



anthropology in the east

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ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE EAST

Founders of Indian Sociology
and Anthropology

Edited by

PATRICIA UBEROI, NANDINI SUNDAR,

&

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Preface

THIS COLLECTION OF ESSAYS IN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY ON some of the founding figures of anthropology and sociology in India originated in a seminar, 'Knowledge, institutions, practices: The formation of Indian anthropology and sociology', held at the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG), Delhi, 19–21 April 2000. A selection of the papers presented at that seminar—those concerning immediate issues of disciplinary practice—was published as an issue of *Seminar* (no. 495) in November 2000.

The present volume, however, has a rather different orientation. Covering a century-long period from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century, it seeks to recount the history of the institutionalisation of anthropology and sociology in India through the lives and professional activities of twelve pioneering individuals. Of course, there already exist numerous biographies or biographical notes on these and other key figures in disciplinary history, a number of autobiographical accounts, and several notable attempts to write such history. But, so far as we know, there has been no *collective* intellectual biography such as the present which allows us to appreciate not only the singularity of the personalities who are the subjects of these essays, but also their shared concerns, dilemmas, and aspirations.

For us, a younger generation living in very different times, these lives contain many lessons. With a sense of true humility, we recognise that many of the professional issues that we reflect on today, often with much fanfare and self-importance, have already been repeatedly debated by our seniors; and equally, that many of the issues on which they reflected have been brushed under the carpet and forgotten in the race to keep pace with global disciplinary trends and fashions.

Collective biography has been a familiar genre in the history of anthropology in the West, especially in the self-critical and self-reflexive literature of the last two or three decades. But the emphasis has

been primarily on British and American scholarship, with Asia, Africa, and Polynesia serving merely as 'sites' in which fieldwork was carried out, rather than as places with their own traditions of scholarship, peopled with active participants who are interested in the potential of sociology and anthropology to reshape their own lives and societies, as well as in remaking the discipline from a different socio-cultural locale. It is a matter of remark that the subjects of these essays have made little impact on disciplinary practices in the metropolis—or indeed elsewhere in the non-West. One wonders why.

Design and serendipity have both contributed to the production of this volume. Apart from the papers originally presented at the IEG seminar, several others—those by Sangeeta Dasgupta on Sarat Chandra Roy, Indra Munshi on Patrick Geddes, and Ramachandra Guha on Verrier Elwin—have been published elsewhere. We are grateful to the authors and their publishers for allowing the reproduction of these essays here. We are painfully aware of the many other pioneering figures whose biographies, for one reason or another, we have been unable to include. Hopefully, other collective volumes will follow to take up this challenge.

We are grateful to the Indian Council of Social Science Research, the Ministry of Human Resource Development, and the faculty and staff of the IEG for their support to the seminar; to Aradhya Bhardwaj for her conscientious copy-editing towards making our script ready before it was sent to Permanent Black; to Dharitri Chakravartty for preparing the index; and to Uma Kumari for her help in the preparation of the manuscript.

Most of all we owe thanks to all the authors of the present volume, and those of its predecessor *Seminar* issue, for joining us in this retrieval and reassessment of well-known and little-known facets of our shared disciplinary history.

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1991), *Muslim communities of South Asia* (1976/1995, 3rd rev. edn. Manohar, 2001), *India's religions: Perspectives from sociology and history* (OUP, 2006); and, most recently, *Images of the world: Essays on religion, secularism, and culture* (OUP, 2006). From 1967 to 1992 he was editor of *Contributions to Indian sociology* (new series).

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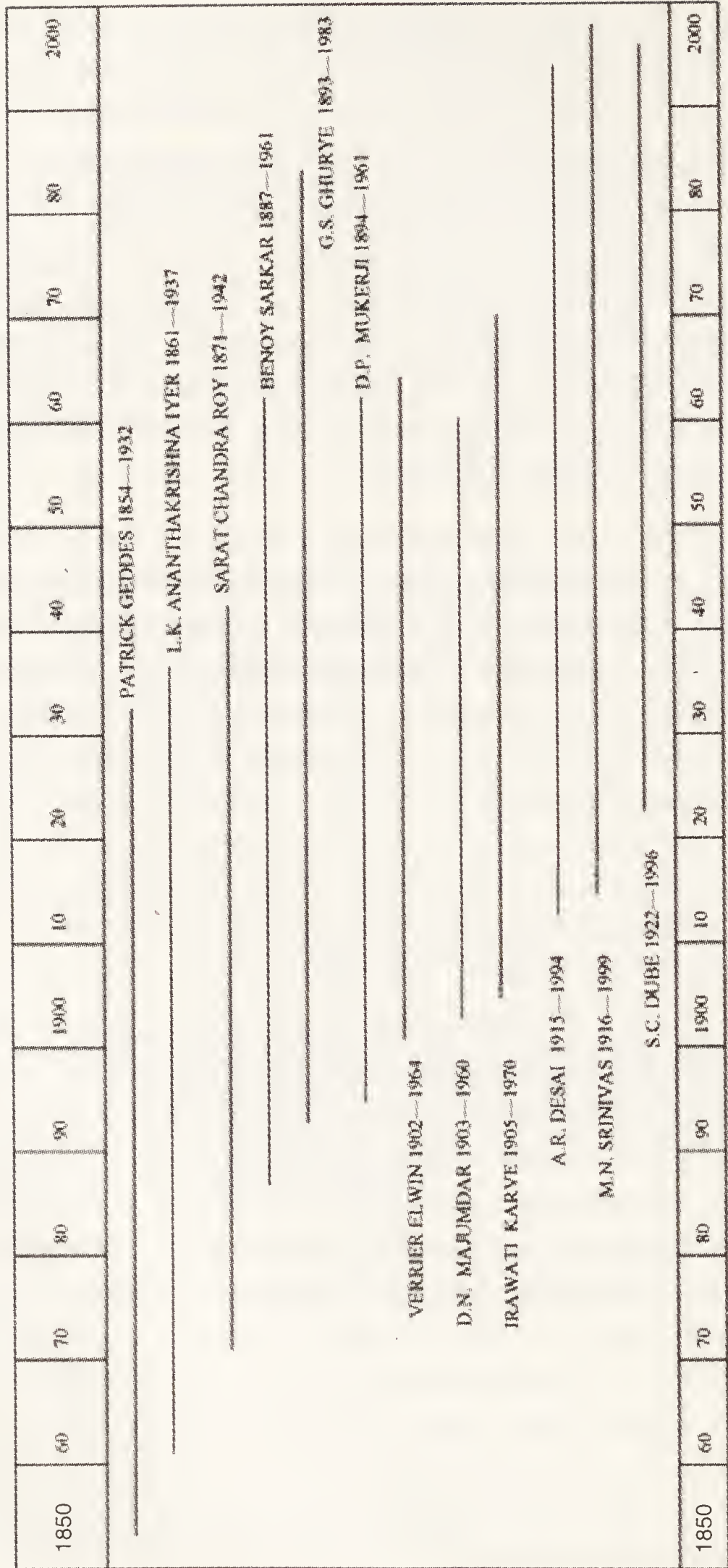
experiences in Asia and the Pacific (co-edited with M. Jolly, Cambridge University Press, 1998); and *Borders of being: Citizenship, fertility and sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* (University of Michigan Press, 2001).

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Fig. 1: Biographical Timespans: Founder Figures of Indian Sociology and Social Anthropology featured in this Book



Introduction:
The Professionalisation
of Indian Anthropology
and Sociology—People, Places,
and Institutions

PATRICIA UBEROI, SATISH DESHPANDE,
AND NANDINI SUNDAR

The problem with us is not that the small amount of good work done by preceding generations is unjustly criticised by succeeding ones, but that it is ignored and then quickly forgotten. In India, each generation of sociologists seems eager to start its work on a clean slate, with little or no attention to the work done before. This amnesia about the work of their predecessors is no less distinctive of Indian sociologists than their failure to innovate.—André Béteille 1997: 98

I. DISCIPLINARY HISTORY IN INDIA:
ITS POTENTIAL IMPORTANCE

IT IS OFTEN REMARKED THAT INDIAN SOCIOLOGISTS AND SOCIAL anthropologists have only scant regard for the work of their predecessors. This is both true and untrue. On the one hand, institutional memory is notoriously short. Once key players have left the scene or the chain of apostolic succession has ruptured, there appear to be few institutionalised mechanisms for preserving professional history. Personal libraries are sold off, destroyed, or gifted

to ill-run institutions. Fieldnotes, offprints, unpublished manuscripts, photographs, and correspondence are only fitfully preserved by descendants who tend, soon enough, to tire of their pious responsibility and the endless battle against dust, mould, and bugs. There is no recognised and centralised archive for depositing such materials, no directory of local archives and repositories. Museums and collections, enthusiastically started, routinely fall prey to neglect and misappropriation. And even in the university system, one finds that departmental handbooks and syllabi are difficult to locate, and dissertations often untraceable.¹ Altogether, we just don't seem to have the interest in disciplinary history that we have seen developing in the West over the last few decades (though recent meetings of the Indian Sociological Association may indicate that we are finally catching up with the times), nor the confidence to claim that 'our' ancestors matter in disciplinary history on a global stage. An obvious reason for this neglect of the past is that, generally speaking, the modern disciplines in India look ever to the West for inspiration, accreditation, and patronage, so that, except to suggest filial piety or personal loyalty, there seems little purpose in looking backwards or inwards for professional inspiration.

While historicising the disciplinary past appears to have been relatively neglected, critiquing and evaluating the current state of the disciplines have been the enduring preoccupations of professional sociology and anthropology in India from the very beginning. Indeed, compared to their colleagues in other disciplines, it seems that Indian sociologists and social anthropologists are unusually afflicted by disciplinary *angst*.² As the bibliography at the end of this Introduction

¹ These problems of the preservation of institutional knowledge were poignantly and passionately presented by a number of the senior participants in the Symposium 'Knowledge, institutions, practices: The formation of Indian anthropology and sociology' (Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, 19–20 April 2000), on which this volume and an earlier special issue of *Seminar* are based (see Deshpande, Sundar, and Uberoi 2000a, 2000b). See also Deshpande 2001a: 19, 21, 33; Kumar and Mookherjee 1995: 2.

² See Uberoi (2000) for a review of successive introspections on their disciplines by Indian sociologists and social anthropologists that were published in the journal *Seminar* over the years since 1960. The *Economic and political weekly* has also been an important platform for the airing of disciplinary concerns.

indicates, they regularly and self-consciously reflect on the past and present status of their disciplines, and on the challenge of balancing teaching and research.³ They repeatedly define and redefine the two disciplines in relation to allied disciplines,⁴ and especially in relation to each other. They proclaim ambitious new research agendas (nowadays known as ‘vision documents’), seeking to domesticate the latest trends from abroad or, alternatively, to make their disciplines transparently ‘relevant’ to local social and political concerns.⁵ They seek reasons for the apparent derivativeness of Indian anthropology and sociology, and the converse failure of Indian area studies specialists to make a mark on their disciplines internationally.⁶ They debate the necessity—or otherwise—of formulating a national social science or cultural ‘policy’, after the erstwhile Soviet model (see Mukherji 2005a; Saberwal 1975). They routinely reorient their priorities to the ebb and flow of research funding—whether from the state or, increasingly nowadays, from international agencies (Mukherji 2005b). They commend the ever-urgent need for syllabus revision against the heavy weight of academic inertia.⁷ They plead for the reform and strengthening of professional associations as guarantors

See, for example, the discussion sparked off by Veena Das’s (1993) comments on the sad state of research in sociology (contributors include Deshpande 1994; Giri 1993; Murthy 1993; and Rege 1997). Another important source and provocation for such reflections are the successive series produced by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (1972–4; 1985, 2000 and latterly the massive two-volume *Oxford India companion to sociology and social anthropology*, edited by Veena Das (2003a; see also Das 2003b). In a welcome development, *Sociological bulletin*, the journal of the Indian Sociological Society (vol. 54, no. 3, 2005), has recently reviewed the state of sociology throughout the South Asian region (for a broader, all-Asia perspective, see also Alatas 2006). For anthropology, see e.g. L.P. Vidyarthi, *Rise of anthropology in India: A social science orientation* (1978).

³ See among others Béteille 2000; Deshpande 2001a; Mukherji 2005a.

⁴ This has been a feature of discussions under the title of ‘For a sociology of India’ in the journal *Contributions to Indian sociology* from its first series beginning in 1957.

⁵ See Joshi (1972), and other articles in the same issue of *Seminar* (157).

⁶ See, e.g. Berreman 1969; Béteille 2003; J.P.S. Uberoi 1968.

⁷ This is a resilient problem in the Indian university system, impacting on teaching programmes at all levels. See, e.g., Mukherji 2005a.

of professional conduct and standards.⁸ They demand quality journals which will also give fair representation to a heterogeneous professional constituency and be receptive to interdisciplinary challenges.⁹ They seek outreach beyond the metropolitan centres of learning to the regional universities and colleges. Intermittently, they challenge the dominance of social science writing in English over the Indian vernaculars; or deplore the lacklustre quality of regional language social science texts (Giri 2004; Jha 2005; Shah 2000). Sometimes they also question whether scholars from upper caste/class backgrounds can authentically represent the lives and aspirations of the socially marginalised (Kumar 2005).

And they do all this, repeatedly and publicly, with barely a backward glance.

This collection of twelve biographical essays on some of the founding figures in the history of Indian sociology and social anthropology has been put together on the assumption that an informed critique and appreciation of the work of previous generations should be a prerequisite for the building of sound disciplinary traditions in India (Madan 1994a: 4–5). Indeed, in one way or another, many of the problems just referred to were issues for earlier generations of scholars too, and it is instructive—indeed chastening—to see how they were posed and addressed in earlier contexts and to reflect on what might have been had different choices been made, other policies pursued, alternative circumstances emerged. In this sense, we believe that our seemingly antiquarian interest in the retrieval of disciplinary history can provide important insights into the professional issues of our times.

This is not to say that the disciplinary history of Indian anthropology and sociology is non-existent. There are a good number of notices, overview articles, *festschriften*, commemorative volumes, commissioned status reports, and surveys of research, in addition to

⁸ See Oommen 2000; Patel 2002.

⁹ For instance, feminism (see e.g. John 2001; Rege 1997, 2000), development studies, environment studies, and cultural studies. See the essays by Ravinder Kaur, Indra Munshi, and Sasheej Hegde and Seemanthini Niranjana in Chaudhuri (2002).

numerous biographical and autobiographical essays and books.¹⁰ But, while building on these studies, the dozen intellectual biographies in this volume seek to give a specific twist to the recovery of disciplinary history by exploring, in and through the lives and writings of their subjects, the linkages between knowledge, institutions, and disciplinary practices.

The essays cover a century-long period from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century, beginning with L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer (1861–1937), a self-taught anthropologist who contributed substantially to the early colonial ethnography of the tribes and castes of southern India, and ending with M.N. Srinivas, often described as the ‘doyen’ of Indian sociology who, after degrees in sociology from the University of Bombay and in anthropology from the University of Oxford, went on to found sociology departments in the

¹⁰ In addition to Ramkrishna Mukherjee’s *The sociology of Indian sociology* (1979), originally written as a trend report for *Current sociology* (1977), and L.P. Vidyarthi’s *The rise of anthropology in India* (1978), probably the two best-known book length studies of disciplinary history, the reader may like to refer to some of the following, as well as the citations in individual articles in this volume: (1) *Surveys and overview articles*: Bottomore 1962; Dhanagare 1993; Dube 1962; Mukherjee 1973, 1976, 1979; Pels 1999; Rao 1974; Risley 1910; Saxena 1964; Saran 1958; Sarana and Sinha 1976; Y. Singh 1967; Srinivas and Panini 1975; Valien 1954; Vidyarthi 1977; (2) *Festschriften and obituaries*: Atal 1993; Avasthi 1997; Bhattacharya & Bhattacharya 2004; Kapadia 1954; Madan 1994b, 1996, 2000; Madan and Sarana 1962; Momin 1996; Pillai 1976; Sarana 1961; Savur and Munshi 1995; Shah 1990; Singh 1956; Singh and Singh 1967; Unnithan *et al.* 1965; (3) *Commemorative volumes*, such as those published in connection with the World Congress of Anthropology or the International Sociological Association conferences, both held in Delhi in 1978 and 1986 respectively (see Oommen & Mukherji 1986; Vidyarthi 1979); and jubilee volumes of institutions and journals (e.g., Ferreira and Jha 1976a); (4) *Commissioned status reports and surveys of research*: Indian Council of Social Science Research 1972–4, 1985, 2000; Chatterjee *et al.* 2002, the latter a general survey of social science research in South Asia; (5) *Biographies*: Bala Ratnam 1963; Bhattacharya 1990; Hivale 1946; Pramanick 1994; Saran 1965; Sinha 1986; and (6) *Autobiographies*: Bose 1982; I.P. Desai 1996; Dube 1993; Elwin 1964; Ghurye 1973; Srinivas 1973, 1997.

University of Baroda and at the Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi. Our protagonists were selected not merely on grounds of their contribution to sociological and anthropological knowledge of India *per se*, but also (importantly from our present perspective) for their contribution to the building of the ‘institutions’ through which this disciplinary knowledge is produced, disseminated, and reproduced in the Indian context (see also Deshpande, Sundar, & Uberoi 2000b). These include not only research institutes and the teaching departments of universities, but also organs and departments of government, such as the Census and the Anthropological Survey of India, professional associations, and, of course, professional journals.

Our choice of focus has delimited our historical survey in several ways which it is important to state up-front. First, by bracketing the two disciplines of sociology and social (and cultural) anthropology, we have taken a preemptive stand on a question that is actually the subject of continual and intense debate.¹¹ Some of the subjects of our biographical accounts are regarded (or identify themselves) as sociologists and some as anthropologists, while others have had training or careers in both fields, and many of them—to further complicate the picture—masquerade as sociologists at home and anthropologists abroad. The problem is that in the Western academy, which provides the model for our intellectual activities in India, sociology and anthropology are often institutionally separated, and also differentiated in terms of theory and methodologies. To put it rather crudely, sociology is conventionally understood to focus on the study of modern industrial societies, and anthropology on the study of primitive, tribal, or pre-modern societies, the ‘*other cultures*’

¹¹ The problem of the relationship of sociology and social anthropology has been repeatedly addressed in the Indian context, not least by M.N. Srinivas (1972: ch. 5, 2002), André Béteille (1974, 1993, 2003, n.d.) and, in a justly famous essay entitled ‘On living intimately with strangers’, by T.N. Madan (1994a: ch. 6), among many others. In Bombay, too, G.S. Ghurye similarly asserted that ‘[i]n India, with its huge numbers of groups in all stages of culture, there is no room for distinguishing and clearly separating social anthropology from sociology’ (quoted in Pillai 1976: 28). Both the ICSSR survey of research (1972–4, 1985) and the recent *Oxford India companion to sociology and social anthropology* (Das 2003a) similarly bracket sociology and social/cultural anthropology; also Dhanagare 1993: ch. 3.

of the Western imaginary (to cite the title of an influential anthropological text of the 1960s [Beattie 1964]).¹² And, while things may have changed somewhat over recent years, with a growing number of anthropologists ‘taking the subway to the field’ (Passaro 1997), the long-established metropolitan division of labour between sociology and anthropology has, for the most part, been faithfully reproduced, indeed petrified, in academic structures and syllabi in India,¹³ as elsewhere in the non-Western world.¹⁴ It’s actually a rather nonsensical distinction from the perspective of the non-Western sociologist/anthropologist for, as André Béteille remarked a generation ago,

[t]his way of making a distinction [between sociology and anthropology] can lead to confusion. For if applied consistently, what anthropology is to an American will be sociology to an Indian, and what sociology is to an American will be anthropology to an Indian. The distinction will work only so long as all societies, Western and non-Western, are studied only by Western scholars. It becomes meaningless when scholars from all over the world begin to study their own as well as other societies. (Béteille 1974: 11)

The issue of disciplinary boundaries is of consequence to the task at hand, however, for the simple reason that sociology and anthropology in the Western academy have tended to generate rather

¹² This is, of course, a rather polite way of phrasing the issue. Diane Lewis, in her review of the relationship of anthropology and colonialism (1973) describes anthropology in so many words as the study of ‘non-white’, ‘non-Western’ people by outsiders.

¹³ Sociology departments in Indian academic institutions are typically under arts or social sciences faculties, while anthropology departments are most frequently under the science faculties. In his recent survey of Indian anthropology, however, Vinay Srivastava reports a very small number of ‘composite’ departments of anthropology and sociology, and also instances of the ‘integration’ of social/cultural anthropology with human biology and prehistory in teaching syllabi and research (Srivastava 2000). In practice, too, one finds a number of sociology departments (such as at the Delhi School of Economics or the University of Poona) where regular sociology courses (on theory, stratification, work, industry, organisation, etc.) are taught alongside ‘traditional’ anthropological subjects like kinship, religion, and symbolism (Dhanagare 1993: 49).

¹⁴ In China, for instance. See e.g. Guldin 1994; Uberoi 1974.

differently-oriented disciplinary ‘histories’. The history of sociology is linked to the post-Enlightenment project of modernity, to the evolution of modern social and political theory, and to the development of a ‘scientific’ approach to the study of man and society (see e.g. Alatas 2006; Aron 1968; Hawthorn 1986), while the history of anthropology, in so far as it differs from the former (and of course there will be considerable overlap), expressly connects the evolution of the discipline with the technologies of domination of the West over the non-West (see Section II below). Within which of these ‘grand narratives’ of disciplinary history should we locate ourselves?

Second, in focusing on the intersection of knowledge, institutions, and practices in a specific geographical locale (India), our account of disciplinary history perforce excludes the major inputs to the sociology and anthropology of India of many scholars—both non-Indians and expatriate Indians—whose studies of society in India have contributed significantly to the building of centres of Indology and South Asian area studies in other parts of the world (see Assayag and Bénéï 2005). In this sense it cannot claim to be a comprehensive and rounded historical account (albeit in the biographical mode) of the history of Indian sociology and anthropology. Conversely, however, not all our subjects were Indian born or bred: Patrick Geddes, Scots environmentalist and town planner, founded the Sociology Department of the University of Bombay; while Verrier Elwin, former missionary, self-taught anthropologist, and advocate of tribal rights came to hold important government assignments in tribal administration in the early years after Independence.

Third, traversing a relatively long historical period through the individual life stories of our subjects and bracketing sociology and social anthropology, we offer a somewhat different perspective on a history that is conventionally rendered in developmental/evolutionary cum typological terms. Vidyarthi, for instance, building on the earlier expositions of D.N. Majumdar, N.K. Bose, and S.C. Dube, periodises the history of Indian *anthropology* into three phases—1774–1919, ‘formative’; 1920–47, ‘constructive’; and post-1948, ‘analytical’ (Vidyarthi 1978: 6–7), while Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1979) similarly identifies a set of early ‘reference groups’ (social philosophers,

policy makers, and social reformers, policy promoters and administrators and proto-sociologists), followed by ‘pioneers’ (1920s–1940s), ‘modernisers’ (1950s), ‘insiders’ (1960s), and ‘pace-makers’ and ‘non-conformists’ (1970s). Additionally, spanning colonial and post-colonial regimes, we also invite the partial dissolution or displacement of the colonial ‘knowledge–power’ thesis which—as mentioned—has been a conspicuous theme in the self-reflexive and self-critical disciplinary history of anthropology (though not, at least not to the same extent, in the disciplinary history of sociology: see Section II below). For the most part (though the career of Gandhian activist N.K. Bose provides an exception), we see in the biographies that span the transfer of power no major ‘rupture’ at the moment of Independence, but rather the expansion and consolidation of professional activities initiated under the colonial regime, and we are left to wonder whether the ‘power–knowledge’ nexus may have been over-stated or rather simplistically formulated in previous discussions of anthropology and colonialism; or whether in fact Indian anthropologists and sociologists were perhaps more innovative, and more locally embedded, than the superficial appearance of disciplinary conformity and colonial–postcolonial continuity suggests.

Finally, in juxtaposing a dozen biographies—of men and women (to be precise, just a single woman, Irawati Karve), of Indians and Britishers,¹⁵ of university-based academics (Sarkar, Ghurye, Karve, Mukerji, Srinivas, Dube), independent scholars (Roy, Elwin), government servants (Iyer), party activists (Desai), or people who straddled these different categories (Geddes, Bose), of people from different regions of the country, of lives played out over a relatively long historical *durée*—we are drawn to consider not merely the differences that divided them but the recurrent concerns that united them within the evolving discursive universe of Indian sociology and social anthropology.

This Introduction seeks in particular to foreground some of these recurrent themes and dilemmas, and the manner of their articulation in the lives and disciplinary practices of our twelve subjects. By the

¹⁵ Though British-born, Verrier Elwin became an Indian citizen after Indian Independence.

same token, it is *not* an attempt to plot a narrative of linear evolution (as from amateur beginnings to professional maturity, from misguided theory to true knowledge), or of decline and attrition (from transdisciplinary synthesis to arid compartmentalisation [cf. Mukherjee 1979: 54, 66]). Nor does it tell a simple story of successive 'paradigm shifts' from one form of 'normal' knowledge to another,¹⁶ or from colonial to post-colonial forms of knowledge and disciplinary practices. Taken collectively, these biographies bear witness to the process of transposition of the modern sciences of man and society into a non-Western environment, and the cognitive, ethical, political, and practical problems—indeed, at times, the self-alienation and self-doubt—that such transposition inevitably entails. But they *also*, and we wish to underline this point, tell the story of the pioneering labours of many non-Western scholars whose professional activities, though no doubt prominently recorded in various 'country'-specific studies,¹⁷ have received negligible recognition in standard disciplinary histories.¹⁸ For instance, L.K.A. Iyer (see Kalpana Ram's account, this volume) lived a life historically coeval with that of Franz Boas, the acknowledged 'founder' of American anthropology. He similarly worked to document the lifestyles and cultural practices of many primitive peoples, contributing to the production of a vast ethnographic survey of the sort that the British wanted (but did not succeed in producing) for the British Isles (cf. Urry 1984). But Iyer's is far from a household name in world anthropology, and the same could

¹⁶ In line with the 'new history of science', inspired by Thomas Kuhn's *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1962). Kuhn's formulation has also influenced the writing of a new history of the social and behavioural sciences, in particular through the work of George W. Stocking, Jr., an iconic figure in the disciplinary history of anthropology (see Stocking 1983, 1984, 1985).

¹⁷ Such as those produced on behest of organisations like UNESCO, the International Sociological Association, or the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences.

¹⁸ The point is forcefully made by Deshpande in his article on M.N. Srinivas (this volume), where he observes, viewing a photograph of the Oxford Anthropology Department in 1945–6, that few non-white anthropologists are recalled and remembered in disciplinary history. See also Eades, Yamashita, and Bosco 2001.

well be said for most of the other figures whose biographies we have included here.¹⁹

II. COLONIAL DOMINATION AND THE COLONISED MIND

The relationship between anthropology and colonialism has received much attention in a colourful, critical, and oftentimes sanctimonious literature, spanning some four decades or more.²⁰ Though further comment may appear redundant, we gesture briefly towards this literature, produced largely in the Western academy, it may be noted, as a background to our discussion of the somewhat different complexion the issue has assumed in the Indian context where it intersects with, or runs parallel to, wider discourses on what is sometimes called the ‘indigenisation’ of social science knowledge,²¹ on the practical ‘relevance’ of anthropological knowledge in application to local problems and conditions in the region, and in general on modern education (alternatively, modern science) and its role in the past and present ‘colonisation’ of the non-Western mind (Alatas 1974).

By the late 1960s, against the sombre background of the neo-colonial wars in Algeria and Vietnam and the civil rights movement in the United States, a new generation of practitioners was obliged to

¹⁹ Only two of our twelve subjects—Verrier Elwin and M.N. Srinivas—find treatment in a recent biographical dictionary of social and cultural anthropology (Amit 2004). No doubt some were excluded from consideration as ‘sociologists’, or ‘social philosophers’, but the exclusion of Iyer, Roy, Ghurye, Bose, Karve, and Dube calls for some reflection. Similarly, Patrick Geddes merits a biographical notice in the *International encyclopedia of the social sciences* (Sills 1968), but none of our subjects received biographical treatment in the new *International encyclopedia of the social and behavioural sciences* (Smelser & Baltes 2001), though Elwin, Geddes, Ghurye, Mukherji, Srinivas, and Dube find occasional mention in various articles, mostly those on the social sciences in South Asia.

²⁰ See among others Alatas 2006; Asad 1973, 1979, 1991; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Diamond 1974; Fabian 1983; Gough 1968; Lewis 1973; Marcus and Fischer 1986; and Stocking 1968, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1992.

²¹ See Alatas 2006; Barnes 1982; Fahim 1982; Fardon 1990; Gerholm and Hannerz 1982; Saberwal 1982.

come to terms with the fact that the intimate knowledge of 'primitive others' claimed by their discipline was made possible not just by the heroic efforts of pioneering anthropologists but also by armies of occupation, pacification campaigns, colonial rule, and racial domination. Claude Lévi-Strauss had summed up the legacy of anthropology's dubious past in a hard-hitting address to the Smithsonian Institution in September 1965: 'Anthropology is daughter to [an] era of violence', he said, whereby the larger part of humanity had been rendered subservient to the minority and millions of people thrown into bondage (1966: 126)—indeed, so much so that, by the end of the Second World War and the beginning of decolonisation, the discipline of anthropology was perceived to be in grave danger of losing its human subjects altogether. Physically decimated and culturally deracinated, primitive peoples were no longer available in their pristine condition (if ever they were after the onset of Europe's 'Age of Discovery'!) for the anthropologist's scientific gaze, and anthropology was scripted as an 'urgent' or 'salvage' operation on behalf of 'vanishing' peoples and their fast-vanishing cultures.²²

Tracing the history of anthropology from its early armchair beginnings, when anthropologists were forced to rely on the data collected by administrators, missionaries, travellers, and traders, to its professionalisation and institutionalisation in universities, professional associations, academic journals, etc., Joan Vincent (1990) has shown how British anthropology was, from its very beginnings, implicated in the colonial experience. Early American anthropology too had its own internal colonial dimension, with the establishment of the Bureau of Ethnology to study native Americans in the latter part of the nineteenth century, while American imperialism in the Philippines, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and South America over the twentieth century was accompanied by increasing anthropological involvement in these areas (Huizer and Mannheim 1979; Vincent 1990).

²² See Sturtevant 1967; also Beals 1967 in follow-up of the Smithsonian-Wenner-Gren Conference (1966) on 'urgent anthropology' where Claude Lévi-Strauss's note on the 'future' of anthropology was circulated. See also the critical remarks of Abbi and Saberwal on the concept of 'salvage anthropology' (1969: 4–6) in the volume, *Urgent research in social anthropology*, based on a conference by that title held at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, in 1968.

'Project Camelot', an operation run by the US Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency that funded anthropological research in South East Asia in the early 1960s was a particularly notorious example, though by no means the first, last, or only one (see e.g. Horowitz 1967; Szanton 2004).

Asad's (1973) benchmark volume for studies of anthropology and colonialism highlights a number of salient points regarding the institutional and ideological contexts in which anthropology developed, the often contradictory relationships of anthropologists with colonial administrations, and how these affected the self-definition and theoretical orientations of the discipline. In his introductory essay, Asad argues that 'anthropology is rooted in an unequal power encounter between the West and the Third World', in which ethnographic and historical knowledge of the colonised domains not only enabled the colonisers to 'know' and thus administer their territories better, but also reinforced the inequalities in capacities between European and non-European worlds.²³ Similarly, Edward Said (1979) and Bernard Cohn (1990) have both pointed to the manner in which orientalist or anthropological 'knowledge' of a country's traditions and customs helped to 'fix' sociological categories, such as caste, ritual, custom, law, and political institutions, into a timeless essence that denied the necessity for administrators to concern themselves with the changing political aspirations and concerns of living people on the ground.

The critique of anthropology's colonial roots is made not only at the political but also at the theoretical level. Functionalism and empiricism, and subsequently modernisation theory, were said to have an 'elective affinity' with colonialism (Anderson 1968; Banaji 1970; Lewis 1973) in their focus on small, bounded wholes and tribal units (rather than the links of these entities with wider economic and political systems [Frank 1967; Wallerstein 1984]); in their concern with surface phenomena and their contribution to surface stability,

²³ Asad modulated his stand in later years, however, declaring in 1979 that the practical role of British anthropologists 'in support of British imperial structures' was only 'very occasionally direct but on the whole insignificant' (1979: 607), and in any case scarcely worthy of further illustration once the general connection between anthropological knowledge and the expansion of European power had been well established (Asad 1991: 315).

at the expense of the underlying relations of power and exploitation which were often exacerbated by indirect colonial rule (Bloch 1975, 1983); and in their neglect of history, which might have shown the processes, such as expropriation and marginalisation, through which these groups were often constituted (Wolf 1982). The objectification and 'denial of co-evalness' to the 'primitive other' (Fabian 1983) which accompanied the framing of cultures in the ethnographic present, based on fieldwork/participant-observation, are also seen as an outgrowth of the functionalist methods and fieldwork techniques of early anthropology. Some of these criticisms are applicable to a much later stage as well, when anthropology had ostensibly gained awareness that cultures are not isolated wholes, and had taken up studies of culture contact and acculturation. As William Roseberry (1989) points out, these studies in the 1950s and 1960s often ignored the unequal power situations in which 'acculturation' took place, and the long histories of contact which pre-dated 'modernisation'.

Apart from the issues of racial and civilisational dominance that were seen to have driven the anthropological enterprise from the very outset, another set of epistemological-theoretical questions also served to intensify self-critical interest in the disciplinary history of anthropology in the 1970s and 1980s. Broadly speaking, these were provoked by the insights of poststructuralist theory and literary criticism, and concerned the methodology of construction of 'ethnographic authority'. Given the discursive nature of social anthropological knowledge, what kinds of rhetorical devices and representational techniques did the discipline deploy in order to produce authoritative statements on 'other' cultures? What kind of a picture did the discipline present when the 'observers' were 'observed' (Stocking 1983)? The hallowed institution of fieldwork, the single most important factor in establishing the scientific credentials of the discipline, proved upon close scrutiny to be not so magical after all (Stocking 1992), and reading the marginalia and the 'rough work' of the leading lights produced a picture startlingly at odds with the impression of detached and dedicated scholarship cultivated by the discipline. Questions were asked about the future of the discipline and its very *raison d'être* in a globalised world, and a range of methodological innovations proposed to address the asymmetries and biases inherent in the production of anthropological knowledge, including 'dialogical'

or 'experimental' ethnography, a greater emphasis on life histories and oral histories, and an anthropology of the 'self' rather than the other (see e.g. Fox 1991; Price 1990; Trouillot 2003).

With the benefit of hindsight and the demands of political correctness, it is all too easy to pass quick judgment on anthropology's symbiotic relationship with colonial rule. But this is not the whole story, of course, and it is not difficult to find consolingly redeeming features in anthropology's chequered past. Indeed, there is a whole strand of literature which highlights anthropology's radical nature—in relativising Western morality (Margaret Mead), in showing that race was not a scientific category (Franz Boas), in encouraging interest in other cultures, in celebrating a common humanity, etc.²⁴ As Wendy James has argued (1973), the very nature of the anthropological enterprise and its defence of alternative ways of life and modes of thought tend to turn it in a liberal direction. Moreover, colonialism was not a monolithic institution imposed on the colonised, and—as is clear in the Indian case—there were important differences of perspective between administrators, missionaries, ethnographers, traders, and the military, and between 'anthropologically-minded administrators' and other colonial officials, particularly with regard to the formulation of tribal policy (Guha, this volume; Sundar 1997: 156–61). There were also differences among the emerging band of Indian anthropologists, some of whom (like K.P. Chattopadhyay and N.K. Bose) were actively involved in the nationalist struggle against British rule.

All the same, the vigorous debates of the 1960s and 1970s, following Vietnam, at least created a heightened awareness among anthropologists worldwide that, whatever their intentions, anthropological evidence could all too easily be put to the service of imperialism and aggression. In turn, the practical consequences for individual anthropologists and anthropology could be dire:

The prospective fieldworker, for example, may find that he is banned by the government or rejected by the intellectuals of the country he seeks to enter; or he may be forced to pose as an economist or sociologist

²⁴ Vincent's (1990) overview of the evolution of political anthropology presents many examples of anthropologists whose theory and practice *did* attempt to take account of the colonial factor (see also Lewis 1973).

in order to gain acceptance. Frequently he encounters resentment from the group he has chosen to study. A willingness to tolerate the anthropologist has been replaced by outright distrust and suspicion. Finally, when the fieldworker returns home to write and lecture about 'his' people, he is increasingly confronted by representatives of the group who challenge the validity of his findings. (Lewis 1973: 581)

This realisation encouraged concerted attempts by the profession to draw up alternative ethical guidelines and to rethink ways in which anthropology and anthropologists could help repay the people with whom they lived and studied (though the form which human subject protection has taken under Institutional Review Boards in the US may be proving unfeasible [see Lederman 2006]). Some of this self-consciousness regarding the 'practice' of anthropology, particularly questions of the ethics of field research and the 'stand-point' of the observer *vis-à-vis* the observed, have found sympathetic echoes in the writings of Indian sociologists and anthropologists over recent years,²⁵ though generations of Indian students continue to be dispatched to 'survey' hapless populations in the routine course of their disciplinary training.

Understandably, the debate on the relationship of anthropology and colonialism has had a somewhat different trajectory in the Indian (compared to the Western) context. In 1968, hot on the heels of the exposés that wracked the Area Studies and Social Sciences communities in the US, the Indian monthly journal *Seminar* published a special issue on the theme of 'academic colonialism'. In his 'poser' to that issue, Satish Saberwal analysed the several forms that academic colonialism may assume in the ex-colonies: (i) In some cases, he wrote, foreign academics and intellectuals may exercise 'political dominance' by using their status to directly influence the course of local politics; (ii) in other cases, intentionally or otherwise, the information collected by individual social scientists may be used by the CIA and other such agencies for political domination and subversion. To these he added a further feature, namely (iii) that North American academics may exercise intellectual domination through their economic and political patronage of individuals and

²⁵ See various essays in Bêteille & Madan 1975; Srinivas, Shah, & Ramaswamy 1979; and Thapan 1998; also Giri 2004; Kumar 2005.

institutions in the non-West, with 'disastrous' consequences, in his estimation, 'for problem selection, research design, and modes of publication' (Saberwal 1968: 13; cf. Alatas 2006). This 'intellectual domination', or 'colonisation of the mind', as Yogendra Singh elaborated in another article in the same *Seminar* issue, means that Indian intellectuals must perforce operate within a system of thought which is culturally alien: 'they acquired it, and continue to acquire it not as creative partners in the universal community of intellectuals but as the handy-men of history.' This is why, according to Singh, their work 'tends to be more imitative than innovative' (Singh 1968: 27). And, around the same time, J.P.S. Uberoi (1968) took the debate a step further, attributing the much-lamented 'crisis' of metropolitan anthropology and the recurrent complaints of the 'unoriginality' of Indian anthropology to 'foreign dominance in all matters of scientific and professional life and organisation' in the ex-colonies, notwithstanding the attainment of self-rule (swaraj) in the political sphere.

In short, in the Indian context, 'academic colonialism' was seen to concern not merely the brute facts of the colonisation and oppression of other peoples via anthropological knowledge, as in the metropolitan debate, but, even more insidiously, the 'colonisation' of the non-Western mind through the imposition of Western education, Western categories of thought, and the value-frame of modern (=Western) science. This colonisation of the mind, as Ashis Nandy was later to elaborate, outlives the literal time-span of colonial rule and 'releases forces within the colonised societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all. In the process, it helps generalise the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds' (1983: xi).

There is nothing very new in such views, it must be said, for concern over the colonisation of the Indian mind was in fact coterminous with the very imposition of colonial rule and colonial education (see Zastoupil and Moir 1999). Writing as early as 1928, to take a random example from a huge literature, the eminent philosopher K.C. Bhattacharya spoke of the urgent need for what he called 'Svaraj [self-rule] in ideas'. 'We speak today of Svaraj or self-determination in politics', he said, and indeed 'man's domination over man is felt in the most tangible form in the political sphere'. But there is 'a subtler

domination exercised in the sphere of ideas by one culture on another, a domination all the more serious in the consequence, because it is not ordinarily felt.' True, Indians had welcomed this new education as a 'blessing', but they had not done so, he complained, in an 'open-eyed' and critical manner. The result was that, even 'after a century of contact with the vivifying ideas of the west', there was still no 'vigorous output of Indian contribution in a distinctive Indian style to the culture and thought of the modern world', and 'not much evidence of such creative work done by our educated men' (Bhattacharya 1984: 383–5).²⁶ In this broader sense, therefore, the practice of *all* modern branches of knowledge in the non-West must be deemed derivative and dependent, and there is nothing particularly 'colonial' about 'anthropology' as a discipline that should single it out for special attention, or differentiate it from its near neighbour, sociology, or from the social sciences in general (cf. Alatas 2006; Deshpande 2001b).

Several of the case studies in this book provide fodder for anthropology's auto-critique, of which the contributors are all well aware, but they also complicate and problematise the question of the link between colonial power and anthropological knowledge beyond its current confines, and encourage several different lines of questioning.

First, they confirm that 'the West' *versus* 'the rest' is not a very productive way of interpreting the history of anthropological practice in South Asia, whether in terms of race or intellectual provenance. There were villains and heroes on both sides of the divide. For instance—and putting aside here the received distinction of anthropology and sociology—the eminent and eccentric natural scientist, geographer, town planner, sociologist, and utopian visionary Patrick Geddes, a founder-member of the British Sociological Society in 1903, had originally come to India in 1915 under the best of imperial auspices to present an exhibition on 'Cities and Town Planning' (see Munshi, this volume). He spent more than a decade on and off in India, preparing some fifty studies on town planning for colonial

²⁶ See other articles in the same special number of the *Indian philosophical quarterly* in which Bhattacharya's article was reprinted, some of them appreciative of his stand, others highly critical.

authorities and for the rulers of some of the Indian princely states (see Geddes 1947), taking up the foundation chair in Civics and Sociology at the University of Bombay in 1919. But Geddes was scarcely a meek and pliable instrument of imperial governance. His radical ideas and unorthodox methods ran counter to established theories and practices of modern town planning—he was widely credited with excessive ‘idealism’ and ‘impracticality’²⁷—and in fact he found greater encouragement for his experiments in the Indian princely states. On the other hand, he was certainly not a recruit to the Eastern Spiritualism *versus* Western Materialism way of thinking. A social thinker and activist, he saw modern India—still at the threshold of industrialisation and urbanisation—as a potential experimental laboratory from where an alternative route to modernisation could be scripted, demonstrating where the West had gone wrong in its fateful separation of ‘place, work and folk’ and endorsing his plans for urban renewal and regional integration in his native Scotland.

The case of Verrier Elwin is especially complex (see Guha, this volume; also 1999), in his celebration of indigenous adivasi traditions against both the colonial government and Hindu nationalists, and in his shifting positions on the Congress—from being a follower of Gandhi to being critical of the Congress as overtly Hindu to influencing Nehru on independent India’s tribal policy. Elwin’s debates with the other anthropologists of his time, like G.S. Ghurye or D.N. Majumdar, can hardly be classified as a Western *versus* Indian debate—but as debates between opposing positions within India, positions which continue to be articulated by different sides even today.

On the other side, it would surely be misplaced to demonise the ‘native’ ethnographer as merely the witting or unwitting instrument of colonial governance and oppression. Kalpana Ram’s paper (this volume) takes up the interesting case of L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer

²⁷ An unsigned note in the first issue of the *Indian journal of sociology* (January 1920, pp. 97–8) defends Geddes against the charge of being ‘impractical’ in his schemes for civic improvement thus: ‘He has an artistic temperament which continually manifests itself not only in his architectural and other designs, but also in his sympathetic appreciation of the symbolism of the peoples with whom he comes into contact in the course of his activities. . . . Contrary to a not infrequent impression, Professor Geddes is a practical man [emphasis added].’

who, following the 1901 Census, was invited to conduct the ethnographic survey of Cochin state (a princely state under ‘indirect’ colonial rule), and later of the princely state of Mysore, and was recognised by colonial authorities and British academies of learning as a pioneer of anthropology in the colonies. As Bernard Cohn (1990) and others have argued (see Appadurai 1993, cited in Sundar 1999), the census and ethnographic surveys were instruments both of scientific inquiry and colonial administrative control, and Iyer’s task—superficially at least—was merely to fill in the gaps in Risley’s pre-devised schedule. Was he, then, completely lacking in ‘agency’ as a thinking member of his own society?

Ram argues to the contrary, and on several grounds. On the one hand, she suggests that Iyer’s *habitus*²⁸ as a Tamil Brahman made him (and others of his community) peculiarly receptive to the scientific/civilising mission of European colonial rule—a question of ‘elective affinity’ (in the Weberian terminology), rather than of naked imperial coercion, or simple and pragmatic venality. On the other hand she outlines the various subtle ways in which Iyer moderated and subverted his appointed task of ethnographic survey. For instance, he rather downplayed the anthropometrical focus of the anthropology of his day; he conducted his ethnographic investigations personally rather than bureaucratically through government functionaries; and he enjoyed the insider’s familiarity with several of the languages of the region (an asset of the ‘native’ ethnographer on which there has been surprisingly little comment). Equally important was his command over the techniques and technologies of modern scientific investigation, enabling him to move with confidence from the role of native assistant and informant to that of a valued co-professional. His mastery of photography was a case in point—at once mimicry and sign of professional arrival (cf. Pinney 1997: ch. 1).

Similarly, the lawyer-cum-anthropologist Sarat Chandra Roy (1871–1942), a respected friend of missionaries and administrators, received professional recognition from the world community of anthropologists as well as patronage and decorations from the colonial state for his pioneering work in establishing anthropology in India (see Dasgupta, this volume). Yet Roy fully believed that the findings

²⁸ A term borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu (1977).

of modern science could be reconciled with the truths of the Vedas and that Indian anthropologists, with their locational advantages and a millennial-old humanistic tradition of scholarship behind them, could do better than foreigners in recording and interpreting the cultures of India's tribal peoples, thereby to bring about the ultimate renewal of the science of anthropology (Roy 1938).

Second, these biographical essays suggest that colonialism may be relativised as merely one form of 'othering' among others, albeit a uniquely powerful and profoundly influential one. In this light, the critical challenge would seem to be to undertake a comparative analysis of colonial-Western and 'indigenous' modes of 'othering' and the ways in which they shape anthropology. While this perspective would carry the risk of softening the villainy of colonialism, it could also offer the possibility of putting colonialism 'in its place', thus countering the perverse way in which it tends to dominate even our understanding of domination.

Many of the essays reveal their subjects' deep ambivalence regarding their disciplinary tools and practices. On the one hand, the anthropologist studying the Indian 'tribes' would likely replicate the standpoint of classical anthropology *vis-à-vis* the primitive; or, as Deshpande argues (this volume) with reference to Srinivas's promotion of 'village studies', would conduct his/her research with the unspoken advantages of the upper-caste, Western-educated, urbanite. Yet many of these pioneers also felt a great empathy, often amounting to genuine admiration, for their subjects. S.C. Roy, for instance, came to believe (in Dasgupta's words) that 'empathy with the subjects was more important than the tools of anthropology that were drawn from the West', ultimately, almost despite his profession, celebrating many aspects of 'primitive' tribal culture. Similarly, for Verrier Elwin, 'truth', a higher truth, was to be sought in the 'other'; the tribal peoples whose lives he recorded were individuals to be loved and respected, not laboratory specimens for detached scientific observation. Reflexively, too, he wrote himself into his books—no longer participant-observer but participant in the true sense, blurring the boundaries of science and fiction and caring little for his professional reputation.

Third, even as they studied primitive 'others', almost all our subjects (Geddes was the exception, of course) saw themselves as engaged

in the study of *their own* society, within the framework of the nation-state (imagined, emergent, or actual): tribals, peasants, and workers, along with the anthropologist-observer, were all coevally and equally *citizens of India* (cf. Béteille 1974). In this sense, whether for assimilationists or for isolationists, the assumption of cultural pluralism was both the challenge and the starting point of investigation. Moreover, the audiences they addressed were not exclusively scholarly ones; many of them wrote bilingually, with varying messages for different circles.

Fourth, while all our subjects sought to utilise the received vocabulary and concepts of their disciplines, faithfully rendering them in alien soil, many of them also sought to translate these into indigenous categories of thought, or to seek analogies or even precedents from within their own traditions. The example of Benoy Kumar Sarkar, who ‘discovered’ evidence of positivism in the classical Hindu tradition, has already been mentioned (Sarkar 1937; see Chatterji, this volume). And there were several others, like D.P. Mukerji, who found in the Upanishadic tradition an alternative and enabling definition of human ‘progress’ (Madan, this volume).

Some of the essays in this book explicitly raise the question of the location/*habitus* of the anthropologist in relation to colonial authority on the one hand, and the peoples brought under the anthropologist’s gaze on the other, or in relation to marginalised communities (tribals, lower castes, industrial workers, etc.) in the anthropologist’s own society. Some reflect on the ‘contradictions’ of the enlightened Indian under colonial rule, or of the Western anthropologist ‘gone native’. Others do so more inexplicitly, via their reflections on disciplinary boundaries, and on the social and ethical responsibility of the sociologist/anthropologist in relation to the state. These are questions to which we will return after a brief excursus on the role of biography as entrée to disciplinary history.

III. THE USES OF BIOGRAPHY IN DISCIPLINARY HISTORY

Biography has long been an important means of doing intellectual history. In Lacapra’s words (1983: 185), it provides ‘the space in

which there is an interaction between lived and written texts' and serves as a useful way of understanding how places and people translate into theories, and how perception mediates empirical observation. Academic disciplines rarely develop merely on the strength or merit of ideas alone for, as Max Gluckman once remarked, the production of knowledge is a 'social process mediated by and through individuals' (quoted in Vincent 1990: 15).²⁹

Given that anthropology, more than other disciplines, is embodied in the lives of its practitioners and their experiences in the 'field' involving a variety of relationships with 'others', biographies of individual anthropologists have become increasingly popular as a way of raising questions about the discipline. In the West more broadly, but in the United States particularly, many of these questions have focused on the role of anthropological knowledge in assisting colonialism and imperialism (see above), on the difference that feminist epistemologies would make to a reading of the same ethnographic material (e.g. Weiner 1976 on Malinowski), or on how individual political predilections may result in different theoretical stances (see Lewis 1951 *versus* Redfield 1930; Freeman 1999 *versus* Mead). Placing private diaries alongside published accounts, reading ethnographies 'against the grain', or even revisiting earlier fieldwork sites have been fruitful in terms of revealing aspects of the 'hidden history' of anthropology (see Clifford 1988).

In the last two decades, this interest in biography has been extended in a different direction by the appearance of a number of edited volumes of biographical and autobiographical essays.³⁰ These collective biographies are interesting not only in what they reveal of individual lives and texts but in the way that these lives speak to each other, building up a larger picture of theoretical shifts, of paths taken or not taken. However, most of the emphasis has been on British and American scholars. Asia, Africa, and Polynesia enter merely as the

²⁹ For a good discussion of the way the institutional location of scholars, (albeit within the overall space of Anglo-American anthropology), their relative power and influence, their informal social network with their peers, etc., influence the contours of their discipline, see Vincent (1990: 14–19).

³⁰ See the Stocking volumes (1983, 1984); also Gould and Pitts (2002) on geographers, and Assayag and Bénéï (2003) on scholars of South Asia.

‘sites’ in which fieldwork was carried out, rather than as places with their own traditions of scholarship where people are actively interested in shaping the discipline as a whole. When the spotlight is turned on to Indian lives, not only do they speak to each other to reveal a specifically South Asian milieu but, when compared to those of American or British anthropologists over the same hundred-year period, enable us to draw interesting conclusions about how simultaneous time is theorised differently in different locations (the 1950s as a time experienced very differently in India and the US, for example).

With a couple of exceptions (Guha, Deshpande), the essays in this volume follow a fairly standard ‘Western’ model of biographical writing where the life of the subject is chronologically laid out, personal and intellectual influences traced, and singularities which set the life apart from others highlighted (see Aaron 19780; Metcalf 2004: 120). It’s a rather commonsensical model, in fact, leaning towards the ‘sociological’ and ‘historical’ rather than the ‘psychological’ or psychoanalytical.³¹ And, while there is material here in plenty for psychobiography—of sibling rivalries, of oedipal struggles, of loss and pain and disappointment, of tangled relations with significant others, of domination, abjection, and rebellion, of self-alienation and self-doubt—these personality conflicts remain in all cases very much in the background, and are certainly not projected as the motor of professional development.

On the whole, too, these essays assume the unity of the self, and this again is a position that is nowhere expressly problematised. It has been argued, for instance, that the idea of an ‘individual’ with coherence over time is itself a Western myth, a product of the ‘age of personality’ created by a ‘Western humanist industrialised culture’ (Clifford 1978: 44). Pointing to the problems that poststructuralism poses for biography, Clifford argues that while biography cannot escape the obligation to ‘deliver a self’, it can at least undertake to make the self’s relationship with others, and with society in general,

³¹ By way of contrast, see e.g. Eric Erikson on Gandhi (1969), or Ashis Nandy’s studies of scientist J.C. Bose and mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan (Nandy 1980).

as visible as possible (*ibid.*: 44). In some ways, Clifford's exhortation brings 'Western' conceptions of personhood closer to others. For example, Arnold and Blackburn (2004) argue that, in their writing of life histories, 'Indians present individual lives within a network of other lives and that they define themselves in relation to larger frames of reference, especially those of family, kin, caste, religion, and gender' (Arnold and Blackburn 2004: 19; see also Boorman 1962 on Chinese biographical styles).

Yet differences in styles of biographical or autobiographical writing can go deeper than that. In a fascinating account of the autobiography of a religious scholar, Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya, Barbara Metcalf points to the ways in which his autobiography differs from a standard Western model. First, as against a chronological development of his life, he presents his character as essentially given, and expressed through repeated episodes. Second, as against individual agency, he focuses on forces that are larger than himself—the divine powers of his elders. Third, his story is essentially of his relation to other people. 'Muhammad Zakariyya's own life gains significance not by individuality but by devotion to a particular pattern. . . . The fundamental purpose of the autobiography is to serve as an interactive, pedagogic tool to instruct others' (Metcalf 2004: 120–1).

The fact that Maulana Zakariyya (1897–1982) lived through the same period as the scholars in our volume and yet conceived of his life in ways that are so different from theirs casts into relief the whole question of Indian intellectual life. Formal Western education not only created different intellectual strata, but fundamentally different conceptions of personhood (see Shils 1972 for a threefold categorisation of Asian intellectuals). Perhaps, since the people we write about were part of this formal system modelled on Western education, there is no other way in which we could have described them except through a 'Western' biographical style. Yet, as Shils perceptively writes, 'in no Asian country is even the first class, the modern or "Westernised" intellectual so modern and "Westernised" that they preserve no traces of the indigenous traditional culture in their outlook, in their tastes and social relations, in their self-identification, or in their loyalties' (Shils 1972: 377). He also points out that, despite

the Westernised tag, these intellectuals usually know more about their own high culture than others,³² while remaining relatively free of regional communal influences (*ibid.*). Inevitably this made a difference to the kind of sociology and anthropology they practised, which marked it apart from North American or European anthropology of the same period. Unfortunately, this tradition of bilingual scholarship, exemplified in so many of the scholars in our volume, seems to have passed in India, but that is another story which will be told in future histories of the disciplines.

While the biographical essays in this volume may assume the 'unity' of the self, they do not necessarily endorse an essentialist idea of an unchanging self. In the accounts given here, several subjects appeared to be fairly consistent in their ideas throughout their professional careers, finding their disciplinary orientations and secure academic positions fairly early in life (e.g. Ghurye; Karve; Srinivas). Others moved in and out of academic positions to administration and government (Bose; Dube). Some gradually distanced themselves from their earlier professional attitudes, as in the case of S.C. Roy, already mentioned, whose initially detached scientific attitude to the tribals of Chotanagpur was ultimately superseded by empathy and concern, and who eventually felt that he could dispense with the eternal apprenticeship of the colonial anthropologist and see Indian 'men' study Indian 'man'! Others underwent drastic career changes and ruptures for one reason or another (Bose and Elwin come to mind), their ideas and perceptions changing accordingly.

Given the overall orientation of this volume, the authors of the biographical essays focus on their subjects as sociologists/anthropologists, and not on other aspects of their lives which may have been equally if not more significant in their biographies. For instance, Irawati Karve was also a Marathi essayist of some stature (see Sundar, this volume); N.K. Bose was a nationalist and a Gandhian activist who wrote eloquently about his association with Gandhi (Bose 1953;

³² This may be much less so now, a generation on from Shils's study. See André Béteille's comments (1994) in respect to K.P. Chattopadhyay's confident recourse to Sanskrit texts and analogies, and the same was true of many others of the older generation—notably G.S. Ghurye (who held degrees in Sanskrit), but also D.P. Mukerji and Irawati Karve (Upadhyaya, Madan, Sundar, this volume).

see Bose, this volume); Patrick Geddes was a hands-on town planner; and Verrier Elwin aspired to be recognised as both poet and novelist. But these aspects of their lives remain relatively in the background in these accounts.

The essays are also 'sociological' in the sense that, in one way or another, all seek to relate their subjects' lives, their writings, and their styles of sociology/anthropology to the times in which they lived. Kalpana Ram, whose biography of L.K.A. Iyer has already been mentioned, does so through Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*: in Iyer's case, both the individual *habitus* of the Tamil Brahmin, and the social *habitus* of the progressive, reform-minded princely states of southern India. Similarly, we learn that G.S. Ghurye was a Saraswat Brahman, and that his ideas were moulded by elite English education, the social reform movements of western India, and a particular style of Hindu nationalism to which in fact he contributed substantially (Upadhyaya, this volume). Again, we learn that Irawati Karve was a Chitpavan Brahmin, married into one of the leading reformist families of Maharashtra. In her case it is suggested that her progressive family background enabled her to enjoy a professional career that few women of her time could aspire to, though this does not in any sense fully account for her dedication to the discipline. T.N. Madan urges us to read D.P. Mukerji's lifestyle and professional work against the intellectual setting of Calcutta in the early decades of this century (the twin forces of Christianity, Western education, and reformism on the one hand, and Hindu resurgence on the other), while Pradip Bose suggests that N.K. Bose's sociological writings in the vernacular belonged within the tradition of the many nineteenth-century Bengali intellectuals who had established societies for the promotion of 'useful' or 'scientific' knowledge. And so on. In all these cases, the social background or context is conceived in a generally straightforward way, in terms of personal networks, institutions, and political and intellectual currents and not in terms of such concepts as the 'collective consciousness' of a class or an era, as Emile Goldman, for instance, had done in relating the *Pensées* of Pascal and the tragedies of Racine (1964, 1980). Nor do the authors attempt literary or deep structural analysis of their subjects' writings in order to relate them to a wider socio-cultural context (e.g. the papers in Clifford & Marcus 1986;

White 1978). Such methodological experimentation, aligned with literary-textual criticism, must remain a challenge for the future.

To these observations we could append our own comment to the effect that all these lives (with the obvious exceptions of Geddes and Elwin) can be subsumed within the emerging stream of Hindu middle-class life. This of course is a story worth telling in itself—the dominance of the Hindu middle classes on professional and intellectual life in twentieth-century India—and it may well have influenced the type of sociology/anthropology that got done, as in the greater focus on caste, kinship, and religion, to the relative neglect of class inequality, industrial relations, etc. (see Ram, Upadhyaya, Chatterji, Madan, and Sundar, this volume), for this was a middle class that seemed to need to stay connected with tradition even while engaged in the practice of modern science. But none of this ‘social background’ quite explains why some individuals rebelled against social expectations and predestined career paths—like the Gandhian N.K. Bose, who resigned his post to join the Non-Cooperation Movement (Bose, this volume), or A.R. Desai who, notwithstanding his relatively privileged class background, actively worked for the Indian Left movement (Patel, this volume).

A number of authors have remarked that much of the existing biographical literature on their subjects is more hagiographic than critical, not least because much of it has been produced in the context of obituaries and *festschriften*—genres which, by their very nature, tend to magnify virtues and achievements and erase blemishes. The comment is a reminder, though, that the *habitus* of the *biographer* is also an active component in the production of biography. As a matter of fact, two of our biographers have familial links with their subjects. Anthropologist Kalpana Ram is the great-granddaughter of L.K.A. Iyer (whose son and grandson were also anthropologists!). This circumstance compels her to try and specify the difference between the *habitus* of her subject and her own: that of a woman professional, living abroad, engaged in recovering both a personal and a disciplinary history, a young scholar familiar with the radical critique of anthropology’s links with empire, a feminist scholar ever-sensitive to the ‘invisibility’ of women in traditional anthropology.

How is she to evaluate L.K.A. Iyer's contribution from her present location? And how are we, the readers, to understand Iyer's work in this light?

Historian Saurabh Dube's task must have been, if anything, even more challenging, for Dube is writing here of his own father, the eminent anthropologist/sociologist S.C. Dube, and attempting to do so as dispassionately as would any non-related historian or chronicler. The fact that his own professional work (Dube 2001) was conducted in Chattisgarh, where his father grew up and first developed an interest in tribal cultures, is no doubt a complicating aspect of the familial-professional relationship of the biographer and his subject.

The relationship of student-biographer to teacher-subject is similarly one of privileged access, as well as obvious constraint. We recall how often T.N. Madan cautioned us against speaking casually of a 'Lucknow School' of Sociology. A student, and later colleague, of D.P. Mukerji, he was only too conscious of the differences in orientation and style between the three leading Lucknow personalities, Radhakamal Mukerjee, D.P. Mukerji and D.N. Majumdar, as well as others like the maverick social philosopher and critic of modernity (and eventually of social science itself) A.K. Saran. Similarly, Sujata Patel's account of A.R. Desai does not especially disclose or reflect upon a personal connection, though she was herself a student of the Sociology Department of Bombay University, and subsequently a close friend of A.R. Desai and his wife, the feminist sociologist Neera Desai.

With the exceptions mentioned above, the other authors rely primarily, sometimes exclusively, on the published work of their subjects. While Elwin, Ghurye, and Bose have written autobiographies, others—like Srinivas and Dube—have written essays about their engagement with sociology that provide important biographical information.³³ In some cases, information has been pieced together through interviews with students or colleagues (Sundar, Guha, Upadhyaya), while for Benoy Kumar Sarkar, Chatterji has relied, *inter alia*, on a published account of discussions between Sarkar and his

³³ See the references in n. 10 above.

students to understand the ideas and events that shaped him. In a few cases, there have been prior biographies to build upon,³⁴ and there are many briefer biographical notices in scattered publications. However, by and large these lives have been uncharted territories, and it is a matter of gratification that many authors have gone to special lengths to track down primary sources (archives, libraries, departmental syllabi, etc.), and to interview the colleagues, students, friends, and family of their subjects.³⁵ In that sense, true to their professional training, many of our biographers pursued their research through the disciplines' privileged methodology—inquiries in 'the field'.

We realise that, methodologically speaking, linking personal lives with particular texts (whether literary or scientific) and with the thought-world of the times in which the author lived is a rather problematic endeavour, as literary critics aver (Wellek & Warren 1966), and in fact our authors fight shy of frontally addressing such thorny conceptual-methodological issues, as they also avoid the temptation of situational determinism and the challenge of psychobiography. But, within the straight, 'as it comes' format they have followed, the essays are quite varied, with differing emphases from one to another on family background, life-history, professional writings, academic and personal networks, and intellectual influences.

Yet, in sociological terms, there are striking similarities between their lives and approaches and those studied here, leading one to conclude that perhaps there is something like an Indian 'sociological sensibility' that developed over time, even if people who came into

³⁴ Understandably, Patrick Geddes has been the subject of numerous biographies and biographical essays, among them Boardman 1944; Ferreira and Jha 1976b; Geddes 1947; Ziffren 1972. For Sarkar, see Bhattacharyya 1990; Flora 1998; for Ghurye, see Pramanick 1994; also, most usefully, Pillai 1976, 1996, 1997; for Elwin, see Guha 1999; Hivale 1946. Vidyarthi (1978) contains useful thumbnail biographies of notable Indian anthropologists, including L.K.A. Iyer, S.C. Roy, B.S. Guha, K.P. Chattopadhyay, N.K. Bose, D.N. Majumdar, Irawati Karve, A. Aiyappan, M.N. Srinivas, S.C. Dube, and Ramkrishna Mukherjee. See the individual essays in this volume for further biographical references.

³⁵ Satish Deshpande also conducted a long interview with M.N. Srinivas shortly before the latter's death. Regrettably, the follow-up interviews did not take place. See Deshpande 2000.

the profession did not bring it with them—for example, a concern with pluralism and diversity, and science and rationality, as well as the engagement with nationalism and later nation-building. At the same time, filling in the gaps on some individual biographies would also help to identify the directions *not* developed by Indian sociology. Perhaps this is clearest in the case of I.P. Desai, whose use of large-scale household surveys and personal interviews to study the relation between caste and backwardness in Gujarat (1976, 1996) was never built upon to study inequality or discrimination—a stunting of the methodological possibilities available to Indian sociology that could partially be traced to the dominance of M.N. Srinivas's style of intensive ethnography and his vigorous attack on questionnaires, statistics, etc.; or Ramkrishna Mukherjee, another proponent of statistical and quantitative methods who also, in many ways, ploughed a lonely track. Similarly, as more women come into the discipline, future biographies might also help us to understand the difference that gender might make to the practice of anthropology/sociology.³⁶

In the following section we seek to explore some of the dimensions of the universe of discourse of Indian sociology and anthropology in which our protagonists were participants: what they shared, how they differed, and, not unimportantly, their blind spots.

IV. THEMES AND ISSUES

(A) SCIENCE AND MODERNITY

In a superficial sense, the establishment of both sociology and anthropology as academic disciplines in India might be seen as the fulfillment of Thomas Macaulay's vision (1835) for Indian education which sought to produce, through English-medium schooling, a class of 'interpreters' between Britain and her colony, 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect' to whom would fall the task 'to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them fit

³⁶ See e.g., Huizer and Mannheim 1979; also, in the Indian context, L. Dube 1975, 2000; and essays in Panini 1991; Thapan 1998.

vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population' (ibid.: 598, 601; see Zastoupil and Moir 1999). Almost all the founding figures in the history of academic anthropology and sociology saw themselves as engaged in the production and dissemination of scientific and useful knowledge. Their purpose was not, however, merely to serve the Empire—to open India and its peoples to scientific scrutiny and thereby enable its efficient administration and control. On the contrary, they believed that mastery of the science of the coloniser was the essential first step to qualify for self-rule and establish India as a modern nation-state within the world community of nations (see also Dutt Gupta 1972; Mukherjee 1979: 30; Prakash 1999).³⁷

Colonial science thus presented two types of challenge to the native practitioner of anthropology/sociology. In the first place, s/he might strive to equal, and even surpass, the coloniser at his own game, initially by perfecting 'mimicry' of the techniques of modern science, and then by exploiting the locational advantages of the native ethnographer (linguistic facility, Indological learning, etc.). The pioneer anthropologists, L.K.A. Iyer and S.C. Roy, exemplify this effort, taking pride in being able to transcend their colonised identity and win recognition as non-racialised 'Men of Science', where "Science" was the shared idiom of the British and Indian middle class elites' (Ram, also Dasgupta, this volume). Secondly, the indigenous scholar might explore local scholarly traditions, particularly the Hindu classical texts, to affirm the prior presence of an Indian tradition of scientific reason and experimental practice: thus, 'with the vital sign of modernity—science—lodged in the "inner" fiber of the nation, India could be modern without being Western' (Prakash 1999: 231). This mode of argument was already well established in

³⁷ Auguste Comte, regarded as the founder of modern sociology, had great popular appeal in Bengal in the latter half of the nineteenth century. However, as Geraldine Forbes has shown in her study of the reception of positivism in Bengal (1979), Comte was seen not so much as a social scientist but as a sort of religio-spiritual leader providing a scientific-modern critique of colonialism. His new 'religion of humanity' attracted many followers amongst the educated middle classes, albeit via English Positivism.

Bengali intellectual circles by the time the social philosopher/sociologist Benoy Kumar Sarkar published *The positive background of Indian sociology* (1937; Chatterji, this volume).³⁸

While both anthropology and sociology as modern disciplines partook of the prestige of modern science, there were different understandings of the nature of the scientific endeavour—between and among anthropologists and sociologists, and through the century-long period covered in this volume. For many of the anthropologists/sociologists who are the subjects of these biographies, the ‘scientific’ aspect of their discipline was understood in simple empiricist terms as the search for *facts* through *observation*, and the testing of these facts in the laboratory or the field (cf. Mukherjee 1979: 43). Carol Upadhyia describes G.S. Ghurye’s approach in exactly these terms, his empiricism motivated by his nationalist desire to challenge and correct what he saw as the mischievous misinterpretations of Indian society and history by colonial scholars, as well as by his distaste for abstract theory (a scepticism shared by many others, like N.K. Bose, for instance).

For the most part, as noted earlier (see n. 11) anthropology is administratively classed in India among the sciences—an extension of the biological sciences, to which are uneasily conjoined, in the conventional four-field model, prehistory and archaeology, social and cultural anthropology (overlapping with sociology), and linguistics (see Srivastava 2000).³⁹ Many of the early anthropologists maintained an active interest in physical anthropology, pre-history, or linguistics, even as they focused primarily on society and culture.⁴⁰ Most of them had prior training as natural scientists, and they accordingly

³⁸ The most noteworthy example being Brajendranath Seal’s *The positive sciences of the ancient Hindus* (1915). For other references, see Dutt Gupta 1972; Prakash 1999.

³⁹ See e.g. the international professional journals, *American anthropologist*, *Current anthropology* and *Man, Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*; or the Indian journals, *Man in India* (founded by S.C. Roy in 1921) and *Eastern anthropologist* (founded by D.N. Majumdar in 1947).

⁴⁰ For instance, Iyer, Karve, Chattopadhyay (see Bêteille 1994; Vidyarthi 1978: 320–7); B.S. Guha (Vidyarthi 1978: 317); Majumdar (see Sarana 1962).

sought to employ the tools, methodologies, and protocols of the natural sciences as they understood them. In this model, society was conceived as a ‘laboratory’ in which specimens of primitive humanity could be measured, and their social and cultural characteristics recorded and classified according to received scales and protocols. Others, like N.K. Bose (a geologist by training), insisted that anthropology was not so much a laboratory science, but first and foremost a *field science*, requiring the practitioner to test hypotheses and gather evidence through first-hand investigations in the field (Béteille 1976; Bose, this volume).⁴¹

Despite the prestige of science as the pre-eminent sign of modernity, the definition of anthropology/sociology as ‘science’ was also problematic in certain respects, which might be briefly noted. First, there is a paradox in the fact that the greater the disciplinary specialisation, the more the ‘fragmentation’ of knowledge. Some of our subjects, especially the earlier pioneers (see Mukherjee 1979: ch. 2) straddled several science, social science and humanistic disciplines (Patrick Geddes was notable in this regard), and others actively sought to arrive at a ‘synthesis’ of different approaches and methodologies between ‘traditional’, usually sanskritic, learning and modern Western knowledge, and between the different modern disciplines of scientific and humanistic scholarship. The intellectual trajectory of the Lucknow sociologist, D.P. Mukerji—‘an art critic, a music critic, a literary critic, a drama critic, a critic of life’ (Rau 1965: iv)—is described by T.N. Madan as, above all, a ‘search for synthesis’ (this volume; also Mukherjee 1979: 36–7): Mukerji deplored ‘the vivisection of knowledge which has been going on all these years in the name of learning, scholarship and specialisation’, and sought to define human ‘progress’ in the Upanishadic vocabulary of *shantam*, *shivam*, *advaitam* (harmony, welfare, unity).

Second, to the extent that the pursuit of science is a highly specialist activity, authenticated by experts, it has an intrinsic leaning to exclusivism and esotericism, thereby defeating its mission of cultural

⁴¹ As Béteille points out, however, N.K. Bose’s idea of ‘fieldwork’ was more extensive (as in the Malinowskian or Boasian traditions) than intensive, as in the Radcliffe-Brown tradition (Béteille 1976: 11–12). In this mode, Bose was a tireless fieldworker, as was Irawati Karve.

regeneration (cf. Pieris 1969). Indeed, it is interesting that a number of our protagonists felt compelled to write *other*, popular books for the non-professional reader, though such books might carry negligible weight with their co-professionals (Bose; Karve; Desai; Dube), while others sought outlet in 'literary' genres—essays, fiction, poetry—to express the psychic truth of ethnographic experience freed of the conventions and constraints of scientific writing.⁴² This, it should be said, is not unique to the Indian situation (though it might well be exaggerated in colonial/post-colonial settings) for, as Wolf Lepenies has argued at some length, sociology as a 'social' or 'moral' science was from the very beginning uneasily poised between science and literature as rival modes of interpreting human reality:

[S]ociology is a discipline characterised by cold rationality, which seeks to comprehend the structures and laws of motion of modern industrial society by means of measurement and computation, and in doing so only serves to alienate man more effectively from himself and from the world around him; on the opposite side stands a literature whose intuition can see farther than the analysis of sociologists and whose ability to address the heart of man is to be preferred to the products of a discipline that misunderstands itself as a natural science of society. (Lepenies 1988: 13)

Before concluding this section it might be added that, paradoxical as it may seem, there has also been a critique *within* Indian sociology of both the culture and methods of Western science—of empiricism and positivism, of the ideology of man's 'conquest of nature', and of the dual cultures of science and the arts in modern, industrial societies. A.K. Saran, a pupil of D.P. Mukerji and follower of A.K. Coomaraswamy, was an articulate proponent of the case for an alternative sociology built on indigenous theories of society (e.g.

⁴² See papers in Clifford and Marcus (1986) for discussion of both the alienating constraints of formal ethnographic writing, as well as the literary tropes typically employed in the production of ethnography. According to T.N. Madan (this volume), D.P. Mukerji's considerable volume of published work in Bengali includes, *inter alia*, a volume of correspondence with Tagore about literature and music, and 'a fiction trilogy in which he employed the stream of consciousness technique, apparently for the first time in Bengali literature.'

Saran 1965). And there have been others, too, over the years (see Mukherjee 1979: 59ff.; Nandy 1988; J.P.S. Uberoi 2002; Visvanathan 1997; cf. Alatas 2006).

(B) DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES

There is surely some irony in the fact that the institutionalisation of a discipline is both a moment of arrival and maturity, and a moment of loss occasioned by the refining of disciplinary boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Thus Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1979: 54) contrasts the relatively eclectic 'pioneers' of professional Indian sociology from the 1920s through the 1940s with the generation of professionals (the 'modernisers') who built up sociology and anthropology in the universities and research institutes from the 1950s, remarking on the 'narrowing of the horizon of knowledge' that ensued as the discipline got established and gifted amateurs made way for trained professionals.

Sociology and anthropology were not the only disciplines that an older generation of Indian sociologists/social anthropologists drew upon. One notable feature, now rarely found, was the apparent ease with which they related to the heritage of Sanskrit learning (cf. Béteille 1976: 2). Few of them found it necessary to expressly argue for the synthesis of Indology and sociology, as Louis Dumont and David Pocock were later to do in a foundational programmatic essay in *Contributions to India sociology* (1957), or as McKim Marriott outlined in his prolegomenon to the sociology of India 'through Hindu categories' (1990). It came very naturally to them. Thus, as noted, Benoy Kumar Sarkar discovered 'positivism' in an obscure (presumed spurious) Sanskrit classic, the *Sukraniti*, for which his book on positivism in Hindu social thought was originally an introduction (cf. Seal 1915), and N.K. Bose had recourse to classical architectural manuals to understand the architecture of Orissa temples. G.S. Ghurye, trained in anthropology at Cambridge under W.H.R. Rivers, was also a Sanskrit scholar of recognised accomplishment who turned routinely to classical texts for understanding all manner of contemporary phenomena—costume, architecture, sexuality, urbanism, family and kinship, Indian tribal cultures, the caste system,

ritual, and religion—and many of his colleagues and pupils (K.M. Kapadia and Irawati Karve, for instance) did likewise.

Apart from the engagement with the biological sciences on the one hand and Indology on the other, the earlier sociologists and social anthropologists had various understandings of the relationship of their discipline with other branches of modern knowledge: indeed, in each case this was the core of their professional self-understanding. For some, like Sarkar, sociology was the paramount discipline, embracing both social philosophy and social reform, history, economy, and politics. For others, working within the overall conceptual framework of Marxist political economy, sociology was conceived as an overarching discipline with the potential to combine and synthesise the sciences and humanities (see Madan on D.P. Mukerji; also Lepenies 1988). Geddes' conception of sociology, as evidenced in his plan for a faculty library in the University of Bombay, was to include 'Archeology, Ethnography and Anthropology, History and Biography, etc.', combined with 'Civics' subjects, such as 'Town Planning, Sanitation, Education, etc.'⁴³ For Nirmal Kumar Bose, understanding *material culture* was intrinsic to the practice of *social anthropology*—a perspective that has only recently been revived and carried forward. In Calcutta, sociology was long allied with political science,⁴⁴ while in several centres (Bombay, Lucknow, later Delhi), sociology was institutionally linked with economics, underlining perceived commonalities but also provoking sibling rivalries and turf wars as economics emerged to become the natural ally of the developmental state. Critiques of the current state of sociology/social anthropology typically seek to realign sociology with other disciplines—particularly history and political economy (see Patel on A.R. Desai, this volume)—and conversely to cut the ties with cultural anthropology or social philosophy or social work, as the case may be.⁴⁵ On the whole, the humanistic

⁴³ *The Indian journal of sociology*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Baroda, January 1920), pp. 99–100.

⁴⁴ Or, in another reckoning, social anthropology was partitioned between politics (Benoy Kumar Sarkar), geography (Nirmal Kumar Bose), and anthropology (K.P. Chattopadhyay).

⁴⁵ See successive articles in the journal *Contributions to Indian sociology* under the title of 'For a sociology of India'.

potential of sociology and the engagement with literature and the arts that D.P. Mukerji had argued for and personally exemplified has been relatively marginal.

(C) NATIONALISM AND THE NATION-STATE

We are yet to form a detailed picture of the ways in which nationalism exerted its influence in shaping Indian sociology and social anthropology. To be sure, almost every historical account of the discipline, whether it concerns an individual, an institution or the discipline at large, makes mention of this factor but, as the essays in this book show, the question of nationalism occupies a very wide spectrum, ranging from N.K. Bose, well known as Mahatma Gandhi's secretary and an ardent nationalist who spent time in British Indian prisons, to the communist inspired anti-imperialism of A.R. Desai, Benoy Sarkar's participation in the Swadeshi Movement of 1905, the sometimes strident Hindu nationalism of G.S. Ghurye, or S.C. Dube's anti-British gesture in setting fire to an item of Crown Property (a postbox)—an excess of youthful exuberance which very nearly cost him dear. Minimally, for those entering the profession in the pre-Independence period, their mastery of these modern sciences of man itself signified the aspiration and capacity for self-rule; for those of a later generation, professional competence was a reflection of India's claim to academic maturity on a world stage. No Indian anthropologist/sociologist can be said to have opposed nationalism, except in its narrowest and most bigoted forms, and all were inevitably affected by it in one way or another.

None of the founder figures of sociology and social anthropology in India doubted that *Indian society* was the obvious and natural object of their professional attention (see below), though some, like Benoy Sarkar, D.P. Mukerji, and A.R. Desai, also sought to plot India's future on the larger canvas of world historical processes (the latter two within a Marxist framework). Inheritors of the legacy of Indian social reform, the issues that concerned them most were those pertinent to the viability of the prospective or emergent nation-state: the challenges of nation-building in a fractured society, and the challenges of economic development. Whether within the

government (Elwin, Bose), or in the universities and newly established research institutions, sociologists and anthropologists sought to reflect on the nature of the civilisational unity of India as a plural society—the relation of Hinduism with the other religious traditions of the subcontinent, of sanskritic or brahmanical Hinduism with popular religious traditions, of tribal populations with the settled peasantry; and of linguistic-cultural regions with each other within the newly instituted federal framework. While some sociologists were worried over the culturally alienating effects of modernisation—Radhakamal Mukerjee and D.P. Mukerji in Lucknow, for instance (see Madan, this volume)—the anthropologists were particularly concerned with ensuring the survival of India's many tribal cultures and the protection of tribal peoples from exploitation by non-tribals, as well as their material betterment, education, and overall development. Indeed, tribal policy was the subject of bitter debate between Verrier Elwin ('protectionist') on the one side, and G.S. Ghurye ('integrationist') on the other, with N.K. Bose, sometime Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (1967–70) attempting to strike a middle position (see Bose 1972). Of similar concern was the future of the caste system—at once a fundamental institution of traditional Hindu society and the basis of enduring social inequality and social exclusion (Srinivas).

Second, how were sociologists/anthropologists to contribute to state-led development programmes, albeit as poor relations of the economists, the architects of the new planned economy? Many of the first generation of post-colonial intellectuals saw it as their professional responsibility to help formulate and evaluate government development projects. As Nirmal Kumar Bose wrote in 1972, in an essay entitled 'Anthropology after fifty years',

[A]n anthropologist does not merely play the part of an observer in a game of chess. He has a greater and a deeper commitment, namely, that *in India he has to draw a lesson from what he observes, so that he can utilise his knowledge in the attainment of the equalitarian ideal which our nation has set before itself as its goal*. If he accepts this ideal then, with his superior analytical apparatus, and the use of comparisons and sympathetic thinking, he can suggest many modifications in the ways in which the

government or leaders of society are trying to bring about justice where injustice prevails today. And this is where applied anthropology has a significant role to play and a heavy responsibility to bear.⁴⁶ (Bose 1972: 5–6, emphasis added)

Thus, S.C. Dube actively participated in early community development projects (Dube 1955, 1958), N.K. Bose was Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Elwin was the government's advisor on NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh), and Karve undertook research on urbanisation and displacement by large dams for the Planning Commission. Others, however, like M.N. Srinivas, saw the sociologist's work as primarily the critical exercise of interpreting larger social processes, whose value and academic credibility lay in its distantiation from the immediate objectives of the state as well as from the Left-inspired compulsion to study society only in order to change it.

(D) QUESTIONS OF METHODOLOGY

The specification of disciplinary boundaries is self-evidently related to questions of method and of the nature and admissibility of data. There were, and remain, several competing models. That is, sociology as social philosophy is based on synthesis and comparativism—an 'armchair' exercise in the interpretation of the relation of man and society. The foundational texts conventionally taught in sociology courses (Comte, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, etc.) are the works of great

⁴⁶ The essay, written to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the Anthropology Department of Calcutta University in 1972, was the lead paper in a collection of Bose's essays of the 1950s and 1960s reflecting on various current problems of Indian society, including tribal welfare, the productive systems of tribal communities, communal separatism, Backward Classes, and policies for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Interestingly, Bose went on to elaborate that applied anthropology must go 'hand in hand' with theoretical anthropology—otherwise, 'theory becomes an ivory tower in which idlers spend their days in mutual admiration or applied anthropology becomes a string of empirical attempts in which one is thrown about like a shuttlecock without attaining useful results, but always living in the hope . . . that one's honesty and purpose will lead to the desired goal' (Bose 1972: 6).

theorisers and synthesisers. Empirical sociology, on the other hand, requires practical fieldwork, which may be of several types.

The preeminent model of fieldwork in Indian sociology/social anthropology nowadays is that of the ‘participant observation’ of a functioning, ‘bounded’ community over an extended period of time, and many of our subjects undertook fieldwork in this mode. In particular, both S.C. Dube and M.N. Srinivas conducted participant observation fieldwork in village settings, routinising the ‘village studies’ that subsequently became *de rigueur* in Indian social anthropology (Deshpande, Dube, this volume; Deshpande 2001b; Jodhka 1998), and Verrier Elwin’s monographs were similarly based on participant observation—excessively ‘participant’, his critics might say, for Elwin had all but ‘gone native’ (Guha 1999). Others, however, beginning with L.K.A. Iyer, conducted fieldwork which was *extensive* more than *intensive*, covering a number of different ethnographic sites (Iyer, Roy, Bose, Karve, Ghurye via the researches of his many students) in a way that has recently become rather more accepted than it was in the heyday of structural-functionalist village and tribal studies (see Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Marcus 1995). As Sujata Patel points out (this volume), A.R. Desai’s perspective was relatively unusual among Indian sociologists of his day—macro- rather than micro-sociological in its ambition to see the whole, not merely the parts; and concerned with the historical forces that shape the present, not merely with the ethnographic present. A number of the earlier anthropologists/sociologists were also comfortable with quantitative survey work, at the interface of economics and demography,⁴⁷ whereas nowadays there seems to be a distinct polarisation between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, the former failing the economists’/demographers’ tests of standardisation and generalisation, the latter too often uninformed by sociological theory. A great deal of current sociological research is in fact conducted

⁴⁷ For instance, N.K. Bose’s survey of Calcutta (1968). Irawati Karve conducted, individually or jointly with her colleagues, a large number of large-scale empirical surveys (see the discussion in Sundar, this volume), among them a study of social dynamics in a small ‘sugar’ town in Satara district (Karve & Ranadive 1965). G.S. Ghurye oversaw many survey research projects among the numerous dissertations that he supervised.

through survey methods rather than long-term participant observation fieldwork.

It appears that, in general, most of our subjects were secure in their confidence in the truth and method of the modern sciences of man and society, yet their self-confidence was often tinged with deep ambivalence, as the accounts in the volume attest. In certain cases, the resistance of their subjects to the invasive investigative techniques of classical anthropology, or their apparently cussed and irrational reactions to volunteering information or being photographed, served as reminders that the anthropologist's power of investigation—the 'othering' imperative of positivist social science—might be experienced by its subjects as dangerous and threatening. Kalpana Ram suggests that some such reservations may have persuaded L.K.A. Iyer to go easy on certain components of the standard protocols of ethnographic survey. S.C. Dube recounts how the Kamar tribals mistook his anthropological activities (village census, etc.) as connected with the ongoing recruitment of tribal labour for the War effort; and how they were convinced that his camera would extract their life-essence (Dube, this volume). The Gandhian Nirmal Kumar Bose paused to consider the propriety of studying patterns of culture among the Juang tribals when their manifest problems were a high incidence of deadly malarial infection and dire poverty (Bose, this volume): the scientific study of other cultures, he always maintained, should never disregard the larger context of poverty and exploitation (Bose 1972).

Apart from their concern with issues of human rights, citizenship, and exploitation, many of the founding figures of the discipline were deeply concerned with issues of cultural survival even while advocating social reform and national integration. S.C. Roy, very much an anthropologist of the old school, came to challenge the hierarchisation of cultures inherent in the discipline, maintaining (for instance) that the Oraon tribals had actually contributed positively to the cultures of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa (Roy, this volume). Others came to appreciate the ecological wisdom of many of India's tribal peoples—the functioning social institutions of tribal life, the richness of their folklore and arts, their 'natural' approach to sexuality, their reverential attitude to nature, the relatively high position of their

women, and so on. Verrier Elwin, as noted, took his appreciation of tribal life-ways to poetic heights, justifying the policy of cultural isolationism; and the Scots nationalist Patrick Geddes deplored the social and cultural insensitivity of local British administrators, who arrogantly imposed their own standards of town planning and sanitation without consideration of local wisdom and experience (Geddes 1947).

Beyond their concern over the erosion of tribal cultures and the destruction of tribal habitats was the overriding nationalist imperative to include all peoples, whatever their level of material development, within the project of the nation-state. In this sense, as Saurabh Dube remarks in reference to the tribal ethnographies of S.C. Dube, ‘anthropological demand’ was subordinated to ‘nationalist desire’ to appropriate tribal and non-tribal, primitive and peasant, as coeval citizens of the Union of independent India. Indeed, this universe of discourse was shared by both ‘isolationists’ (Elwin) and ‘integrationists’ (Ghurye) among Indian anthropologists and sociologists, explaining, perhaps, why the ethical-methodological considerations of the relation of ‘self’ and ‘other’ were, and remain, relatively muted in the Indian social science context.

(E) SOCIOLOGY/ANTHROPOLOGY—FOR WHOM?

For those Indian anthropologists/sociologists aspiring for recognition in the international system, English is the natural and preferred language of scientific communication. It is also, in the Indian context, the preferred language for engaging the attention of national-level policymakers and of elite public opinion. All of our Indian protagonists had English-language education, and some of them were stylists of considerable ability. Yet many of them obviously felt that this competence, and the national and international reputation that it attracted, was insufficient. Some felt that the language of scientific communication failed to express the personal and emotional experience of fieldwork; they turned to literary forms—very often in the Indian vernaculars—as an alternative medium of self-expression (see above). Ramachandra Guha (this volume) describes Verrier Elwin (who of course wrote in English) as blurring the boundaries

‘between literature and anthropology’: according to Guha, he was both a pioneer of the ‘ethnographic novel’ with his *Phulmat of the hills* (1937) and *A cloud that’s dragonish* (1938), and a diarist of poetic sensibility (Elwin 1936, 1964). In fact, Elwin ‘was a published novelist (and privately published poet) before he turned to anthropology, and returned to literature after he had finished with anthropology’, bemoaning that contemporary professional anthropology had lost poetry, drama, and inspiration and passed over to ‘the serologist, the genealogist, the utterly dreary folk’ recognised as the stalwarts of British structural-functionalism. Apart from a book on social distance and a volume of correspondence with Tagore on themes of literature and music (in Bengali), D.P. Mukerji also published a fiction trilogy in which, apparently for the first time in Bengali literature, he employed the stream of consciousness technique (Madan, this volume). Irawati Karve’s novel, *Yuganta*, based on characters from the Mahabharat, won her a Sahitya Akademi award, one of the nation’s most prestigious literary awards, and she is considered a pioneer of the ‘personal essay’ in Marathi.

Others sought wider social impact for their research by writing books for the general reader and articles in the popular press, both in English and the vernaculars, in which some of them were also recognised stylists in their own right (Sarkar, Mukerji, and Bose in Bengali; Karve in Marathi; Desai in Gujarati; Dube in Hindi)—so much so that, sometimes, ‘scientific narration or documentation takes a back seat, and the language itself imposes control over the text’ (as P.K. Bose remarks of N.K. Bose’s Bengali writings, this volume). As an activist in Left-wing political groups, A.R. Desai wrote widely for a general public, both in English and, increasingly in his later years, in Gujarati; he was also a dedicated archivist, overseeing a huge project to document the Indian working class movement (Patel, this volume). In many cases, the satisfaction obtained from the public response to these general writings, as to Bose’s influential work *Hindu samajer garan*, initially serialised in the popular Bengali literary magazine *Desh* (Bose 1976 [1949]), was compromised by the condescending attitude of their co-professionals in India and the indifference of the global professional community. Saurabh Dube (this volume) describes how, through the last decade of his life, S.C. Dube wrote mainly in Hindi ‘with passion and desire, urgency and

anxiety . . . combining a literary sensitivity, a sociological sensibility, an ethnographic imagination, and a citizen's concerns, . . . conceptually translating and imaginatively recasting the terms of the social sciences into Hindi.' Yet, as the literary critic Namvar Singh (1997: 109) has observed, Dube 'also received punishment for this crime. He came to be considered a second-grade intellectual' by his co-professionals at home and abroad. Sadly, Hindi-medium sociology teaching continues to rely on indifferent translations of often out-of-date Western texts, along with 'guides' produced by local college and university teachers.⁴⁸

(F) THE STUDY OF 'OTHER' SOCIETIES

Notwithstanding anthropology's classical self-definition as the study of 'other' societies, the Indian-born sociologists and anthropologists who feature in this volume all believed it to be their role and responsibility to study Indian society. Relatively few India-based sociologists/anthropologists of the postcolonial generation have studied societies outside the subcontinent, though this is occasionally stated to be a desirable objective,⁴⁹ and their numbers have not grown appreciably.⁵⁰ What is more, South Asian students in the Western academy tend to return routinely to India for their fieldwork (or to

⁴⁸ B.L. Abbi, Pushpesh Kumar, personal communication.

⁴⁹ See Srinivas, Shah, and Ramaswamy (1979: 3) who remark that: 'the study of non-Indian societies by Indians is done mainly as part of the study of international relations and there are therefore very few field studies of other societies by Indian sociologists, and little appreciation of the problem of doing fieldwork outside India. This is unfortunate. *There can be no science of society in India without bringing to bear a comparative perspective, and this is possible only if Indian sociologists study non-Indian societies also.* A comparative perspective is also necessary for more pragmatic ends, including the understanding of problems of development and nation-building. A major effort is needed to promote the study of non-Indian societies [emphasis added].'

⁵⁰ Of those who have established themselves professionally in India, one might mention Behari L. Abbi (New Guinea), Satish Saberwal (Kenya), J.P.S. Uberoi (Afghanistan), and Patricia Uberoi (China). For a brief time in the late 1960s, the UNESCO Asia Research Unit of IEG was enabled to carry out comparative studies in other Asian countries (T.N. Madan; Ratna Naidu). More recently, the Indo-Dutch IDPAD programme has encouraged a number

locations in the Indian diaspora), thereby contributing their skills as 'native informants' to the growth of South Asian Area Studies in the US and elsewhere, more than to comparative anthropology.⁵¹ The few Indian professionals who have conducted fieldwork outside India complain of lack of interest or recognition for their work in India.

The reasons for this relative insularity (typical of non-Western anthropology in general, it might be noted) are difficult to pinpoint. Lack of funding is an oft-cited explanation,⁵² but this rather begs the question: has there in fact been an unmet demand? National character is another explanation: Hindus, it is said, have never really interested themselves in other peoples (a proposition which may well merit re-examination). Or maybe it was simply that the problems of Indian society and the demands of nationalism and nation-building seem so urgent that there is little time or incentive to think of other societies. Be that as it may, it is interesting to note that at least some of the subjects of our biographies sought to interpret Indian society in a broader, comparative context (independent of the 'Greater India' chauvinism which was also a powerful ideological force through much of the period covered in these biographies [see Bayly 2004]). This aspect of their work is rarely commented on. Certainly, the pioneer anthropologists, L.K.A. Iyer and S.C. Roy saw their researches as contributing importantly to the discipline of anthropology *per se*—that is, to the comparative, scientific study of human social institutions—and not just to the study of India.⁵³ The polymath, Benoy

of sociologists to undertake fieldwork in the Netherlands. Regarding the methodological challenges of this 'reverse anthropology', see Palriwala (2005).

⁵¹ The failure of South Asian anthropologists to achieve visibility in the discipline as a whole is remarked upon by Nicholas (1969), among many others.

⁵² While this certainly would apply to research undertaken by Indians in Western countries, where costs of living are much higher, fieldwork in many Asian and other Third World countries would not necessarily be unduly expensive.

⁵³ Cf. Uberoi (1993: Introduction) which discusses the role of Indian data in the evolution of kinship studies (through the pioneering work of Rivers, Maine, Morgan, Lévi-Strauss, and Dumont) as the reciprocal of the domestication of anthropological kinship studies in India.

Kumar Sarkar, who was familiar with several classical and modern European languages and a prolific translator of European texts of social and political philosophy, clearly felt that the interpretation of European social and cultural processes need not be the sole prerogative of the Europeans themselves. For him, as for other Bengali nationalists, Chatterji tells us (this volume), ‘the engagement with Western thought enabled him to think of Indian civilisation as inherently cosmopolitan and therefore modern.’ Inspired by the ideal of pan-Asianism, he also wrote two books on China, based on his visits and studies in that country—a book on Chinese religion ‘through Hindu eyes’ (1975 [1916]), and a tract on the outlook for democracy in China (1919). The Sanskrit scholar G.S. Ghurye similarly thought it relevant to look into sources in Latin and Greek to establish the fundamental features of Indo-European kinship systems (1962). One wonders whether this ambition for a *comparative* understanding of Indian society (whether by independent assessment of the features of European modernity or by the unmediated study of other non-Western societies) has not now dissipated.⁵⁴

V. DISCIPLINARY MEMORY

The compilation of this volume has been both an exhilarating and a chastening experience: exhilarating in exposing us to the details of the professional life-histories of twelve exceptional individuals; chastening in the reminder of the extent of our ignorance of our own disciplinary history. We were struck to find that so many of the debates that recurrently feature in our professional journals or meetings of professional associations have deep (and rarely acknowledged) roots (see Uberoi 2000); but equally struck to realise that many of the issues that preoccupied our predecessors have completely faded from view. The nationalist/nation-building agenda has taken a new shape for the second generation, post-Independence; ambitious professionals now aspire to perform on a world stage, to demonstrate their awareness of current metropolitan fashion rather than to reach out to inform, educate, and persuade a local audience beyond the

⁵⁴ One might cite here André Béteille (1974), Satish Saberwal (1995), and J.P.S. Uberoi (1978, 1984, 2002) as among the few self-conscious practitioners of comparative sociology.

reach of the English-language national press. They also seem chary of addressing the 'big' issues of Man and Society in India—for instance, the nature of the state and the political process, or the sources of civilisational unity, of social breakdown, and of communal antagonism (cf. Saberwal 2000). On the other hand, as already remarked, they rarely seek to study *other* societies outside India to develop an independent comparative sociology. And while the era of 'Man and Plan' (Mukerji 1958) is now well behind us, few would dare claim sociology as the paramount and encompassing social science: it seems now to have accepted its position as a poor relation to economics and other 'policy' sciences. Alternative futures are left to others to imagine.

While the twelve personalities whose biographies are presented in this volume are widely recognised as among the 'founders' of sociology and anthropology in South Asia, we realise that there were numerous others who were also important in shaping the contours of the two disciplines in India. For the most part, their exclusion here is largely a matter of chance—not finding the people to work on them, the right people not finding the time, and so on. It would certainly have been invaluable to include essays on people like K.P. Chattopadhyay who, like Ghurye, belonged to the first generation of professionally trained anthropologists to set up university departments in India (see Bêteille 1994); I.P. Desai who developed a distinctive Baroda style of sociology; A. Aiyappan who built up the Madras Museum and later started the Department of Social Anthropology at Utkal University; B.S. Guha whose name was synonymous with the Anthropological Survey of India in its early years; Radhakamal Mukerjee and D.N. Majumdar (for the latter see Madan and Sarana 1962; Sarana 1961), leading members of the Lucknow Department; and Surajit Sinha who wrote comparatively little but whose work has been quite influential in historical sociology in India (see Bhattacharya and Bhattacharya 2004).

Notwithstanding the acknowledged role of our twelve subjects in pioneering professional sociology and social anthropology in India, it is a matter of note that our contributors have so often commented here on their subjects' lack of 'lasting influence', the distortion and

misrepresentation of their legacy, or the fact that pious ancestor worship has substituted informed appreciation and incisive critique of their work. Thus, L.K.A. Iyer is now remembered as a native cog in the wheel of colonial ethnographic survey. S.C. Roy fares a little better, since the journal he founded, *Man in India*, is still in existence, and his ethnographies remain till today a recognised source for the legal authentication of tribal customary law. The intellectual giant, Benoy Kumar Sarkar, is reduced now to just a regional footnote in disciplinary history. While Sarkar is apparently still well known in Bengal for his translations of numerous texts of Western social and political philosophy, these texts are no longer deemed central to the theory and practice of Indian sociology: he ‘wrote at a time when the field was still fluid’, Chatterji explains. Patrick Geddes may well have become a contemporary cult figure in the fields of social ecology and town planning, but intellectually (so several of our contributors conclude) he left ‘no mark’ on the Bombay University Sociology Department that he had founded and—with a few exceptions—has had negligible influence among Indian sociologists today (Upadhyaya; Munshi (2000), this volume; cf. Visvanathan 1987). D.P. Mukerji—a man of the spoken more than the written word, according to T.N. Madan—is scarcely known today; his books are mostly out of print and absent from teaching syllabi. Verrier Elwin continues to be ‘treated with condescension in the academy’ (Guha), though his tribal ethnographies remain in print and are widely read. Votaries of ‘Action Research’ do not appear to take inspiration from the likes of N.K. Bose (Gandhian) or A.R. Desai (Communist), both of whom had contributed so importantly to *documenting* the socio-political movements in which they participated.

Nandini Sundar speculates at some length in her contribution on Irawati Karve’s lack of lasting influence. Was it because Karve practised anthropology in the classical sense (including archeology, prehistory, and physical anthropology) that she does not qualify as an ancestress for contemporary sociologists/social anthropologists? Is she now recognised only or especially in the regional context, not the national? Did she have too few students to keep her memory alive? Did she have the wrong publishers to promote her books on a national scale?

Was it because she was a woman in a profession still dominated by men? Any or all of these factors may have made a difference but, reflecting on these essays across the board, some factors appear to be more important than others: in particular, a large and strong teaching department; metropolitan location; writing in English; the control of professional associations; access to a professional journal; and, perhaps increasingly, international recognition and networks of patronage.

But this volume is not intended as a guide to disciplinary immortality. It aims simply to allow these extraordinary professional lives to speak to each other and to a successor generation of sociologists and social anthropologists, ourselves included. There are many lessons to be learned and we owe much to our contributors for making this dialogical engagement possible.

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Anthropology as 'Ananthropology'

L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer (1861–1937),
Colonial Anthropology, and the
'Native Anthropologist'
as Pioneer

KALPANA RAM

When Ananthakrishna entered the field of anthropology in the first decade of this century, anthropology was undeveloped in India, and the facilities, resources and prospects which exist for anthropologists nowadays were non-existent then. It must have required singular courage and devotion to have started on a career of anthropology in those days. That is why Ananthakrishna became a legend to subsequent generations of anthropologists. In fact, anthropology was jokingly referred to as 'Ananthropology'. It can be said with justice that the work and example of Ananthakrishna contributed substantially to the building up of a scientific tradition in modern India.—M.N. Srinivas, Anthropology exhibition souvenir, Madras, 1962, cited in Bala Ratnam 1963: 57

THE FORM IN WHICH M.N. SRINIVAS, FROM HIS POSITION AS Professor of Sociology at Delhi University, tells of the achievements of Ananthakrishna (hereafter A.K.) Iyer, is one Bourdieu describes as elaborating 'the image of the great predecessors'. The form is given by a retrospective construction of lineage and genealogy: the great predecessors, viewed from the perspective of subsequent generations



Fig. 2: L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer with his wife Gangai Ammal and their son L.A. Natesan. (*Photograph courtesy A.K. Ramdas*)

of academics in that field, appear as those who provide the terms of self-definition for their descendants (Bourdieu 1993: 65). This is not, however, the form in which academic institutions require their members to narrate their own lives: that form is given by the academic

curriculum vitae, written for institutional circulation and promotion. If we were to narrate A.K. Iyer's life in the academic form of a CV, and add a few biographical details, it would look something like this:

Ananthakrishna Iyer graduated with a BA from Christian College, Madras, in 1883, and first worked as a clerk in the land settlement office at Wynad. He became a teacher at Victoria College, Palghat, teaching science. While teaching, he graduated in L.T. and became headmaster of a school run by a Christian mission at Changanacherry. At this point, the subcollector of Palghat became Dewan of Cochin and embarked on a wide-ranging educational programme in the state which required trained teachers. The Dewan offered Iyer appointment as Science Assistant in Maharaja's College, Ernakulam. In 1902, the secretary to the Dewan asked Iyer to take up, as a purely honorary job, an ethnographic survey of the state of Cochin—a task required of all provincial governments and states by the colonial state. Iyer worked during the week as a teacher at the Ernakulam college, and on weekends as Superintendent of Ethnography for the Dewan. Twelve monographs were issued by the government press of Ernakulam between 1904 and 1906. In 1908, the first volume was published, and a second in 1914. Iyer was chosen President of the Ethnology Section at the first meeting of the Indian Science Congress in Calcutta and there met the vice chancellor of Calcutta University. In 1914 he was appointed by the Dewan as Curator of the State Museum and Superintendent of Zoological Gardens at Trichur. In 1916 he delivered a series of special lectures on ethnology in India at the University of Madras, the first of its kind within Indian universities. He was now appointed Lecturer in Anthropology and Ancient Indian History and Culture at Calcutta University; in 1920, he became University Reader at this university. The same year, the university introduced the first anthropology postgraduate course and Iyer was appointed Senior Lecturer in order to set up a new anthropology department. He held the position till 1932–3. In 1924 the Maharaja of Mysore invited him to undertake an ethnographic survey of Mysore, resulting in four volumes, the last three completing information initially collected by H.V. Nanjundayya, Superintendent of Ethnography. Iyer undertook a lecture tour

of European universities in 1934. He received an honorary doctorate degree at the University of Breslau. In India, he was conferred the honours of Rao Bahadur in 1921 and Dewan Bahadur in 1935. In his last years, he had embarked on an ethnological study of Coorg. He died in 1937.

The present essay is as much an exploration of the way we, as contemporary social scientists and middle-class Indians, write about and remember our disciplinary ancestors as it is about the figure of A.K. Iyer. The reason for this departure from the usual intellectual biography lies partly in methodological considerations and partly in my familial positioning in relation to Iyer. As A.K. Iyer's great granddaughter (by his third marriage) as well as anthropologist, my narrativisation of ancestry is necessarily overdetermined, blurring the boundaries between the professional and the familial. What makes this ancestral connection even more extraordinary is the transmission of anthropology as a 'family business' across three generations of men in my maternal family. Paternal authorisation of the son, and a reciprocal memorialisation of the paternal ancestor, are intimately linked in this mode of transmission. Iyer's eldest son by his second marriage, L.A. Krishna Iyer, went on to collect data as Special Ethnographer to the Census Commissioner in 1931–2, and as Officer in Charge of the Ethnographic Survey of Travancore from 1935 to 1942. Drawing on this material, he wrote three volumes of the Travancore Tribes and Castes published in 1936, 1939, and 1942, and later in the Coorg Tribes and Castes. In 1945 he was appointed Head of the Department of Anthropology in the University of Madras. *His* son, L.K. Bala Ratnam, began his academic work via a book coauthored with his father—a popularising volume on anthropology published in 1961. He was General Secretary to the Social Sciences Association in India, and author of many publications, some of which are direct memorialisations of the contributions of his grandfather. He has been a key figure in establishing a Centre for Anthropological Studies, named after A.K. Iyer, located in the ancestral village of Palghat at Lakshminarayanapuram. One of the objectives of the Centre is to revive interest in and pursue research on the contributions of A.K. Iyer.

The centre's publications on the occasion of Iyer's birth centenary (see Bala Ratnam 1963) and subsequently (Bala Ratnam 1991) provide some of the source material for my essay.

The writing of disciplinary ancestry is often limited to a history of ideas and affiliations entirely intellectual—to the delineation of a shared style of thought and ideas. Such a history is extended, at best, to a discussion of academic and professional institutions. In this case study, however, there are features which resist such a rendition. Anthropology itself existed in 1902 only in a loosely formative stage. There certainly existed no institutional mechanisms for socialising Indians into the colonial discipline. What is it that enables an individual Indian to make an entry into the set of practices described as 'anthropological'? Iyer's admission into a colonial science, the 'Science of Man', provides a unique opportunity for examining those *non*-disciplinary enabling elements of the social field which are always present in the reproduction of academic institutions and theoretical traditions. Bourdieu has defined 'the habitus' as a set of dispositions and affinities that are individualised but durable enough to make possible a transmission of social and cultural capital across generations (e.g. Bourdieu 1977, 1993). But what exactly *is* the 'habitus' in our present context? If, as numerous considerations of colonial forms of knowledge have pointed out, anthropology was a discourse designed to study 'native peoples' rather than for these to figure in it as speaking subjects, then what made it possible for someone like Iyer to carve out a speaking position for himself? And what kind of speech did that position render possible?

This shift in the form of the question enables me to pose a further question: can caste, class, and gender be regarded simply as elements in a structure of power relations, to be considered in purely structural terms, with individualism as the only theoretical alternative? Or can they be regarded, in a livelier fashion than usual, as embodied skills and forms of enablement that bring the individual and social power together? Is class a matter merely of the unequal distribution of these skills? Or do the prior fundamental class and gender interdictions, and separations between different kinds of knowledge and practice, shape the very form taken by knowledge?

Habitus has a further significance for this essay: I write as the great grand-daughter of Iyer. Insofar as the familial habitus is to appear as an object of enquiry and thought here—and it can do so only in an incomplete fashion, as it furnishes elements of my own speaking position—this is not because of an effort of sheer will or imagination on my part but because I have experienced a partial break with this habitus. My induction into anthropology has not been as straightforward as that of the men I have just described: there have been discontinuities, both in disciplinary and in gender terms. The partial break I refer to is shaped by differences of generation, migration, and in ways not unconnected with either age, gender, or migration—a different kind of theoretical and political socialisation. The situation offers a set of possibilities and constraints. It provides both the distance from which to ask certain kinds of questions and the nearness that motivates the questions. But the nearness also generates, as a thoroughly internal set of constraints, the kinship expectations born of the nurturance given by older generations.

I: COLONIAL WAYS OF KNOWING

When the Secretary to the Dewan of Cochin, Achuta Menon, asked Iyer to undertake an ethnographic survey of the state, the princely state had little choice except to respond to an externally imposed requirement flowing from the colonial state's decision to embark on an ethnographic survey of all of India as part of its 1901 census operations. The ethnographic grid of enquiry that Iyer used was a 'given'. The imposed nature of the colonial apparatus of ethnographic and ethnological investigation would have been particularly apparent at the time that Iyer made his entry. Although no tradition can be defined in entirely local terms, an ethnographic survey was particularly alien to Indians. Its foreign character consisted not in its external origins but in its very mode of operation, which relied on a separation of outsider investigator from the native investigated. This separation derived partly from the 'objectivist' model of science that shaped anthropology. The model rests on a fundamental division between the knower and the world, between the detached scientist and the

observed natural world. European modernity has also given us traditions critical of this separation. The mistaken extension of a scientific subject/object distinction to members of the social world has been the object of a sustained critique by phenomenological traditions of philosophy (cf. Heidegger 1992; Merleau-Ponty 1986). This tradition remains internal to the terms of Western philosophy. What it ignores is the way in which colonial relations of power sustained and elaborated the terms of this transposition. We can only speculate about the extent to which this model of natural science was in turn shaped by the form taken by colonial state power. The colonial state has been characterised in terms remarkably similar to the model. One historian, for instance, contrasts the colonial state with previous forms of the state in India. The colonial state was not only 'far more powerful, centralized and interventionist' but also 'far more self-consciously "neutral" . . . than any previous state', 'standing above society, and not really part of it' (Pandey 1992: 16).

British colonial forms of knowledge have been relatively well explored in recent years. Bernard Cohn, in many ways a forerunner of this body of work, writes of the many forms of colonial modalities of knowledge, such as the museological, the enumerative, the historiographic, the observational/travel modality, and the survey modality. Of the survey modality, explored in his early work on the census, Cohn writes:

The survey as an investigative modality encompasses a wide range of practices, from the mapping of India, to collecting botanical specimens, to the recording of architectural and archaeological sites of historic significance, or the minute measuring of a peasant's fields. . . . Upon the acquisition of each new territory, a new survey was launched, which went far beyond mapping and bounding to describe and classify the territory's zoology, geology, botany, ethnography, economic products, history and sociology. (Cohn 1996: 7)

Another scholar, Asad, has advised us not to overestimate the importance of anthropological knowledge to the structures of imperial domination. Much more important was the 'vast body of information routinely accumulated by merchants, missionaries, and administrators' (Asad 1991: 315). What remains undisputed, however, is the centrality of the colonial state for anthropology. The ethnological

project of survey—with its classificatory grid of 'castes', 'tribes', and races (Robb 1995)—works as a particularly intensive colonial subset of the overarching governmental category of 'population'. Its modes of operation follow all the three paths traced by Foucault for 'population'. It is simultaneously 'a datum . . . , a field of intervention, and . . . an objective of governmental techniques' (Foucault 1991: 102). The ethnographic investigations Iyer was invited to join were proposed in 1899 to the Secretary of State in India by the British Association for the Advancement of Science. The proposal was accepted as part of the colonial state's census operations of 1901. Science and governmentality—Indians as scientific 'datum' and Indians as objects of administrative control—weave in and out of one another as modes of meaning. The terms in which the government accepted the need for an Ethnographic Survey of India as part of its 1901 census invoke the utility of a tidy record of its subject population:

It is unnecessary to dwell at length upon the obvious advantages to many branches of the administration in this country of an accurate and well-arranged record of the customs and the domestic and social relations of the various castes and tribes. The entire framework of native life in India is made up of groups of this kind, and the status and conduct of individuals are largely determined by the group to which they belong. (GOI 1901: 138, cited in Ghosh n.d.)

The opening statements of the *same* memorandum conceive of ethnography as a provider of 'datum', scientifically conceived and implemented:

It has come to be recognised of late years that India is a vast storehouse of social and physical data which only need to be recorded in order to contribute to the solution of the problems which are being approached in Europe with the aid of material much of which is inferior in quality to the facts readily accessible in India, and rests upon less trustworthy evidence. . . . (ibid.)

What sustains this movement between the scientific observation of the natural world and the administrative categorisation of a subject population is a third set of terms provided by evolutionary biologies of racial embodiment. Within the overarching framework of meaning provided by evolutionism as science, there was little need

to make a distinction between the scientific investigation of the natural world and the 'Science of Man'. The historian Bayly refers us to earlier antecedents for the Ethnological Survey of India:

In 1869, the Ethnological Society of London invited specialists to map the ethnological composition of individual Indian regions according to the established 'scientific' criteria of ethnology—'physical character', 'language', 'civilisation' and 'religion' (Huxley 1868–9). Significantly, the meeting was held in what was then called the Museum of Practical Geology. It was accompanied by displays of ethnographic photographs, geological samples, flint axes and other 'specimens'. (Bayly 1997: 189)

Once Iyer had established his reputation as an ethnographer of castes and tribes, he could be made Curator of the Cochin State Museum and Superintendent of the Zoological Gardens in Trichur in 1914. People could be observed as one observes the natural world, and they could be classified as so many representatives of different historical periods. Fabian (1983) has pointed out, in an influential formulation, the denial, within this framework, of 'co-eval' temporality between the observer and the observed. But a further refinement is needed. The special scientific appeal of civilisations such as India's lay precisely in the 'coeval' appearance, within India, of what appeared in other places as temporally successive phases of evolution. What occurred in linear form in Europe occurs simultaneously in India, where there is a peculiar collapsing of evolutionary phases, so that all social forms are arrayed in one space, coexisting in one temporal frame. Unlike more fragile 'primitive' societies which crumbled under the onslaught of colonial contact—in which anthropologists such as Rivers detected a pervasive psychological malaise (Jolly 1998)—India provided a particularly interesting laboratory as a civilisation made complex by the hardy survival of forms extinct elsewhere, alongside the more evolved forms.

In the Introduction to Volume 2 of Iyer's *The tribes and castes of Cochin* (1912a), Alfred Haddon of Cambridge writes:

These backward jungle folk have a peculiar interest for ethnologists as they appear to retain many of the customs and beliefs which we may well suppose characterised mankind in very ancient times; they are

ethnological survivals which bear the same relation to anthropology as that borne to zoology by those generalised or persistent types dating from geological antiquity in various groups of animals that rejoice the heart of the zoologist. (Haddon 1912: ix)

Iyer makes his own case for ethnology by distinguishing scientific rationality from administrative rationality and preferring the former. But the case is made within the terms available:

The work hitherto done in Indian Anthropology has been mainly for administrative purposes. But nothing worthy of the name has been done to ascertain the types persisting in a country to which no other country in the world can be compared as possessing so many varieties. (Iyer 1925: 18)

These ways of constructing the differences between India and Europe are not confined to the past, nor are they confined to a particular political orientation. They have entered into socialist analyses as well. Consider D.D. Kosambi's famous 'walk through Poona' in the 1950s (Kosambi 1956). He encounters in his neighbourhood 'the Law College (which teaches post-British law in English), the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, the Fergusson College, several country houses of Bombay millionaires, and a modern state sheep-breeding farm run on scientific lines . . .'. However, the neighbourhood also contains 'a tent-dwelling nomadic group of Râs Phâse Pârdhis whose basic costume (for the men) is a simple loin-cloth, who never take a bath, but who retain the natural cleanliness, mobility, superior senses of wild animals' (ibid.: 26); and, later on, the Parvati temple 'now dedicated to fashionable brahmin gods' (ibid.: 37). During any such walk in India, he suggests, 'it will be possible to see the interaction of obsolete with modern forms of society'. The formulation is certainly more dynamic and purposeful than the purely typological gaze of the ethnologist. But the evolutionary terms of categorisation remain the same, as does the singling out of India by virtue of its uniquely 'coeval' array of evolutionary stages.

Iyer had to work with a much tighter set of constraints than post-colonial intellectuals. The framework he had initially to work within was even more narrowly specified and specifying than a broadly

defined 'colonial field of knowledge'. He had to adapt himself to the conceptual 'grid' dictated by the Census Commissioner for the 1901 census, H.H. Risley—author of *Tribes and castes of Bengal* (Risley 1891).

But does the overwhelmingly 'given' and externally imposed nature of these categories require us to conceive of the colonial grid as dictating every possible move that could be made?

II: THE AGENCY OF A 'USER' (1):

MAKING SELECTIONS

Agency of the kind available to someone in Iyer's position was at once less and more than the terms suggested by the question. It was certainly less than the collective agency represented by the terms laid down in the ethnographic survey questionnaires and backed by the authority of the colonial state. However, it was more than the passivity of mechanically carrying out externally given orders. In considering this intermediate level of agency I take inspiration from de Certeau's (1984) description of everyday practices and the agency of those who are 'users' of that which is pre-given. Language provides a prime example. If we shift our perspective from the pre-given structures of language as *la langue*, to the perspective of *parole*, of language as used, then we find enunciation is always fresh, because always taken up in a specific and novel context. The same insight can be applied to other practices. The pedestrian in a cityscape has to walk within an inherited system of urban spaces, but in walking transforms each spatial signifier:

And if on the one hand he actualizes only a few of the possibilities fixed by the constructed order (he goes only here and not there), on the other he increases the number of possibilities (for example, he forbids himself to take paths generally considered accessible or even obligatory). He thus makes a selection. (de Certeau 1984: 98)

Iyer was commissioned to gather 'data' according to a closely specified and deterministic set of categories. Yet, as a part of his procedure, we catch glimpses of the agency of the kind described for the speaker of a language and the walker of city streets. According to a former Director General of the Anthropological Survey of India,

Iyer adhered to the 27-point format drawn up in 1885 by H.H. Risley and two others for the ethnographic survey of India. Iyer simplified this format into a 14-point one which covered the origin and tradition of a community, internal structure, marriage, custom, inheritance, religion, occupation, life-cycle ceremonies, dress, ornaments, etc. Iyer also like others borrowed the conceptual framework of Nesfield on the occupational categories of the people of India, but he stuck to the ethnographic format. (Singh 1991: 39)

Selecting, simplifying, assembling pre-given elements slightly differently—these are the forms of agency available to the user of that which is imposed from without.

There were other significant selections made by Iyer from Risley's format. The data for the surveys was to be 'collected firstly by the circulation of questionnaires to local government officers, and secondly by the physical measurement of the population in the manner prescribed by Risley' (Bates 1997: 245). Iyer departed from these expectations in two ways. First, he omitted to follow Risley in his anthropometric, ethnological strand of enquiry, despite the fact that it had been enthusiastically adopted in the Madras Presidency by Edgar Thurston who 'relied heavily on his authority as a government officer' to make people submit to his measuring instruments (ibid.: 246).

Anthropometry brings to a climax the transposition of the physical sciences on to the social world. A measure of the coercive relationship thus brought to bear on the object of anthropometric attention in already unequal situations may be glimpsed from Thurston's ironic comments on the fear he inspired in his subjects (cited in Prakash 1999: 42–3). Measurements of 'the nasal index' were used by Risley to distinguish between Aryan and Dravidian physique, and were in turn related to social status in the caste hierarchy: 'it is scarcely a paradox to lay down as a law that a man's social status varies in inverse ratio to the width of his nose' (cited in Ghosh n.d.: 16). Iyer was not so unaffected by prevailing discourses as to dispute the scientific significance of 'race'—he invited Dr Baron von Eickstedt, Director of the Ethnographic Museum and Professor of Anthropology at the University of Breslau, to fill in the chapter on the racial history of India in Volume 1 of *The Mysore tribes and castes*. However, he was

able to take advantage of the waning influence of anthropometry, by the time of the last ethnographic survey, to refrain from making it his own main focus. A review of Iyer's work in the *American anthropologist* congratulates him for his decision to ignore this dimension:

The book is, on the whole, free from flaws which are found in other books of similar nature. It does not contain any anthropometric data, as the author has planned to confine himself to descriptions of the customs, manners, traditions, etc. of the various tribes and castes. (*American anthropologist*, 1910, cited in Bala Ratnam 1963: 24)

In his method of investigation, Iyer did not favour the more bureaucratic procedures employed by British administrators, which included sending 'administrative circulars to Tehsildars and other local functionaries' (Singh 1991: 39). Although Singh describes these functionaries as 'steeped in rural life and [to be] depended upon to send a reasonably authentic account of the communities they were called to report upon' (ibid.), Iyer was not content with such reportage. We have already noted his opposition to administrative styles of knowledge in favour of scientific method. He visited villages and interviewed people himself. In Cochin, he would have had the advantage of knowing the language, but it is clear from his preface to the Mysore volumes that he embraced the philosophy of rigorous first-hand investigation in other linguistic regions as well. He had been given printed monographs of thirty-four tribes and castes put together by Nanjundayya, but he was not content to publish what he was given. As he writes in the Preface to Volume 1:

The thirty four monographs which had been published between 1903 [and] 1918, were carefully revised and edited in the light of fresh and additional information. The notes on the fifty other tribes and castes were mostly fragmentary. Some of those notes contained important material which has been utilised by the present writer. But most of them were mere field notes in pencil on a few topics out of which nothing could be done. If these tribes and castes were to be dealt with, it was clear that a fresh investigation into the manners and customs of all these tribes was imperative, and on representation of this fact, the Government of His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore were pleased to accord sanction

to all facilities required to institute a fresh survey of these tribes and castes. The articles in the descriptive volumes are . . . the outcome of the fresh investigations and first-hand study undertaken by the writer. (Iyer 1935b: iv)

None of these preferences and selections occurred outside colonial ways of knowing. The ethnographic 'fourteen-point format' consisted of the following sorts of categories: origin and tradition of caste or tribe; habitation; marriage customs; pregnancy and childbirth; inheritance and tribal organisation; religion, magic, and sorcery; funeral ceremonies; occupation; physical and mental characteristics; food; and social status. While much has been written over the last decade about 'caste' as a metonym for India, we have scarcely begun to explore the smaller and seemingly innocuous categories through which castes and tribes were investigated and which have shaped the way in which 'culture' is understood: categories such as 'customs', 'beliefs', and 'rituals' (but see e.g. Asad 1993; Needham 1972).¹ In my work on the changing construction of female sexuality among coastal Catholic fisherpeople, I am tracing the continuing effects of the construction of 'tradition' as a collection of false beliefs and irrational rituals (Ram 2001). The centrality assigned to 'beliefs', for example, in defining and investigating the 'religion' of other cultures rests on a thoroughly Christian genealogy of religion. As Needham points out, 'the opening words of the Christian confession of faith, the Creed, define the "interior state" of the adherent by the declaration "I believe in God"' (Needham 1972: 20). The ethnographic questionnaire and its categories drawn up by a committee of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1874 was heavily influenced by E.B. Tylor, who had just published *Primitive culture* in 1871. One effect of using these categories, argues Tomas (1991), was that of filtering out the effects of colonial presence from representations of a pristine primitive culture.

Similarly, Iyer's preference for first-hand investigation over the bureaucratic issuing of questionnaires to minor functionaries takes

¹ The category of 'custom' has been taken up particularly in the Pacific, both as practice ('Kastom') and as object of intellectual debate (cf. Keesing and Tonkinson 1982).

advantage of a certain already existent tendency in British anthropology. Stocking's essay (1992) on the history of 'fieldwork' in British anthropology describes the 'armchair' anthropologists who, steeped in evolutionary comparisons, were 'very seriously concerned with improving the quantity and quality of their empirical data' (ibid.: 17). Initially reliant on 'gentlemen amateurs abroad' (ibid.: 18), by 1883 E.B. Tylor—as Reader in Anthropology at Oxford—was in regular correspondence with those who could gather first-hand ethnographic data, notably, missionary ethnographers. In 1884 Tylor prepared a 'Circular of Inquiry' for the use of government officers, missionaries, and travellers. If the theorists were to 'reach the theological stratum in the savage mind', then bureaucratically inspired questions were too blunt as instruments. Inquirers were urged rather to watch 'religious rites actually performed, and then to ascertain what they mean.' Similarly, collecting myth-texts 'written down in the native languages' and 'translated by a skilled interpreter' was 'the most natural way' to get at 'ideas and beliefs that no inquisitorial cross-questioning would induce the Indian storyteller to disclose' (ibid.).

However, the dilemmas of the colonial quest for empirical accuracy did not end there. If bureaucratic questionnaires were inadequate because of lack of familiarity with the language and inadequate contact with the people, then missionaries, preferable on both these counts, were a problem for a different reason: their interventionist agenda. 'The centrality of religious belief in the evolutionary paradigm tended, however, to compromise data collected by those whose primary commitment was to the extirpation of "heathen superstition"' (Stocking 1992: 20).

This contradictory relationship between the colonial desire to intervene, to evangelise and civilise 'natives' on the one hand, and on the other the desire to capture, in the interests of science, authentic and pristine culture by way of ethnographic representation, is explored further in Tomas's essay on British anthropology and the Andaman Islands at the close of the nineteenth century. Tomas argues that the type of investigative methodology that could be marshalled in the colony was not simply a matter of intellectual theory,

but depended on the nature of colonial control. Observational methodology, as has often been noted, screened out a part of what could be observed by the ethnographer, namely the effects of over two decades of colonial 'pacification'. However, the ideology of observational science also had its own momentum and, by the turn of the century, earlier authoritative ethnographies were being criticised as inadequately based on genuine linguistic competence:

. . . much of the Notes on their Anthropology published by Man is incorrect, and the language he knew was a hotch potch of three or four dialects. His work is chiefly written on the information of a few boys of different tribes, and two convict jamedars. This is not my idea of accurate scientific research, and the results, thought good for 1881, will not do for 1899. (T.B. Portman, personal communication to E.B. Tylor, quoted in Tomas 1991: 90–1)

In such a situation, the 'native anthropologist' fills a valuable niche. The 'native' status of the ethnographer is perceived by Europeans, who introduce and review Iyer's volumes, as crucial in enhancing the truth value of his investigations, particularly in respect of linguistic skills. There is a promise here of being allowed in where no European can tread, or, as the *Calcutta Statesman* of 4 January 1910 puts it, 'Mr. Iyer has also given us many details which no European could have found out, more especially with reference to their marriage and burial ceremonies' (cited in Bala Ratnam 1963: 25). The *Indian Patriot* of 27 January, 1913 states that Iyer has 'justified Herbert Risley's remarks that a native of India alone can do justice fully to describe the wonderful details of the customs and ceremonies of the thousand odd tribes and castes that inhabit India' (cited in Bala Ratnam 1963: 27).

The 'native anthropologist' evidently features in the colonial era as one of a series of intermediary figures adopted as mediations between the colonial and the 'native'. Iyer fits in with the description of journals like the *Indian antiquary* which 'welcomed dialogue with educated "native gentlemen" on ethnological topics', education here being signified by the formation of 'European-style learned societies among educated "progressive" Indians' (Bayly 1997: 185). We have

only described the view from the perspective of the coloniser. From the viewpoint of the colonised, however, even the position of the intermediary looks different.

III: THE AGENCY OF A 'USER' (2):

ACQUIRING SKILLS

The dominant discourse of liberalism has socialised us into conceiving of agency primarily in terms of 'choices'. The centrality of choice in notions of subjecthood is closely tied to the centrality of consent in the liberal framework. For an act to be ratified as agential and consensual, it must be free of coercion and chosen between equally available options. From the point of view of the colonised, however, consent and choice are not as salient a feature of social life, which is why we have to re-attune ourselves to a smaller scale of shifts and assemblages.

I wish to push the challenge to inherited liberal notions of agency a little further. Even the recent theoretical innovations on the meaning of agency continue to be driven by the assumption that agency is entirely coterminous with the exercise of choice—only, it has now to be located in ever more minute spheres of action. I suggest that this downward spiral can be avoided if we recognise that the choosing subject is only one ingredient—if an important one—of the agential subject. More relevant to the colonial situation is the agency exercised in learning to master the use of the newly imposed language. When Iyer began work on *The tribes and castes of Cochin* series, he was Science Assistant at Maharaja's College, Ernakulam. His ethnographic work was undertaken on a purely honorary basis. Iyer spent his weekends on fieldwork, transcribing the work at night during the week (Bala Ratnam 1963: 19–20). By the end of his life, when he set off on a lecture tour of Europe and England, he counted as his circle of acquaintances Western anthropologists such as Hocart in England, and William Koppers, Dr von Eickstedt, and Baron Heine Geldern in Germany; and he addressed the meeting of the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in London. He was corresponding with the leading figures in anthropology—Crooke, Frazer, Tylor, Haddon, Keane, Rivers. By the end of his career

Iyer was, in other words, no longer an implementer of narrowly specified and externally constructed agendas, but a skilled speaker and wielder of an entire discourse socially recognised by a European world.

Volume 1 of *Mysore tribes and castes* (Iyer 1935a) is far more than an application of an externally given format. It contains wide-ranging essays on all the anthropological topics of the day, including caste, religion, marriage, and family. The nature of the essays also reflects a widening in the range of anthropological practices in which Iyer was engaged. He was now an academic teacher as well. The Preface makes it explicit that this book is informed by the urgencies of teaching undergraduate and graduate students at Calcutta University. The book is meant to remedy the lack of reference books for Indian students and aims to provide a single source-book 'to indicate the main lines of what to study in Indian Ethnology' (Iyer 1935b: vii). The discussion of caste brings together and compares the contemporary theories then available, contrasting the racial theories of Risley with the occupational theories of Ibbetson and Nesfield. The author feels able to invite other 'experts' as colleagues who can supply missing elements in his Preface. Professor Baron von Eickstedt, University of Breslau, is asked to write the chapter on the racial history of India.

The illustrations to the Mysore volumes show the acquisition of a similar ease and mastery over a dominant style of photography. This is the museological style, which seeks out the anonymous 'type', whether it takes the form of the typical natural habitat such as the forest, the typical human habitat such as the village (see Plate 52, 'A typical village showing types of houses' [Iyer 1935a: 410]), or human beings themselves as representative of a broader category such as tribe (Plate 25, 'A Banjara and his wives in their gorgeous costumes' [Iyer and Nanjundayya 1928: 157], caste, or occupation (Vol.2, Plate 35, 'Two Besthas with their fishing nets, Sagar' (ibid.: 239). At the same time there are, in the Mysore volumes, photographs that are more reminiscent of what Pinney (1997) regards as the portraiture genre of photography. This genre is more intimate and engaged than the 'detective' genre, which comes to the fore after the events of 1857 to supply photographs that can be used as 'future identificatory guides' (ibid.: 45). A striking instance in Iyer of the more intimate

style of portraiture is Vol.2, Plate 66, 'A Sri Vaishnava Brahman in vow' (Iyer and Nanjundayya 1928: 508). Although the man is still there as a representative of a wider category, his face is utterly individual and he looks at the camera with an intensity that invites involvement. Still others, such as the photo of the Maharaja of Mysore, strategically placed as the frontispiece to Volume 2 of the *Mysore tribes and castes* (ibid.) and photographed with the formal backdrop of a painted balcony, a tapestried chair, and a walking cane, resemble the court portraiture photography of Lala Deen Dayal, projecting 'formal representations of royal grandeur' (Pinney 1997: 88).

As Pinney's work documents, such photographic images which 'mimicked key colonial aesthetic forms' were being produced by the 'vast numbers of local Indian-run studios' from the mid nineteenth century (Pinney 1997: 72). The stigma attributed to a 'mimic culture' (as opposed to an 'original' culture) has been a central object of post-colonial critique. While sharing in the general objective, my means of pursuing this goal here lie not in deconstruction, but in pointing to something quite basic and therefore easily overlooked—namely, the quality of agency involved in developing skills in that which is initially alien, in expanding one's repertoire of practices. This kind of expansion of individual agency, common to all aspects of learning, also centrally entails mimicry. In the colonial context, the ordinariness of such agency is transfigured (cf. Taussig 1993). Mastery is acquired over a discourse fashioned expressly to treat Indians as 'datum' rather than as enquiring subjects in their own right.

IV: THE 'VAMCAVALI' NARRATIVES OF THE MODERNISING INDIAN MIDDLE CLASS: IYER'S GENERATION AS 'PIONEERS'

M.N. Srinivas' pun on anthropology as '*Ananthropology*' certainly hits off—in the alliterative mode so beloved of South Indian rhetoric—the great predecessor as someone who supplies 'the exalted vision of the writer's or artist's craft; which may shape the aspirations of a whole generation' (Bourdieu 1993: 66). Iyer's birth centenary was celebrated by the Social Sciences Association; the welcoming address by M.D. Raghavan, Ethnologist Emeritus of Colombo Museum, describes Iyer as 'both a prophet and a pioneer' (Bala Ratnam 1963: 9).

The terms 'pioneer' and 'innovator' have played an important role in European modernity's self-definition. As part of modernity's understanding of itself as ever dynamic, ever the space of individual freedoms, these terms implicitly mark and define the meanings of 'tradition'. They do so in characteristically binary oppositional terms. If modernity is the space of freedom, then tradition must be that which holds people back, which keeps them from innovating, from fulfilling their potential as dynamic individuals. If modernity is egalitarian, then tradition has to be hierarchy.

The antinomies were forged in part by Europe's relationship to its colonies, and in part derived from mapping Europe's construction of its own past ('feudalism') on to a colony such as India. In turn, these binary oppositions have played a major role in fashioning the self-image of the modernising Indian middle class. The Iyer generation may be viewed as the first generation of the Indian middle classes to become adept at wielding Western discourses in its own right, without external direction. But in the eyes of its successors the Iyer generation is something more. The agency it exercised is celebrated in more glowing terms. Its eminent figures are represented as 'pioneers' forging a path in untrodden territory. I wish to examine such narratives for the indirect insights they can yield. The terms in which the achievements of the pioneers are celebrated indirectly offer a guide to what the middle class regards as the key features of Indian modernity. The roll-call of Iyer's sons and their achievements, listed as part of Iyer's memorialising essay by his grandson Bala Ratnam, reads as follows:

- Geologist and Petrologist of the Geological Survey of India
- Tata Professor of Geology at Patna University
- pioneer researcher in Atmospheric Physics and Agricultural Meteorology
- first Professor of Economics at Scottish Churches College, Calcutta, Economic Adviser to the Ministry of Railways, Chief of Transport Division in National Council of Applied Economic Research

There is a consistency about the stories this segment of the middle class tells of its predecessors, a sameness which points to the outlines of a habitus. An account of her grandfather ('*thatha*'), C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, written by his granddaughter Shakunthala Jagannathan

(1999), is prefaced by her reasons for writing it: 'So few of today's generation, young and middle-aged are aware of the difficulties men like him faced and overcame in pre-Independent India to achieve what they did' (1999: 5).

An account of his eleven years as Dewan of Travancore from 1936 is explicitly framed by the notion of the pioneer. Here the several fields of pioneering, represented by a family over two generations in Iyer's case, are collapsed into one man. The granddaughter's representation takes the form of a list simply entitled 'Thatha's Firsts in Travancore':

- the FIRST [caps. in original] state to permit Temple Entry for Dalits (known then as Harijans)
- the FIRST state to introduce free and compulsory education
- the FIRST time a University was established in Travancore, including Marine Biology, Science
- the FIRST state to make a one-crore investment in an industry, and to commence procurement of foodgrains to prevent famine
- the FIRST to nationalise road transport
- the FIRST cement concrete highway in India from Trivandrum to Kanyakumari
- Thatha established the FIRST Fertiliser factory
- the FIRST Travancore Rayon plant, and the FIRST Aluminium Cable making plant, the Cement industry, etc.

In his account of the cultural authority of science in colonial and nationalist India, Prakash writes of science 'as a multivalent sign' which '... traversed a vast arena, encompassing fields from literature to religion, economy to philosophy, and categories from elite to popular.' The divisions, he argues, 'overlook and conceal how politics and religion, science and the state run into each other, how it is precisely through spillovers and transgressions that modernity penetrates the fabric of social life' (1999: 7). The 'spillover' proceeded not only from one discursive domain to another, but from British to Indian elites, among whom science was taken up as their very own project.

Prakash's book emphasises the nationalist colouring given to the science project by middle-class elites, particularly in the enterprises of a 'Hindu' science. Equally, one should recognise the appeal to

members of the colonised Indian elites of science's claim to *transcend* all racial location. At a time when such universalisms are under severe critique from poststructuralist and feminist quarters, it is easy to overlook the importance of such meanings for subordinate populations. In fact, these were more than meanings—they offered forms of identity. As a universalising discourse which was supposed to have no regard for the social location of the enquirer, science offered Indians a certain degree of cultural capital (see below), a way of reshaping themselves that won them far more prestige than the racialised identity on offer. The offer was not illusory. As we have seen, the world that Iyer had made himself part of by the end of his life furnished recognition by prestigious *Western* institutions—certainly less than a genuinely 'universal' identity, but also more than a purely racialised one. Science offered not simply a mode of enquiry, but a way of fashioning one's being into a new identity with the promise of being able to expand beyond the colony into the world at large. The practices that contributed to this self-fashioning are set out in eloquent detail in Bala Ratnam's account of the rigorous routines associated with Iyer's anthropological fieldwork:

A week or ten days before the commencement of the summer and Puja vacations, he used to prepare for the field trip. After reaching either Bangalore or Mysore, he would proceed to the outstations, stop in the travelers' bungalows or circuit houses, and accompanied by the local revenue officials, visit the villages or settlements of the different castes and tribes. He would already have studied whatever material was available regarding their habitat, manners and customs. He would interrogate the headman of the tribe or caste and the more important persons belonging to the group, about the different social institutions, and take down notes. He would also take a number of photographs. Most of the photographic illustrations in his books were taken by him using a half plate stand camera, assembling the group and taking the photographs. Starting at about 8 or 8.30 in the morning, he would return by about 1 or 1.30 pm. Sometimes when a longer distance had to be covered, and the interrogation or items to be observed took up more time, he would not mind staying on, returning for lunch at so late an hour as 3 or 4 pm. He was anxious to ensure getting a proper photograph of any

group, so that in the event of failure, he could rectify it without loss of time on the following day. After dinner, therefore, he would convert the bathroom into a dark room to develop the photographs and by the time fixing was over and washing completed, it might get past midnight. His zest for work was unflagging and many a person who used to be with him freely confessed their inability to stand up to the strain of his exacting regime. (Bala Ratnam 1963: 32)

The description of the 'regime' vividly conveys the relentless drive of bodily practices, the stern discipline and drive that are a part not only of the field of knowledge but of the identity appropriate to a 'Man of Science'.

In addition to what these stories reveal of the past, they tell us a great deal about our present. The stories of 'pioneering' frame agency in more dramatic ways than mine in this essay. On the other hand, they do not make as much of the colonial context, not even in order to take narrative advantage of the drama of crossing racial interdictions. Instead, they locate Indians of a certain generation as part of a universal and universalising class of modernisers, members of disciplines that also belong to no particular racial or class group. They are 'men of' science, law, engineering, economics, and so on. Unlike the theses suggested by studies of Indian nationalism over the last decade, the drama here is supplied not by the tensions between nationalism and colonialism but by the oppositions between modernity and tradition. I regard these stories as being very like those of the Tamil *vamcavali*, the way/path of the *vamcam* or lineage, which Dirks (1987) happens on in his attempt to reconstruct the history of the 'little kingdom' of Pudukottai. Referring to the *vamcavali* of the Maravars of western Tirunelveli, Dirks describes a genealogical record that consists of a succession of episodes concerning selected ancestral heads of the family (Dirks 1987: 75). What gives potency to these *vamcavalis* is that they are not simply 'lists' of a genealogical nature. Instead, they are, like most performative traditions in India, strongly narrativised. The episodes describe a progression that moves from 'the violation' to the 'proper performance of ritual norms', a 'structurally ordered opposition, which is then mediated by devotion' (ibid.: 82). Thus, in a move that is familiar in bhakti literature, the

Maravars proceed from the crude but unflinching devotion of a hunter or, in another instance, of a highway robber, to the *agamic* puja proper to a king.

In the case of the vamcavali I am referring to—as with Dirks' Maravars—one can trace certain functions in the narrative structure which help to establish ancestors as heroes. All are pioneers in various branches of scientific modernity. The orientation of these stories is overwhelmingly towards the future. The face of the teller is turned forward, looking ahead to inspiring many such further achievements by succeeding generations. Indeed, that is the function of their retellings within familial contexts.

The 'violation' with established practice described by Dirks' Maravars, which in turn enables the ancestors to emerge with their cultural capital enhanced, is also relevant to the vamcavalis of modern elites. For the other side of the Man of Science is the Man of Reform. The two may be combined in the same man, but they act more as functions that may be distributed over different men in the same shared lineage or background. Significantly, the two areas of 'tradition' which are singled out repeatedly as the sites for a 'progressive' violation are the two areas isolated by the British as the sites of a recalcitrant and oppressive tradition—caste and the status of women. Upper-caste vamcavalis routinely refer to the flouting of caste and gender conventions by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century ancestors.

Under the heading 'Pioneer and Reformer', his grand-daughter narrates an incident prefiguring C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer's work in implementing temple entry for Dalits during his Dewanship of Travancore. Approached by a Dalit graduate, Sivaraj, he readily takes him on as law apprentice, only to find him missing during lunch—no doubt a thoroughly Brahmanic vegetarian affair with 'thatha', a stickler for punctuality, unambiguously at the head of the group. Sent to look for Sivaraj, the servants find him eating his lunch outdoors. The incident leaves a deep impression. 'I made up my mind on that day to do all I could to integrate this section of people into Hindu Society', he said (Jagannathan 1999: 75).

Science as well as social reform fuelled the upper-caste move to flout caste conventions. Iyer's obituary in *Man* (1937) written by A.C. Haddon and F.J. Richards, describes him 'coaxing a gang of shy

Nayadis to come within the 300 feet which custom prescribes as the limit of their approach to a Brahmin' (Bala Ratnam 1963: 2).

The area of cultural capital claimed through the transgression of tradition depends partly on the perspective of the teller. Iyer's mother is described by L.A. Natesan, son of Iyer, in his unpublished memoirs, as an unselfconsciously progressive mother-in-law:

From the uniform testimony of all her daughters in law about her, *giving them all ample freedom which was unknown in Hindu households in those days*, there can be little doubt about her gracious manners, trusting nature and reliance on the goodness of her daughters-in-law. (L.A. Natesan, unpublished memoirs, emphasis added)

No such interest in gender relations guides the telling of Iyer's marriage by Bala Ratnam. His third and longest lasting marriage to Gangai Ammal, my great grandmother, is described in entirely conventional terms as 'a model of marital life which lasted about 45 years'; and: 'He was indeed quite happy with Gangai Ammal, who, throughout the period of 45 years of married life, gave her husband most devoted help by running the house tactfully and efficiently, and braving most cheerfully all the difficulties of life with a great scholar' (1963: 17, 44).

Women who rise above oppressive gender norms can be just as important to these vamcavalis, even though the main accent is on the men. This is Jagannathan on C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer's mother:

Widowed at a young age, Rangammal's aristocratic bearing and independent spirit never left her. She would not wear the blouse-less white cotton saree or the naarmadi that Brahmin widows had to wear in those days, but had the family weaver at Kanchipuram weave orange silk sarees with maroon borders specially for her. . . . She also innovated a new way of draping this saree. . . . It also pioneered a trend amongst Brahmin widows of well-to-do families who started wearing similar sarees. (Jagannathan 1999: 13)

The stories tell of constant innovation and pioneering. Nor are they altogether mistaken. Circumstances were shifting rapidly, and there is a change occurring in the nature of dominance, both internally between the sexes, and across classes. It is simply that the shift is not of the wholesale kind envisaged in the dramatic break with 'tradition'.

Rather, as with the heroes of Maravar clan stories, these violations of the caste/gender order work to equip the more enterprising members of a caste or class with cultural capital.

V: EMBODIED FORMS OF CULTURAL CAPITAL

What is forgotten or suppressed in this version of modernity are class and caste, not only as factors that *disable* Dalits and women but as factors that *enable* upper-caste men to carve out a dominant niche even as they set about reform in the colonial context. It is therefore not simply 'pioneers' we are discussing in these stories, but Indians of a certain kind and of a certain background. In this section I wish to take seriously the notion that the habitus is embodied. This does not mean that the body is a passive register, or, in the Foucauldian and textualist idiom now popular, that it is 'inscribed upon' by the disciplines of power. Nor is the habitus a set of rules to be reproduced. Rather, it entails a specific version of socialisation. Embodying the habitus therefore entails being equipped with skills which do not specify what one does, but rather may be used in order to *flexibly* respond to changing contexts. I wish to discuss habitus under the broader heading of the princely states within colonial India before focussing more narrowly on the constitution of 'knowledge' in the Brahmanic habitus.

THE PRINCELY STATES

It is not a coincidence that the expanded role that Iyer was able to play as an Indian in the field of colonial science took place entirely in the princely states of South India. In his biographic sketch of Iyer's life, Bala Ratnam remarks on the opportunity provided by the 'far reaching educational programme' launched by the Dewan: 'To start an adequate number of schools the State required a large number of trained and experienced teachers. The newly organised Education Department, therefore, offered an attractive avenue of employment for many graduates with L.T. Degree' (1963: 18).

The 'reform' orientation of the rajas in states like Travancore and Cochin can be re-framed in the terms set out in the present essay. These states elaborate, in a much larger way than is open to an individual, the capacity to make an externally given agenda their own,

and they do so in a skilled fashion. The agenda is broader than any particular programme, and is the expression rather of modernity and modernisation more generally. The princely states establish a very early lead in this respect. In the educational field alone, Travancore's maharajas invested heavily, from the 1860s on, in vernacular primary schools. Cochin in the 1890s was following suit. The political historian Robin Jeffrey attributes the joint lead in literacy and public education to 'a complex interaction of old Kerala's culture with an expanding cash economy and princely governments intent on 'improvement'. Travancore's Maharajas from the 1860s sincerely believed in the desirability of education' (1992: 56). In her work on the Devadasis of Mysore, Nair (1994) argues that the reform-oriented modernity of the princely states was made possible by the fact that modernity was not represented, in regions like Mysore, by an alien and external colonial state. As a result, she argues, the familiar antinomies between a public sphere defined by colonial modernity and a private domestic sphere defined by resistance to reform did not apply: 'legislative and administrative initiatives that attempted a molecular transformation of social relations in Mysore, often reach[ed] into the heart of the family without provoking protests comparable to those in British India' (Nair 1994: 3157).

A striking instance of this is the abolition of the devadasi system. In Madras Presidency the legal bill was introduced in 1929 and became law only in 1947, and then as the result of diverse social movements ranging from the Self-Respect Movement to middle-class women's call for reform. In Mysore, on the other hand, the legal initiative had been undertaken by the Mysore government as early as 1892. Upper-caste discomfort with aspects of cultural traditions reflected the success of missionary critiques, but in the princely states this discomfort could be translated into legislative and administrative initiatives. Nair traces the initiatives undertaken by the Mysore administration in evolving a 'legality delinked from religion' (1994: 3163).

All of Iyer's commissions flow from states such as these. In these states, Iyer was part of a social class of Western-educated upper castes that populated the bureaucracy. Here, state patronage was not so bifurcated by considerations of race. Iyer was a friend of C. Achuta Menon, who was Secretary to the Dewan of Cochin. Iyer owed his

first appointment at Victoria College, Palghat, to his acquaintance with P. Rajagopalachari, who was formerly Sub-Collector of Palghat and subsequently Dewan of Cochin. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer's reform programme as Dewan of Cochin from 1936 to 1947 brought together a modernising Tamil Brahman elite with a modernising princely elite in Kerala.

TAMIL BRAHMAN HABITUS: THE LATE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

The background practices of Tamil Brahmans in the late nineteenth century seem particularly well suited to being described in terms of a 'habitus', reflecting in each sub-set of their embodied practices—such as forms of labour, dietary practices, dwelling, and marriage—a concern with distinctions from the rest of society. I will refer, necessarily briefly, to each of these. Spatially, the Brahman *agraharam*, a street composed entirely of Brahman households, sets itself apart as a special environment within the village. Iyer's son L.A. Natesan describes Iyer's village of Lakshminarayanapuram in Palghat as consisting of

about a hundred houses ranged into an L-shape, the east to west length having rows of houses facing one another, and the remaining length, north to south, only partly double rowed on the south. There is a Temple dedicated to Lord Krishna at the eastern entrance to the village and another dedicated to Lord Subrahmanya at the southern end on our side of the house . . . (L.A. Natesan, unpublished memoirs)

Not only is the *agraharam* set off from the rest of society, there is also a closing in on itself which is shaped by the style of dwelling:

As each house was contiguous to the next one, the right side wall in the house was built by the owner, while the right one built by the owner of the house to his left provided the second wall of his house. . . . The houses were short in breadth and what was lost here is sought to be made up in the length. The doors were all exceptionally strong, though dwarfed in size. (L.A. Natesan, unpublished memoirs)

Underlying this spatial demarcation is a separation and expulsion of all forms of manual labour. Describing Brahman households in

Tanjore—from where the Palghat Brahmans migrated in the nineteenth century—the anthropologist Gough records that, even in the 1950s,

As religious specialists, the men do almost no manual labour, but spend the greater part of their time in the home, absorbed in ritual and in kinship relationships. . . . For the most part Brahman men are engaged in the management of their lands and in the performance of many religious ceremonies, and do no manual labour. Land is cultivated by tenants and labourers of the lower castes of the village, who fall into two major categories: non-Brahmans and Adi Dravidas. (Gough 1993: 147)

The community generated a particularly well delineated set of regularities in practices around bathing, food, and diet. Although the overriding distinction is between vegetarian and non-vegetarian food, meals are fine-tuned elaborations of ‘taste’ which it is the full-time business of women to attend to since the succession of meals is a central aspect of the organisation of the day. A concern with the regularity of bodily routines recurs in different aspects of daily practice. The regularity of the bodily routines of Palghat Brahmans, their repeated visits to the river for ‘ablutions’ and baths in the morning and evening, moves Iyer’s son L.A. Natesan in his private memoirs to describe them as a ‘clean and disciplined people’. Writing of the Havik Brahmans of south Kanara, the anthropologist Nichter captures not only the centrality of food to this way of life, but the attention to the regularity of bodily rhythms:

One aspect of adhering to this lifestyle is an internal clock literally calibrated to food transit time (hunger, defecation patterns) and activity-rest patterns. Deviation from this pattern is a cause of concern. . . . In everyday discourse, food and digestion are common reference points among Brahmans. A common Kannada greeting in South Kanara inquires as to one has finished one’s meals (*oota aiytu?*). This constitutes an invitation to talk about *visheshha*—happenings in one’s house related to special food preparations. . . . Among Brahmans, it also constitutes an opportunity to talk about one’s appetite, digestion, *pathya* (dietary restrictions), and participation in social events—all spoken about in

relation to food consumption. Through observation and overt discussion about foods eaten and not eaten, interlocutors learn much about the quality of life in each others' households. (Nichter 2001: 88–9)

Such regularities could not be ensured, of course, without substantial uniformity in the background of marriage partners, right down to finer distinctions between Iyer (Smartha) Brahmans and Iyengars. In addition, most ethnographic and historical reconstructions of Brahman kinship have emphasised the inordinate emphasis on the control over female sexuality and fertility. Chakravarti's historical work on an eighteenth-century Brahmanic Peshwa state in Maharashtra gives us a glimpse into Brahman kinship in a particularly reified and exaggerated form as state laws, characterised by a-symmetrically severe punishments for Brahman women convicted of adultery, particularly with men from lower castes, as well as by the institutionalised annihilation of the social life of Brahman widows (Chakravarti 1998).

However, these are all broad background practices—they do not *dictate* a particular life, and certainly not in the context of considerable social change. Nevertheless, there remains a relationship between a habitus and a life which is the legitimate object of a sociological enquiry. Within the broad spectrum of practices and skills made available by socialisation, individual embodiment exercises its particular agency in re-attuning that which one has received and previously learned to the new tasks at hand. The very fact that Iyer was able to enthusiastically 'teach himself' ethnography on weekends raises with particular force the question of prior attunement. What were the elements in the socialisation received by Iyer which would have attuned him and oriented him in assuming a task that was externally organised but nevertheless taken as his very own project? Of Iyer's early education his son L.A. Natesan writes:

Education in the modern sense was not known and all that was attempted was in the traditional style of going through a regular adhyayana and Sanskrit courses. He got one day four annas as Bhoori Dakhshina or some such thing and asked to join a small elementary school on modern lines which had then started near the Sivan Koil. After completing this, he proceeded to the Kerala Vidyasala at Calicut,

which later came to be known as the Zamorin's College. (L.A. Natesan, unpublished memoirs, p. 5)

Iyer's father was a Sanskrit scholar. According to L.A. Natesan, '[In his last years] grandfather was invited on his way back from Benares by a Sanskrit Patshala people [*sic*] to be with him. His Vedic scholarship was so striking and he might have found himself usefully employed' (ibid.: 16–17).

We now have a considerable body of scholarship which argues that the colonial state turned to the textualised Brahmanical versions of scriptural tradition in defining religion, caste, and tradition itself (e.g. Dirks 1987; Mani 1998). This European 'turn' towards Brahmanism is itself not to be taken as self-evident. Colonialism, too, had as its background a 'habitus'. What was it in the European philosophical and religious 'habitus' which allowed such a striking orientation to exist in the first place? And before turning more fully to this question, why do we assume that the European resort to Brahmanical interpretations did not meet with a reciprocal, if unequally placed, 'turn' on the part of Brahmanic intellectuals towards European systems of knowledge? Were the constitutive features of Brahmanic intellectual traditions so very different to European ones? Should not an 'anti-orientalist' critique interest itself more in this question, particularly when there are such striking and independent similarities that stand out even in a cursory examination. In his study of the 'Brahmanizing tendency on the part of medieval ruling elites', Pollock singles out the monopolisation of access to the authority of Sanskrit *vaidika* or learning as a key feature in the transmission of privilege and inequality (1993: 105). What are the characteristics of this *vaidika*? Pollock examines the *nibandha* composed in the middle of the twelfth century by Bhatta Lakshmidhara for the King of Kanaujas:

these digests of social/religious codes of conduct, which define what may be viewed as the total society (varnasramadharmā), are compendias of rules and exegeses based on earlier material from dharmasastra and its 'metalegal' framework, Purvamimamsa. . . . (Pollock 1993: 105)

The critique of British representations of caste as timeless has unnecessarily deflected attention from the way in which a Brahmanic

and upper-caste codification of society was emphasised and reinforced in particular historical contexts before British times. We have mentioned one instance of this already, in the eighteenth century Peshwa state (Chakravarti 1998). Pollock sees the composition of the *nibandha* as a response to the crisis of having to confront the Central Asian Turks. A similar argument is made by Roy (1998) for the codifications and regulatory classifications undertaken in the composition of the *Kamasutra* which, she convincingly argues, ought to be interpreted as a shastric composition rather than as a piece of *kavya*: it seeks to define and regulate social relations, a privilege confined to males, and more particularly to Brahman males well versed in Sanskrit. Roy, like Pollock, attributes the flurry of codification to crisis—in this case the crisis following the disintegration of the Mauryan empire around the second century BC. We therefore do not have to define Brahmanic Sanskritic authority as timeless and unchanging in order to recognise that there has been, in Indian history, a striking tendency on the part of ruling elites to compose, from time to time, what Pollock describes as an 'encyclopaedic synthesis of an entire way of life', or that Sanskrit and Brahman scholarship have had a very specific role to play in these efforts. Nor can these be seen as isolated episodes in Indian history—Roy's very definition of what makes the *Kamasutra* a shastric composition invokes the fact that it cites earlier authorities and situates itself self-consciously in the authority of a normative tradition (Roy 1998: 54).

Colonial categorisations of caste, tribe, customs, and manners are not identical to Brahmanic 'compendias of rules' which 'define what may be viewed as the total society'. The ideology of science and scientific rationality constitutes at least one crucially different element and it has left its imprint on the way Sanskritic Hinduism can be defined and defended (see below). But it certainly would have required no vast epistemological break to transpose an intellectual socialisation based on imbibing a shastric 'encyclopaedic synthesis of an entire way of life' to the ethnographic-administrative aim of producing a totalising vision of all the different groups with their habits and customs. Iyer's essay on Religion in the Mysore volumes (1935e) effortlessly absorbs an evolutionist schema in which Brahmanic religion retains its place on the top of the civilisational ladder. But in his

version Brahmanism is distinguished in a new way from the religion of 'lower castes' and 'tribes', which henceforth become the province of 'totemism', 'magic', 'sorcery', and 'animism'. The religion of the upper castes consists of named, organised bodies of thought. It includes the hymns and sacrifices of the Rg Veda, the philosophy of the Upanishads, doctrines of karma, as well as the challenge of organised discourses such as Buddhism and Jainism, and the advaita philosophy of Sankaracharya. Magic and sorcery on the other hand are the province of non-elites:

Primitive tribes all over India and other countries of the world believe that magicians and sorcerers can assume the figure of any animal they like. The Parayan and Panan sorcerers have powers of witchcraft. The Mundas of Chota Nagpur have similar beliefs in transformation. . . . The Todas and Badagas are mortally afraid of the Kurumbas who are believed to possess the power of destroying men, animals and property by witchcraft. Thus, sorcery is a living article of faith among the ignorant and backward people as also among the jungle folk. (Iyer 1935c: 275)

A kind of transposition is at work here, where some of the terms through which the British distinguished Europe from India become reworked in order to distinguish elite from non-elite Indians. If the terms of Western orientalism allow westernisation as the only gateway through which Indians can enter 'history', then in the transposed version the adoption of upper-caste mores becomes the only form of change conceivable for the 'tribal' and the 'low caste' (a premonition of Srinivas's 'Sanskritisation' thesis): 'it is curious to note that tribes once with very low culture have gradually imbibed the culture of the higher castes, assumed new caste names or become merged into the already existing castes by adopting Brahmanic gotras or names of new Puranic heroes as their original ancestors' (Iyer 1935b: 257).

For such transpositions to be possible, they have to be sustained by pre-existing affinities. In turn, the epistemological affinities are sustained by the deeper-lying social parallels of class and patriarchy. In *both* cases, the dominant philosophical tradition has defined 'knowledge' in terms of intellectual traditions that are formal, discursively organised, and highly elaborated. In both Western and

Brahmanic philosophical traditions this orientation towards formalised and textualised versions is in turn based on a denial and suppression of certain aspects of the relationship between the human body and the world. That these relationships have to do with labour and reproduction may be indirectly adduced from the fact that in both systems they are projected on to particular social groups—the working classes and women—which are henceforth exclusively defined in terms of their function as labourers and childbearers, respectively.

Western philosophical traditions have been examined from diverse quarters for their peculiarly disembodied and privileged stance on the world. Heidegger (1992), and after him Derrida (1976), have drawn particular attention to the logocentric character of Western metaphysics. Heidegger argues that there is something peculiar about the characteristic stance of metaphysics, which assumes a subject who is all mind, and who seems to need to enquire into the world as if it were an entirely external object. Bourdieu has in turn traced such a stance back to the peculiar position of the academic scholar who, cut off from the world of diverse practices, has the leisure time or *skhole* (Bourdieu 2000) to ponder the world rather than engage in it for practical purposes. The expulsion of the maternal body from philosophy has been the object of feminist critiques such as Irigaray's (1985). She describes the inability of Western metaphysics to accommodate a genuine sexual difference, to allow the maternal body or the relation between mothers and daughters into representation in the symbolic order of language.

I have deliberately foregrounded critiques of the European philosophical habitus in order to de-exoticise the critique of Brahmanic intellectualism. I certainly consider this a more effective strategy than one that eschews all consideration of Brahmanic ideologies such as 'purity' and 'pollution' on the grounds that these are orientalist anthropological constructions. Such an objection may enjoy impeccable anti-orientalist credentials, but it leaves unaddressed important aspects of the experiences of those who have been centrally devalued by such ideologies. 'Pollution' can be re-understood, in the class terms I propose, as a heightened form of affect, the disgust that attaches itself to attempts by a dominant system of knowledge to 'spit out' and expel that which it finds unassimilable and undigestible to its

authority claims—namely, the fleshly domains of the female body of birth and the body of labour. They are so many forms of ‘abjection’ (cf. Kristeva 1982). The ritual induction into ‘knowledge’ so constituted attempts to reconstruct birth without its fleshly basis either in human labour or in the bodies of women. The *upanayanam* ceremony sees the father giving birth to the son in a spiritual birth which is defined by its abjection of the ‘Sudra’ and the woman. The female force, *sakti*, is redefined in terms that expel the embodied woman and attenuate the sexual body of the Brahman boy. Henceforth, he must be all mind. Henceforth, *sakti* resides in ‘the recitation of Sanskrit texts and the fervent worship of Siva, but also [in] control of bodily functions, and in particular from the conservation of semen by sexual abstention’ (Gough 1993: 160).

These deeper-lying structural affinities between two class systems—and what each has officially designated as ‘authoritative knowledge traditions’—would have enabled a mutual ‘recognition’ to take place in colonial times. The ‘turn’ to Brahmanic formulations of Indian tradition now appears more fully contextualised, although the unequal context of colonialism did not allow an explicit formulation of this recognition. British recognition of Brahmanism was displaced on to texts and a golden past, while its living intellectual exponents were discredited as avaricious, cunning, power-hungry, and sexually exploitative. The ambivalence—in its orientalist binarisms of the empirical Western intellectual *versus* the otherworldly Brahman intellectual mixed with a ‘recognition’ of a certain similarity—can be glimpsed in the introduction by R.R. Marett, Rector of Exeter College, Oxford, to Volume 1 of *The Mysore castes and tribes*. Marett unhesitatingly addresses himself, as a Western scholar, not to Indians as a whole but to the bearers of the equivalent tradition in India whom he terms ‘the Indian philosophers’:

Now a life devoted to a striving after perfection is not unfamiliar to India. . . . But it would seem that hitherto the Indian mind, despite its noble ambition for self-knowledge, has been disposed to overlook a good half of its potentialities. . . . Unless I am greatly mistaken, the genius of India has never taken kindly to empirical studies for the reason

that it has always reckoned the material side of experience to be sheer illusion. . . . In practice, whatever his theory might logically involve, the Indian philosopher does not by any means jettison all his cargo. He simply rejects as superfluous certain grosser needs such as must distract his attention from the pursuit of spiritual perfection. Thus he has only to embark in company with like-minded men of other countries on the quest for truth by way of the empirical sciences to discover that this way of study also involves 'simple living and high thinking'—in other words, a service under discipline as strict as any that sage or saint could wish to impose upon himself. (Marett 1935: xlvii–xlviii)

Such recognitions of affinity do not end at the boundaries of colonialism and Indian elites. Iyer in turn sought authoritative knowledge of the castes and tribes from those whom *he* recognised as authorised to know: 'He would interrogate the headman of the tribe or caste and the more important persons belonging to the group, about the different social institutions, and take down notes' (Bala Ratnam 1963: 32).

In this account, postcolonial hybridity takes on a different complexion. It no longer refers exclusively to the internal instabilities of colonialism as it meets with a necessary failure of meanings (Bhabha 1994: Prakash 1999). Instead, it refers to the hybridity of mutual transpositions between two systems of power and meaning that understood 'knowledge' on the basis of similar expulsions and interdictions.

VI: CONCLUDING REMARKS

No sociological case study can fully account for a life lived. Although one can refine one's sociological tools, emphasise that a 'habitus' does not operate as a set of rules but as a set of potentialities, just *how* an individual takes up those potentialities and what meanings he endows them with will always be in excess of any theory. Brahmanic and Western intellectual environments may have flowed together, as in their construction of the prototypically male scholar who enjoys the free time of the skhole and the free space of a separate 'Library House'—such as Iyer built for himself suitably far away from the

noise and distractions of the family home, but close enough to receive fresh supplies of coffee and tiffin from my great grandmother's kitchen, hand-delivered by his overawed sons. However, Iyer's style of work also required him to *break* with certain aspects of his background. The thorough and exhaustive monographs flowed not from the stance of a scholar cut off from the world but from the stance of a scholar prepared to journey into the world, to undertake empirical observation and ethnographic encounter. Such a break required a powerful set of meanings to sustain it, and these were, at least in part, provided by science. Whatever our contemporary theories make of such practices and meanings, the zeal and energy with which Iyer brought these alien meanings to bear *on his own social world* are, ultimately, what make him stand out through his vast corpus of work. Unlike his European colleagues, for whom 'science' and colonialism were part of their own civilisational apparatus, to be projected on to others, the Indian anthropologist—as part of the culture under observation—had to be prepared to objectify his own intimate environment in the interests of science. The unhesitating way in which Iyer made this his own project is nowhere more strikingly exemplified than in the photograph Iyer provides in Volume 3 of *The Cochin tribes and castes* (classified under 'T' for Tamil Brahman), with the caption 'Three Tamil Brahmans'—these are women from his family, now re-viewed as typical examples of a strictly scientific category of enquiry (Plate 4, 1912a). Brahmanic education and its transformations under colonialism are described in the same neutral tones:

The study of the Vedas and Sastras is, in point of money earning, less popular among them, and its place is being taken up by western education. Brahman children, boys and young men, are being educated in all schools and Colleges, and take advantage of the instructions imparted in them; so that they form a conspicuous majority in the ranks of the literates. (Iyer 1912b: 338)

The ideals of scientific objectivity Iyer so conscientiously brings to bear on his practice were bought at a price. Yet even these costs illuminate the present. As the price of applying to social life a scientific ideal forged in the observation of the natural world, the analyser

henceforth could not include himself in the same frame as those analysed. Iyer had to write as if the processes of Western education which he describes occurring among Brahman children did not account for his own capacity to write as he does. To the extent that 'magic' comes to be exorcised from social practices and projected on to the 'animism' and 'spirit cults' of non-elites, intellectuals sacrificed their capacity to represent and comprehend the magical aspects of their own cultural practices—let alone the practices that sustain the lives of those around them, particularly in a place like India. The gap between elite and non-elite religion widened as recognition of the patently magical element in such Brahmanical practices as mantras, *agni* sacrifices, and *asanas* was suppressed in favour of a purely intellectualist understanding of religion. Henceforth, Hinduism could only be defended as a set of metaphysical philosophical doctrines or as a prefiguration of 'science' from the time of the Vedas on.

Ultimately, the language of costs and benefits, the language of stocktaking, is inadequate for what I have tried to show in this essay. Instead, I have tried to read Iyer's corpus of work and his life-practices more broadly, in a way that makes them speak to the present. The concerns I have taken up in this essay are the concerns of those for whom the past is not dead 'history': postcolonial intellectuals with a stake in tracing genealogies of the present, and feminist and Dalit intellectuals for whom configurations of caste, gender, and class as they come down to us from the past retain a vital political significance.

In the Mysore study, Iyer referred to spirit possession, to which, he observed, women were more prone than men. Perceptively, he linked spirit possession to disorders in reproductive embodiment (Iyer 1935d: 274). Yet the possessed woman also brings the dead spirit to life and, if sufficiently skilled, can make the spirit address the concerns of those who attend its spirit court. The Brahmanic *sraddha* ceremonies performed by sons for their fathers have a different emphasis. They placate the spirit of the ancestor but keep it more firmly, if more contentedly, in the other world. This has been the prestigious model of the relationship between the dead and the living. Women,

who have been excluded from this relationship, must seek another. Perhaps the possessed woman can be understood as offering us another model for acknowledging the dead.

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The Nationalist Sociology of Benoy Kumar Sarkar¹

ROMA CHATTERJI

FOR STUDENTS IN MOST SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENTS IN INDIA today, Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887–1949) represents at best a footnote in the history of Indian sociology. His work is still taught in universities in Bengal, but more as homage to a regional tradition of social science than because of his contribution to mainstream sociology. Yet in his day he was known as a cosmopolitan scholar with impressive knowledge of Europe and the US based on a mastery of several European languages. He was also a renowned teacher and introduced the study of modern sociological texts into the institutions where he taught. Why then does he find no place in our institutional memory? I attempt to address this question by locating his work in the historical period within which he wrote. This entails a twofold engagement: with his life on the one hand, and with the social scientists that he interacted with on the other. As I will show, he was a nationalist and a political activist, as well as a scholar who had a living relationship with ideas current in his time. For him, sociology offered a way of addressing India's contemporary concerns and all his writings are

¹ I am grateful to André Béteille and Satish Saberwal for introducing me to the work of B.K. Sarkar; also to Nandini Sundar, Satish Deshpande, Patricia Uberoi, and Deepak Mehta, who have commented on successive drafts of this paper.



Fig. 3: Portrait of Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887–1949)
(Source: Swapan Kumar Bhattacharyya, *Indian sociology: The role of Benoy Kumar Sarkar*, Burdwan: University of Burdwan Press, 1990)

constructed like conversations or discussions around significant events, particularly those that concerned India's sovereignty.

Sarkar's scholarly concerns were shaped by his participation in the Swadeshi (self-rule) Movement in Bengal (1905–7), especially by his association with the Dawn Society, started by Satishchandra Mukherjee in 1902, which propagated the study of Indian culture, particularly of the country's distinctive spiritual traditions.² Sarkar was also a teacher in the Bengal National College set up in 1906 by the National Council of Education as an alternative to colonial institutions of learning in Bengal.³

However, Sarkar's scholarship, while remaining faithful to the nationalistic sentiment of the Dawn Society, took a radically different turn fairly early on in his intellectual career. Thus, instead of affirming the spiritual distinctiveness of India's culture and therefore of the national movement as an idealistic movement against an alien Western ideal, he tried to demonstrate the materialistic or 'positive' orientation of Indian culture. He argued that this orientation not only legitimised India's claim to self-governance (swaraj) but also showed Western representations of Indian 'otherworldliness' as feeble attempts at rationalising colonial rule.

Scholars like Tagore (1999) and Coomaraswamy (1981) had proposed that India, having never sought political domination over other nations, offered a distinctive spiritual ideal, and that her independence would therefore benefit the world at large. Sarkar, on the contrary, seemed to accept the fact of political domination as a universal phenomenon and took pride in demonstrating that Indian history showed her as capable as any Western colonial power of exercising 'brute force' in the interests of imperial domination. He used a comparative perspective to argue that, since India's history showed remarkable parallels with those of other nations, she too was capable of

² Regular classes were held on the Bhagvat Gita, on the ancient village community as a self-governing unit, on national enlightenment, and on spiritual traditions. The Dawn Society also emphasised the study of Western philosophy and history. The emphasis was on moral and spiritual education. For a comprehensive history of the Swadeshi Movement, see Sarkar (1973).

³ In 1907, he also helped establish the District Council of National Education in Malda, Bengal, which ran several schools in the district as well as a research institute for the study of the folk culture of Malda.

functioning independently and forming a nation state (see Sarkar 1936).

What caused the shift in Sarkar's ideas on Indian nationalism? To answer this question we have to first examine the discourse on nationalism as it emerges through an interface with the discourse on Western imperialism and colonisation. Unfortunately, a detailed discussion on this is beyond the scope of this essay. However, I will give a brief account of Tagore's views on nationalism and its space within Indian civilisation so as to understand Sarkar's brand of militant nationalism and its appropriation of disciplines like history and sociology.

I. HISTORY AND INDIAN CIVILISATION

Concepts such as autonomy, freedom, and distinctiveness constituted part of the important themes around which debates on nationalism cohered. Coomaraswamy and Tagore thought of autonomy and freedom as spiritual ideals. For Tagore, India's distinctiveness and her contribution to world civilisation lay in the coexistence here of different races. India's history showed a process of continuous self-regulation, of a social adjustment of differences such that these could be organised into a spiritual unity. Tagore did not feel that the formation of a nation-state would contribute to the maintenance of this spiritual unity. He thought that the idea of the 'nation' was a negative ideal, expressing a kind of collective insecurity that led to the exploitation of 'no-nations' such as India. The West had developed an exploitative relationship to the rest of the world as a result of its enhanced technological and organisational capacity. This acted as a 'goad', stimulating 'greed for material prosperity', which in turn stimulated jealousy between various groups of people. Power thus became a ruling force rationalised by the ideology of nationalism.

Sarkar would have agreed with Tagore's analysis. He too believed that power was articulated effectively with the help of science and required organisational support. But, unlike Tagore, he thought of power as a positive force and science as a form of practical rationality. Giuseppe Flora (n.d.), a historian who has written extensively on Sarkar, says that his particular orientation to Indian civilisation was characteristic of nineteenth century Bengal. Positivist ideas spread

as a result of the establishment of scientific institutions like the Calcutta Medical College in 1835, the Calcutta Mechanics Institute in 1839, and the Linnean Society of India in 1840. Efforts were made to synthesise Hinduism with positivist values (see also Raychaudhuri 1995). However, there was an abrupt reversal of this trend with the partition of Bengal and the rise of the Swadeshi Movement. Satish Chandra Mukherjee, founder of the Dawn Society, was influenced by Swami Vivekananda, opposed spiritualism to positivism, and stressed the significance of India's spiritual tradition for the modern world. In fact, Sarkar adopted this position in his early writings, when he was still a member of the Dawn Society. Later, in his mature work, he referred to this perspective on Indian civilisation as a kind of veil, an appearance that India took on when she came face-to-face with the outside world; but the core of her being was materialist.

What brought about this change in Sarkar's thinking? He himself attributed it to his discovery of *Shukraniti*, a classical text on the science of government which was thought to have been composed in the fourteenth century. Sarkar thought that *Shukraniti* was unique in that it offered practical guidance to the ruler and was not merely a philosophical treatise. It offered detailed information on the gradations of feudatories, councils of ministers, financial budgets, administration, and so on. In addition, it linked this pragmatic discussion of government to the goals of *purushartha*, namely, *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha*, and to the *swadharma* of the ruler whose duty it was to sustain the particular *swadharma* of his subjects (see Acharya 1987; Sarkar 1939). The 'discovery' of this text allowed Sarkar to place his research on Indian politics, history, and culture within an international perspective without losing his nationalistic moorings. He could acknowledge the specificity of India's national culture while at the same time emphasising her common destiny with national movements elsewhere.

Sarkar's encounter with *Shukraniti* not only shaped his understanding of Indian nationalism but also influenced the way he approached Western scholarship in general and sociology in particular. Even though he never thought of himself as a professional sociologist, his reading of certain sociological classics configured his discourse

in a particular way. I will here use the sociological ideas that he refers to in his writings as a point of entry into his nationalist writings and demonstrate that the work of social philosophers and sociologists like Tonnies, von Wiese, Gumplowicz, Ratzenhofer, and Haushofer were important influences on his thought. To this end, my discussion will focus on texts that are considered somewhat marginal within his corpus, namely *The sociology of population* (1936) and *The political philosophies since 1905* (1942). I refer to his more famous works like *The positive background of Hindu sociology* (1937), *Villages and towns as social patterns* (1941a), and *Folk elements in Hindu culture* (1941b) only to exemplify his sociological perspective. My discussion is also informed by *Benoy Kumarer Boithoke* (1944), edited by Haridas Mukhopadhyaya, which consists of a series of discussions between Sarkar and his students on ideas and events that shaped his intellectual life.

Sarkar was a prolific writer. He used his writing as occasion to engage with authors and events that concerned him at the time of writing. He was interested less in presenting a coherent body of ideas than in provoking discussion. Each of his books is a moment in his engagement with Indian society and her national movement. Only by focusing on these lesser-known texts may one come to grips with his style of writing, with the fact that he thought of ideas only within particular conversational contexts and as intimately associated with his life and that of the Indian nation. For him—and this applies to other Bengali nationalists as well—engagement with Western thought enabled thinking about Indian civilisation as inherently cosmopolitan and therefore modern. However, to understand the particular way in which he appropriated sociology, some discussion on his use of the historical method is necessary.

Gadamer (2000), in his seminal work on hermeneutics and the Romantic movement, says that history, after Spinoza, came to be seen as a form of inquiry for approaching phenomena that seemed at first sight unintelligible. What made sense could be grasped at first sight; what did not required a detour into history. History became a kind of laboratory for the comparative study of social institutions and even a resource that nations could use in their struggle

for existence, as well as a way of understanding their present. It was through the study of ancient texts that the past was made available. They represented, as it were, the biographies of nations.

It is in this context that we must examine Sarkar's translation of the *Shukraniti*. He thought of it as part of a comparative study on India's materialist past that would provide an important counter to transcendentalist representations of Indian civilisation. He thought that this text, which he claimed had been composed in the fourteenth century, provided evidence of an unbroken tradition of political philosophy in India from the time of the Mauryan dynasty, represented by Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, to that of the Sultanate period when Muslim rule was established in India. However, more recent works on the *Shukraniti*, like that of Lallanji Gopal (1978), tend to place it in the nineteenth century and even speculate that it may have been a forgery (see Flora n.d.). Be that as it may, this text allowed Sarkar to counter arguments that were current in Bengal from the late nineteenth century which claimed that politics, as a category of knowledge and practice, was alien to Indian consciousness.

History, embodied in texts like the *Shukraniti*, became an ideological weapon for Sarkar. Kaviraj (1995) shows how history becomes an important symbol in the consciousness of colonial Bengali intellectuals. In the discourse of colonial Indology, history is thought of as an attribute characterising the difference between mystical India and the rational, scientific West. However, as Kaviraj argues, history became a double-edged weapon in the hands of nationalist Indian scholars who used it to point to the 'constructedness of the past' and to argue against essentialist representations of India. Kaviraj says that history showed a world in the making, a contingent world, in which social arrangements were fluid and open-ended, pointing to alternative possibilities that could be logically plausible even if never actualised. In this view history can allow the free play of imagination, becoming a root myth for colonised people.

Sarkar saw his efforts in describing the materialist history of India as a confrontation between ancient India and the India of his time. As mentioned, he thought that representations of Indian spiritualism were ways of rationalising her 'enslavement' by the West. Thus, if India could be shown to have no social, political, or economic institutions of her own, that is, no history worth recording, then it could

be argued that it was her destiny to be ruled by others (Mukhopadhyaya 1944). History, then, became a way of making the past a presence in the consciousness of colonial India, of establishing relations of commonality between institutions described in ancient texts and those in contemporary India. For colonial Indians like Sarkar, it was a way of making the present intelligible.

II. SOCIOLOGY AS A PERSPECTIVE ON HUMAN CIVILISATION

Sarkar's 'sociological' concerns were shaped by the teachings of the Dawn Society, especially by Brajendranath Seal who helped introduce sociology in Calcutta University in 1917. Radhakamal Mukherjee and Benoy Kumar Sarkar were the first to teach sociology there. Sarkar took from Seal the idea that Indian institutions had to be studied from the perspective of comparative sociology. This involved the study of cross-cutting influences of race, religion, and culture on social institutions as well as comparisons of the history and development of ideas embodied in them. It did not refer to a method *per se* but rather to an orientation that was sensitive to other cultures.

A delineation of Sarkar's sociological lineage is extremely difficult. This is not merely because his definition of the discipline was expansive—he thought sociology was concerned with social philosophy and social reform—but also because of his pedagogic concerns. He believed that sociology was a way of sensitising young minds to other civilisations and he was not particularly interested in its establishment as a rigorous discipline within the Indian university structure. Thus he never actually systematised his ideas about sociology, nor discussed the influence of contemporary sociological writing on his work. However, there is at least one essay in which he does discuss sociology as such. This is the expanded version of his presidential address to the sociology section of the first Indian Population Conference held in Lucknow in 1936, later reproduced in his book *The sociology of population* (1936). Here he discusses several different perspectives on the subject and lays out his own scheme of the broad areas of study that could be included under the rubric of sociology. Thus, 'sociology' is divided into the following themes and perspectives:

A. Theoretical Sociology

1. Institutional sociology (family, property, state, myth, arts and crafts, sciences, mores, languages)
 - a. Anthropology and history as well as sociography
 - b. Social philosophy and philosophical history
2. Psychological sociology, sociology proper in the narrow sense
 - c. Social psychology
 - d. Social processes and social forms

B. Applied Sociology

The study of attempts at remaking of man, societal planning and the transformation of the world by promoting 'social metabolism' along diverse fronts (Sarkar 1936: 8)

It is evident that Sarkar, in common with many sociologists writing in the early decades of the twentieth century, used sociology to articulate their concerns with social reform. However, the specific organisation of this schema does give us some insight into the kind of sociology that Sarkar read and helps us in delineating a sphere of scholarly influence.

Tonnies and later Ward make a distinction between pure and applied sociology. Pure sociology is concerned with the formulation of concepts that can be applied to the study of concrete historical societies and social processes: for instance, *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, which characterise two alternative modes of collective being. Tonnies also introduces a third category—empirical sociology or sociography, which is the description of social phenomena. Sarkar reorganises this classification. Thus, the category 'theoretical sociology' includes the philosophical anthropology of scholars like Kant and Montesquieu, as well as the comparative ethnology of Bachofen, concerned with the ends and values of so-called universal human institutions. Under the second item in this category, 'psychological sociology', he included mainstream sociologists and other social scientists who had influenced the development of sociology. He thought that sociology was especially concerned with the psychologies of different societies that were to be studied from a comparative perspective.

Sarkar was clearly not interested in 'pure sociology' as such, even though von Wiese—a 'formal sociologist' who thought that the subject matter of sociology should be restricted to the study of abstract social forms and relationships—did have a significant influence on his work, as we shall see. Sarkar is far more interested in applied sociology—the study of 'human achievement' and of structural changes within groups and institutions, especially with a view to making recommendations for future progress. He called this the 'sociology of social metabolism'.

In the category of 'psychological sociology' Sarkar includes a host of scholars such as Tonnies, Gumplowicz, Tarde, Ratzenhofer, Durkheim, Le Bon, Simmel, Pareto, Small, Binet, Freud, Wallas, Ross, Bogardus, McDougall, Salleilles, Wundt, Ellis, and Stanley Hall. These scholars, together with von Wiese—for whom Sarkar reserves an especial place in his conception of sociology—are fundamental for the 'enrichment' of the discipline.

Even though Sarkar wrote passionately about the dynamism of India's traditional institutions and about the need for social reconstruction, he did very little empirical investigation of concrete institutions.⁴ His interest in applied sociology was tied to his interest in state formation. Everything that he wrote on social institutions (and his writings range from essays on folk religion and traditional aesthetics to modes of transport in medieval India and comparative economics) is tied to a larger concern with Indian sovereignty. Thus, Sarkar was drawn to sociologists like Ratzenhofer, Gumplowicz, and Haushofer who wrote on geopolitics and state formation in broad philosophical terms. I shall discuss their influence on Sarkar's work in the next section. Here I will focus instead on the two sociologists, Tonnies and von Wiese, from whom Sarkar learnt that all social phenomena could be thought of as geometric patterns, but patterns that were volitional and therefore inherently dynamic.

Sarkar read von Wiese's *Allgemeine Soziologie* (1924, 1929) and was fascinated by the idea that the study of abstract forms of social relationships could be a sociological problem (Mukhopadhyaya 1944;

⁴ A significant exception is *The folk elements of Hindu culture* (1941), which is a monograph on the Gambhira ritual complex of Malda.

Sarkar 1936). Von Wiese believed that sociology was concerned with the isolation of the processes of sociation, of approach and withdrawal, which characterise all social behaviour. It was not concerned with the functions of social institutions but only with the 'rhythm of sociation'. Rhythm has a temporal dimension which von Wiese conceptualised in terms of 'direction'. Thus, forms of sociation and relationship could be characterised in terms of particular styles of movement and interaction (see Barnes 1948).

For Sarkar, von Wiese's appeal lay in the range of phenomena that the concepts of form and relation were able to capture. Thus, in a discussion of von Wiese's definition of sociology, Sarkar describes social relations as being composed of phenomena like competition, boycott, exploitation, and so on, while social forms were crystallisations of relations such as group, mass, state, people, nation, and class. All such forms could be analysed in terms of association and dissociation, by the kind of distance that people maintained in relationships and by the direction that these relationships took. Thus relations of association occurred in three phases or took three forms—advance, adjustment, and amalgamation; and those of dissociation—competition, contradiction, and conflict. Each of these phases was characterised by a particular quality of difference and mutuality between the participants in the relationship as well as a particular emotional charge (see Barnes 1948). Sarkar found this idea extremely attractive. By building 'direction' into his definition of social relationship, he was able to capture its volitional nature. Sarkar believed that all social formations were brought about by collective agency, which was why they could also be self-consciously reconstituted. However, he did not believe in the concept of a group mind. Collectivities were made up of individuals who had the freedom to express their differences. Sociology had to account for the fact that individuals were both contained by forms of sociation but could also confront them; they were both inside society as well as outside it. This allowed Sarkar to consider the influence of leaders, *digbijoyee* or 'world conquerors' to use his phrase, in the study of 'social metabolism'. But, more importantly, it allowed Sarkar to systematise his ideas about Indian tradition as a product of a long process

of interaction between different cultures, of amalgamation, distantiation and conflict, but also tentative appeasement. Other nationalist scholars have also spoken of Indian civilisation in these terms, most notably Tagore: but he thought this gave Indian society the quality of unselfconsciousness. Sarkar held the opposite view and believed that even colonisation was a willed relationship, which was why it could also be repudiated.

From Tonnies, Sarkar took the idea that all forms of thought, even seemingly irrational ones, were never completely unreasonable because they were expressions of human will. Thus, *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* represented opposite potentialities. A group or relationship could be willed because it was desirable for a definite end; this was called *kurwille* or rational will, which is able to distinguish between means and ends. Relationships could also be willed out of sympathy or because the relationship was considered valuable in itself. This was called *wesenwille*, any process of willing that arises from the character of the individual.

In *Villages and towns as social patterns* (1941a), Sarkar uses Tonnies' distinction between *wesenwille* ('natural will' or action that may be willed for its own sake or because of habit or inclination) and *kurwille* (action that is consciously chosen) to the understanding of the Krishna myth. The myth becomes a metaphor for Indian society itself. Sarkar takes up the contrast between the two locales in which the Krishna lila are played out, i.e. Vrindavana and Dwarka. Thus, Vrindavana, the archetypal village is a *gemeinschaft*-like entity and embodies the spirit of *prakriti* or nature, while Dwarka is the product of *sanskara* or *sanskriti*, i.e., man's influence on nature and the spirit of *gesellschaft*. The village/town distinction in the myth is represented by a series of related oppositions. Thus, Vrindavana : Dwarka :: sylvan scene : artificial, built landscape, and cowherd/pariah : sophisticated courtier :: Prakrit/primordial or natural language : Sanskrit/artificial or cultivated language. Both sets of qualities are part of Indian society. We shall see later that the co-presence of the registers of the real and the imaginary is repeated in his materialist account of Indian history. This inclusiveness allows him to use history as the arena for his philosophical cogitation. History, for him, becomes a

horizon with shifting boundaries, or a landscape in which his theory of geopolitics or *vishwa shakti* (world forces) is played out.

III. VISHWA-SHAKTI AND CREATIVE DISEQUILIBRIUM

The previous section focused on Sarkar's conception of sociology and his emphasis on volition in the understanding of social phenomena. This section foregrounds his views on politics and on the state, for he did not believe that society or 'civilisation' could be understood apart from the political formations within which it was embodied. Sarkar (1942) explicitly refers to Haushofer's work on geopolitics, on the notion that the state is a territorial embodiment of 'will force' served by reason, that is, force that can be justified when it is in the interest of the group. Haushofer was a scholar in the National Socialist regime in Germany who had been responsible for inviting Sarkar to the Technische Hochschule in Munich in the 1930s. But Sarkar's historical canvas, the idea that groups are bonded together for survival and that human interaction is primarily conflictual, driven as it is by biological nature, is found in the works of Gumplowicz and Ratzel.⁵

Gumplowicz said that sociology is concerned with the study of group interaction. Societies evolve out of such interaction, through marriage alliances, economic interaction, and warfare. All societies were held together by material interest. In due course different groups coalesce to form states. The impetus for state formation originates in the desire to subjugate others, which in turn leads to assimilation with the subjugated groups, and finally to amalgamation with them. This, according to Gumplowicz, is the process by which nations or

⁵ Gumplowicz (1838–1909) was Professor of Public Law at the University of Graz, Austria, and is known for his pioneering work in establishing sociology as a social science (see Barnes 1968). Ratzel (1842–1904) wrote six books on sociology after he retired from the Austrian army. He worked on the evolution of types of human association and believed that all social phenomena could be reduced to physical, chemical, and biological ones (see House 1968). Both scholars were considered important in European and American sociology in the early decades of the twentieth century.

'folk states' are formed—whereupon the process begins anew and newly emergent states begin the process of subjugating other groups once again. Ratzenhofer followed Gumplowicz in believing that societies are composed of rival interest groups. However, he also said that hostility between groups is limited by felt advantages of cooperation, such as trade between states as well as other processes of sharing. In the long term, he felt, such processes of limitation had led to the development of civilisation. Ratzenhofer also believed that 'interests' foundational to the formation of society are, however, not merely social or economic but could emerge from environmental or chemical (that is, sexual) impulses as well.

The important points that Sarkar took from these two thinkers were: (i) that material interest provides the dynamic force behind social evolution; (ii) that such interests lead to conflict between groups and individuals; (iii) that conflict is a creative force in history; and (iv) that there is no such thing as infinite progress—all societies go through cycles of progression and regression. These ideas form the core of Sarkar's account of Indian history. He is able to construct a theory that can account for the seemingly contradictory processes of colonisation which, as I have mentioned, is attributed to voluntary self-subjugation as well as to the newly emergent desire for swaraj. He says that both these desires are part of the universal process of history shaped by the conflict between varying interest groups. He is also able to give an alternative view of the colonisation process. As remarked, according to Gumplowicz history occurs in three successive cycles of subjugation, assimilation, and amalgamation. Sarkar, in his discussion of the Muslim and British colonisation of Bengal, uses this framework to argue for a reverse colonisation in which Bengali culture is supposed to have amalgamated with the so-called colonisers.

In *The political philosophies since 1905* (1942) Sarkar talks of Bengali culture as the product of a continuous process of acculturation, first with the conquering Vedic Indo-Aryans, and later with the Buddhists and Hindus from Bihar, Punjab, and Kanauj. He says that Bengali culture was invented by pariahs: 'the aboriginals living in hills, forests and river valleys, as well as the untouchable and depressed classes and some of the lower castes, nay, many of those castes

who have in subsequent ages got admitted into the alleged higher castes may be regarded as descendents . . . of pre-Vedic and pre-Buddhist Bengalis . . .' (Sarkar 1942: 61). He claims that the nominal conversion of Bengalis to Hinduism and Buddhism was the reason why Islam was so widely accepted in Bengal. It was the religion of the masses, while Hinduism was an elite religion restricted to the aristocracy and 'the commercial oligarchy'. Regardless of class considerations, however, Sarkar says that both Hinduism and Islam have been completely 'Bengalised', so that the customary practices of both Hindu and Muslim Bengalis are more or less identical. Regarding periods closer to his own times, he says that the same tendencies can be discerned in the Bengali assimilation of Western ideas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that is, from the Bengalisation of positivist rationalism by Rammohan Roy to the 'Mystical duty sense' of Mazzini and Kant by Aurobindo. He calls this process of assimilation a 'conquest', not so much by the colonising culture as by the one that creatively adapts to and naturalises the foreign influence.

It is interesting to note that Sarkar has to include Hinduism as a colonising force when talking about Bengal. The uneasy relationship between Bengali heterodoxy and mainstream Hinduism has been widely documented. Vedic Hinduism is supposed to have come late to Bengal and to have given way to many heterodox forms of Buddhism and later Tantrism (cf. Chatterji 2003). In the *Positive background to Indian sociology* (1937), Sarkar says that when scholars talk about '*the expansion of Hindu culture*, [this] implies nothing but the democratization or rather the impact of the masses upon the main stock of Hindu institutions and ideas' (Sarkar 1937: 472, italics in the original).⁶ This is said while discussing the impact of Bengal Vaishnavism on folk culture. In other contexts, as we have just seen, Bengal is given an autonomous status with a separate religion, 'Bengalicism', an independent Indo-Aryan language, and an indigenous rationality distinct from those of other regions in India.⁷ However,

⁶ 'Hindu' is often collapsed with 'Indian' and is used as a marker for differentiating Indian from non-Indian culture and civilisation (see Flora n.d.).

⁷ Sarkar's collaborator, Haridas Palit, who documented folk rituals in Malda, puts forward the view that Bengali had a different origin and therefore a distinct identity.

it is not as if Bengal occupies an exclusive place in Sarkar's writings. Thus, while discussing the Muslim conquest of India, he says that it must be compared with the periods in European history when Europe was subjugated by the 'Saracens, the Mongols or Tartars and Ottoman Turks' (Sarkar 1937: 91), though even such processes of colonisation throw up contradictions. Arab culture, personified in the figures of Albaruni in the eleventh century and Abul Fazal in the sixteenth century, becomes the medium by which Indian civilisation speaks to Europe. Sarkar refers to Albaruni as a 'Muslim Indologist' who presents Hindu culture 'to his readers in the perspective of Greek thought' (1937: 462):

This Moslem mathematician of Khiva [Albaruni] is an important landmark and agent in the establishment of Greater India. His service to *charaiveti* [march on], the dynamic march of Hindu culture is immense. Not the least paradoxical feature in this evolution consists in the fact that while his masters of the Ghazni House were laying the foundations of a Moslem Raj in India his scientific and philosophical researches in Hindu culture were contributing to the Hinduisation of the Moslem world and through the Moslems to the world. (Sarkar 1937: 462)

World history, Sarkar says, can be thought of in terms of an interaction between *vishwa-shakti* or 'world forces' and human will. These world forces encompass the 'totality of man's environment, natural as well as man-made—the totality of social, economic, cultural, political, religious and sexual circumstances in which man is placed' (Bandyopadhyaya 1984: 36).⁸ But, for Sarkar, even though man-made forces also embody the 'laws of necessity', they are simultaneously the agents of historical change as they represent the will that is capable of breaking the laws of necessity. History then becomes a strategic resource in the struggle for political survival (Sarkar 1936). Historical societies are nations, willed unities based on the consent of its members. Not all nations become states, but the ones that do have to base their sense of autonomy on territorial integrity sustained by military force. The state could be thought of as an aggregate of groups and associations bound together within a discrete territory that could

⁸ Ratzenhofer's influence should be noted here.

be supported by external force and (national) culture.⁹ National culture, for Sarkar, could be described in voluntaristic terms, as sentiments, desires, and values, or as 'systems of influences, conversion, conquests and domination' (Bhattacharyya 1990: 257). Thus, association with a national culture gives rise to human creativity born from the desire and the power to influence and dominate. But for Sarkar this creativity is also directed inward—to the democratic spirit innate within Indian society that surfaces not only in revolutionary movements but also in the different types of organisations and associations delineated in the political treatises of the ancient period, giving proof that 'Hindus' have always had the capacity for self-governance. In this context, the India that Sarkar refers to is exclusively Hindu. He says that due to the fact that 'during the white man's burthen Hindus were deprived of chances for displaying aggressive secularism . . . [a] general skepticism has grown among Euro-American scholars as to the capacity of Hindus for organized activities and institutions' (Bhattacharyya 1990: 257).¹⁰

Why does Sarkar sometimes speak of India as being exclusively Hindu, while at other times including Islam and the Muslim period of Indian history as being part of the Indian civilisational process? He believed that history itself is a process of 'creative disequilibrium' in which frontiers are constantly being renegotiated (see Flora 1994). But he also believed that boundaries are experiential entities in the cultures of nations. At various times in India's history, Islam could be thought of as part of Indian experience, that is, when Indian civilisation was in its expansive or dominant phase, while at other times it was not, as was the case under British rule. In this, India was no different from any other society and partook of the same universal processes that were delineated by scholars like Gumpłowicz and Ratzenhofer. However, Sarkar also gives his own particular twist to this theory.

⁹ I am not clear about what 'nation' means in Sarkar's writings. Sometimes he conjoins the term with the state, as in 'the nation state', at other times he uses it to mean genus or *jati*.

¹⁰ According to Flora (1994) such 'irrationalities' as dependence on alien powers for political government were a consequence of 'international factors'—the external dimension of *vishwa-shakti*.

The contradiction between various historical forces is not merely intelligible in the long time span of the political historian; it is also anthropomorphised in the figure of the exemplary individual. Thus, in his writings, figures like Albaruni, Buddha, Vivekananda, and even Churchill and Mussolini come to represent civilisational expansiveness—but they also stand for the contradictions in their societies. (This we have already seen with reference to Albaruni.) Sarkar also has some interesting passages on the Second World War in *The political philosophies since 1905* (1942), in which he discusses the moral effect of Churchill's speeches on the English people when they were threatened with the possibility of defeat. He calls Churchill an 'inspired fanatic'—much like Hitler—whose charisma conquered 'British defeatism'. He also says that Churchill embodies in his persona both the forces of 'democracy and despotocracy', again like Hitler and Mussolini. He calls 'Churchillian democracy' a despotocracy based on popular will, like the dictatorial regimes in Italy and Germany.

The tension between vishva-shakti and individual volition is also expressed in the minutiae of day-to-day events and not merely in the broad sweep of history. Thus, in a discussion on the Japanese bombing of 'American, British and Dutch empires in Asia' in 1941, Sarkar says that with 'the War at India's door interhuman relations is undergoing swift transformation' (ibid.: 67). The transformation arises, according to Sarkar, because of the exodus of residents from metropolitan centres to villages (1942). He says that the threat of war achieved a form of social metabolism in Bengal that generations of social reformers could not. Thus, with the exodus from Calcutta of 'domestic servants' and women, 'metropolitan residents are compelled to do cooking and cleaning' (ibid.). In a characteristic shift from the particular to the general, he also says that this situation of enforced self-help has led to 'the breakdown of distinctions between superiors and inferiors' and to the decentralisation of labour, capital, skill, intelligence, modern conveniences and cultural institutions' (ibid.: 70).¹¹

¹¹ Much of Sarkar's writing is in this style. Such utterances seem to be a polemic with ideas that were either current at the time when Sarkar wrote or that engaged his immediate attention. However, it is not as if the ideas he is

Sarkar considered war a kind of 'world force', as did many of his European interlocutors such as Haushofer (whom I have already mentioned), and Gini, the sociologist/statistician whom Sarkar met while visiting Italy in 1935–6. However, apart from these casual statements there is no serious reflection on war as such. Sarkar is far more interested in the role that charismatic individuals could play in bringing about 'creative disequilibrium'. He speaks of 'world conquerors' or avatars that carry ideologies from one people to another. Only such exemplary individuals, he feels, bend the forces of history to their will and become active agents of historical disequilibrium rather than its passive victims. Such individuals serve as counterbalancing forces to the non-rational forces that the impersonal agents of *vishwa-shakti* sometimes release (see fn. 10).

Sarkar is conscious of the tension between the rational and the irrational in his writing of history, and between legitimate ideology and pragmatic self-interest in the domain of politics. Even though he calls himself an ideological dualist, it is not through the logic of argument that this tension is articulated in his writing. Rather it is represented anthropomorphically through the figure of the exemplary individual. Thus, not only are images of civilisational expansiveness made accessible through figures like the Buddha, Chaitanya, Christ, and Vivekananda, but so also are the contradictions between ideologies and cultural practices. Sarkar gives them human form and thereby allows for the naturalisation of the tension between contradictory historical forces.

Sarkar applies this formula to all his work. Thus, the disequilibrating effects of war are presented in terms of examples like 'the flight of domestic servants' from Calcutta, giving war a human and very mundane face. We see the same process at work in his discussion of

arguing against are clearly stated; rather, the reader is left to infer them from details in the texts themselves. Thus, the immediate context of this curious statement could well have been a response to Gandhi's message of self-help and moral improvement. Sarkar was ambivalent about Gandhi's moral philosophy though he admired his qualities of leadership. He says that Gandhi was a master politician in the mould of Kautilya and Machiavelli (see Sarkar 1939).

religion and politics. Gods and goddesses of Pauranic Hinduism are considered by Sarkar mere projections of pragmatic human concerns and the day-to-day morality of the folk. Politics is the interests of the state anthropomorphised into the image of the nation state. This is clearly articulated in Sarkar's responses to events during the Second World War, such as the moral effect of Churchill's speeches on the English people when they were threatened with the possibility of defeat. He says Churchill's charisma conquered 'British defeatism' and calls him an 'embodiment of Upanishadic idealism and the Gita cult of duty for duty's sake . . .' (Sarkar: 1942: 299). He argues that: 'For Young England today Churchill is what Hitler was to Young Germany in 1918–33 and continues [in 1942] to be—the *avatar* of patriotism and the *avatar* of mysticism' (ibid.: 300).

In spite of his almost obsessive concern with nationalism, Sarkar was an agnostic when it came to the field of political ideology. Whilst, in principle, he did want India to take the form of a democratic state, he took a relativist position *vis-à-vis* the existing kinds of political regimes. Thus, he was quite willing to consider the possibility that non-democratic state formations were legitimate in particular historical situations such as those of war. In the second volume of *Political philosophies since 1905* (1942) Sarkar says that ideals such as 'de-imperialisation' and 'de-colonisation' have the same significance for people living through the two world wars as democracy and socialism had before, that is before the world wars. They 'furnish the *élan de la vie* to millions of repressed humanity' (Sarkar 1942: 282). But such ideals are only vehicles for 'inspired fanatics' who are able to reshape historical destiny by the force of their will.¹²

For Sarkar, all political movements have a similar telos—they swing between the two poles of democracy and 'despotocracy'. In spite of the creative disequilibrium that he saw in world history, political movements had a stable form which he designated 'demo-despotocracy'. 'It is because of the eternal presence of despotocracy in the human Gestalt that I consider demo-despotocracy to be the

¹² Sarkar attributes the phrase 'inspired fanatic' to Vivekananda (see Mukhopadhyaya 1944: 45).

normal, natural, fundamental and universal reality . . .' (Sarkar 1942: 301). He goes on to say that, just as the dictatorial regimes in Germany and Italy are based on popular will, so also is 'Churchillian democracy' a despotocracy constitutionally legitimised by the wartime government in Britain. Thus, both democracy and dictatorship are responses to specific historical situations.

Specialists on Sarkar's work like Bhattacharyya (1990) and Flora (1994) tend to link this aspect of his work to Pareto's sociology. Sarkar himself comments on Pareto's idea of 'the circulation of elites' in *The positive background of Hindu sociology* (1937), but finds it too constraining as a philosophy of history. Also, he does not seem to share Pareto's cynicism regarding oligarchic tendencies within the politics of the masses. For Sarkar, the democratic impulse is also a powerful force in world history. Sarkar's admiration for the 'inspired fanatic', his desire for rapid social change in India as well as his laudatory writings on the wartime regimes in Italy and Germany, have led some Indian scholars to label him a closet fascist (see Bhattacharyya 1990). Sarkar's political ideas were formulated in a period when India was going through political and social upheaval. He was able to observe at first hand a wide range of political formations and perhaps for that reason he took a relativist position *vis-à-vis* all of them. After all, as a citizen of a subjugated nation he was aware of the contradictions inherent in democracy that allowed nation states to sustain democratic structures within their own territorial boundaries while at the same time colonising other nations. Even though Sarkar visited Italy and Germany several times between the two world wars and had close contact with scholars who were associated with the dictatorial regimes of those countries, he had no sympathy with the racial and eugenicist theories that were being propagated there. In fact, he was quite critical of Haushofer's attempt to analyse population in terms of concepts such as 'race destiny' and so on (see Sarkar 1936).¹³ He said that racial 'miscegenation' was necessary for cultural dynamism and it was pragmatic self-interest rather than

¹³ It is important to remember that Sarkar's critical reflections were made in a public forum—that is, in his presidential address to the first Indian Population Conference.

‘strength of soul’ that led to cultural expansion. He did not believe that political boundaries ever coincided with racial or cultural boundaries and was outspoken in his condemnation of those who sought to represent Hinduism as a unique religion. He said there was ‘no truth’ in Hinduism that was also not found in other religions (Sarkar 1936, 1937, 1939).

The novelty of Sarkar’s perspective can best be understood by comparing his ideas with those of his associate Radha Kumud Mukherji (1989), the nationalist historian and fellow member of the Dawn Society. For Mukherji, India’s territorial boundary coincides with her cultural unity. To me it seems that this aspect of Sarkar’s work is best understood in terms of the sociology of von Wiese and his perspective on *lebensphilosophie*. The idea that the form of social life could be understood as a structure of generality, distinct from its particular spatio-temporal manifestations, as well as the emphasis on individuality which found a place in the structure of generality both as a value and as an embodiment of a certain kind of relationship, were attractive to Sarkar. Like von Wiese, he felt that sociology had to account for the fact that individuals were both contained by forms of sociation but could also confront them; they were both within society as well as outside it. Gumplowicz and Ratzenhofer are significant influences on his thought. Yet, even here, I do not think Sarkar believed in the concept of a homogeneous ‘folk state’. He did not think that the process of assimilation between different groups was ever complete. All nation states had plural cultures and it was the friction generated between them that contributed to a state of creative disequilibrium.

IV. SARKAR’S SIGNATURE ON INDIAN SOCIOLOGY

I began this essay by saying that B.K. Sarkar’s sociology was at best a footnote in the history of Indian sociology. It is now time to review that statement. Sarkar’s sociology was shaped by his nationalism, more specifically by his membership of the Dawn Society and by his participation in the Swadeshi movement. The term ‘sociology’ was used by intellectuals associated with the movement to discuss issues

of Indian independence and self-government, especially within a comparative historical perspective. The curriculum of the Dawn Society and its successor, the National College of Education, saw history both in terms of specific socio-political events as well as intellectual currents that configured trajectories of human intentionality. To this end they felt it important to turn to the study of Indian philosophy and to traditional social formations, but also to Western philosophy and history.

Sarkar was introduced to these ideas through the Dawn Society which, under the auspices of Satish Chandra Mukherjee, organised classes on subjects as diverse as the Bhagvat Gita, the Indian village tradition of swaraj, the philosophy of Kant and Hegel, and so on. Sarkar thought that an exposure to the intellectual heritage of the West was crucial in the shaping of the consciousness of Bengali youth. To this end he devoted a considerable portion of his career to the translation and review of the works of modern European social scientists, thereby making their ideas available to a Bengali public. This is probably his greatest contribution to the development of sociology in Bengal. He also tried to give concrete form to the idea of historical comparison by isolating socio-economic and political factors that could be quantified, and established an objective standard by which the development of various Asian and European societies could be measured (Sarkar 1936). His concern for social reform led him to foreground 'applied sociology', which included concerns such as poverty alleviation, public health, criminology, and the sociology of population. These concerns, according to Flora (1994), are still reflected in the way that sociology is taught in Calcutta University, and perhaps it is in Bengal that Sarkar's work still has a living presence. However, his concern with India's modernity and the use of the comparative method in this regard is possibly what gives a distinctive formulation to Indian sociology as it is shared by sociologists across generations, whether they belong to the 'Calcutta School' or come from other sociological traditions—the one established by M.N. Srinivas in Baroda and then in Delhi, for instance (see Chatterji 2000; Shah 2000).

What relevance does Sarkar's sociology have for us today? Sociologists like von Wiese, Gumplowicz, and Ratzenhofer, who were a

major influence on Sarkar, are no longer taught in sociology departments today even though they once exercised a considerable influence when the discipline of sociology was still demarcating its boundaries. Thus Albion Small, who helped found the Chicago School of Sociology, was deeply influenced by Ratzenhofer and Gumpłowicz. Distinctions between sociology, social and political philosophy, and social reform were not as clearly drawn as they are now. The increasing professionalisation of the discipline has led to an emphasis on autonomous methodological tools like intensive fieldwork and survey techniques, as well as theoretical models that prefer to seek explanations for social phenomena from within the realm of social life itself rather than from the psychological or Indological. In the light of this it is evident that Sarkar's work cannot contribute to our understanding of mainstream Indian sociology.

However, if we think of the history of sociology and the way that it is taught in various universities across India, we see that each department still carries traces of the way in which sociology was initially conceived by its founders. This may be through an interface either with political philosophy (and the department in Calcutta University still has teachers who have double roles as political scientists and sociologists),¹⁴ or with social anthropology, as we see in the department that Srinivas set up in Delhi University. It is in this context that Sarkar becomes important. He wrote at a time when the field was still fluid. However, Indian sociology is not a homogeneous subject. It has many different streams that can best be understood through the diverse pedagogic traditions institutionalised in the many sociology departments established across the country. Sarkar's is an important part not only in the history of Indian sociology but also of the way that India herself is conceived by Indian sociology. By rooting themselves in sociology, Indian scholars writing in British India could stake a claim for India's modernity. They used sociology to oppose orientalist representations of India that were put forward by Indologists. It is this legacy—that is, a concern with

¹⁴ Bolanath Bandyopadhyay, who wrote a dissertation on Sarkar as a student of the political science department, is now on the faculty of the sociology department (see Bandyopadhyay 1984).

India's present rather than her past—that all sociologists of India, whatever their methodological differences, share.

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Recasting the Oraons and the 'Tribe'

Sarat Chandra Roy's Anthropology*

SANGEETA DASGUPTA

A FEW MONTHS BEFORE HIS DEATH, SARAT CHANDRA ROY (November 1871–April 1942) confessed to his student Nirmal Kumar Bose that, if given the chance, he would rework his earlier ethnographic accounts of the 'tribes' of Chotanagpur, concentrate on village units and local nuances, and thereby give a new orientation to his study of tribal culture (Anonymous 1971: 266).¹ Unfortunately, Roy's wishes remained unfulfilled. This essay focuses on the transformations in Roy's writings on the Oraons between 1915 and 1938 in an attempt to recover the rudiments of what might have been a possible

*Gautam Bhadra introduced me to the records at the *Man in India* Office, Ranchi; the late Meera Roy gave me the rare opportunity of consulting the private papers of her father, Sarat Chandra Roy; Subrata Ray took considerable effort in organising reprints of the photographs of his grandfather. For comments on this essay, I thank Neeladri Bhattacharya, Gautam Bhadra, Nandini Sundar, Sheena Panja, and Padmanabh Samarendra. This essay draws substantially on Dasgupta (2004), originally published in the *Indian economic and social history overview* (editor Sunil Kumar), vol. 41, no. 2. Used by permission of the copyright holders and publishers, Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi.

¹ Meera Roy told me that Bose was the author of this article and corroborated his statement.



Fig. 4: Portrait of Sarat Chandra Roy taken by his eldest son, the late Dinesh Chandra Roy, after Roy was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind medal in 1913. (*Photograph courtesy Subrata Ray*)

trajectory of Roy's anthropology. It seeks, first, to examine shifts in the image of the 'tribe' in Roy's work across a period of time; and second, to show how an academic anthropologist gradually came to adopt the stance of an activist anthropologist.

Although Roy wrote on several of the tribal communities of Chotanagpur, his work on the Oraons was both extensive and foundational. As Sir Arthur Keith put it in a letter to Roy: 'I doubt if any one has ever done so much for the Anthropology of a people as you have done for the Oraon.'² Roy's role as an anthropologist was indeed pivotal in the construction of the 'tribe' in Chotanagpur. Missionaries, administrators, and anthropologists, in India and abroad, often acquainted themselves with Chotanagpur through Roy's eyes. Verrier Elwin wrote of Roy: 'The home of the beautiful Chota Nagpur plateau is the home of the great Oraon tribe, the Mundas, the Hos, some Santals, the Kharias, and a number of smaller tribes, including the very ancient Asur iron-smelters. These people have been made known to the world by the works of Bodding and of Sarat Chandra Roy, their champion, friend and biographer' (Elwin 1943: 6). Most of the objects that represented Chotanagpur and the Oraons at the British Museum, London, and at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, were collected by Roy; the photographic collection on the Oraons at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, was almost entirely his contribution.³ He also organised the collection of anthropological artifacts in Indian museums, and donated a major part of his own ethnographic and archaeological collections to the Museum of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society.

Administrative authorities turned to Roy for guidance and mediation in situations of what Roy refers to as 'unnecessary panic' caused by 'ignorance'.⁴ Legislative and judicial opinion often cited his texts,

² Roy published letters such as this, sent to him by scholars across the world, reviews of his books, opinions on his publications, etc. in *Man in India*. Sir Arthur Keith's assessment of *Oraon religion and customs*, along with the opinions of Col. T.C. Hodson and R.R. Marett, was published under the title 'Some opinions' in *Man in India* (1929, vol. 9, 2 and 3: i-iv).

³ Refer to the Merlin British Museum Collections Database at the British Museum, London; the Catalogue of the Objects collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford; and the Photograph Collections Catalogue at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. I thank the Nehru Trust for the Indian Collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and particularly Dr Deborah Swallow, for giving me the opportunity of viewing many of these collections in England.

⁴ Roy refers to two such interesting incidents: one was at a meeting place of

and even today these texts are seminal in the judicial construction of tribal custom.⁵ For example, in the historic case between N.E. Horo vs. Smt. Jahan Ara Jaipal Singh (reported in *The All India Reporter*, 1972), which rested on the question of whether a non-tribal woman married to a tribal could contest elections in a reserved seat, Roy was quoted as an authority on Munda customs. S.C. Roy's observations in *The Mundas and their country*, together with other evidence on record, had convinced the Supreme Court that 'once the marriage of a Munda male with a non-Munda female is approved or sanctioned by the Parha Panchayat they become members of the community' (Roy 1995 [1912]: lxiv). Anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and activists continue to draw upon Roy's constructs, whether, as K.S. Singh notes, 'in order to create a new sense of history to legitimise the tribal's search for identity', or because Roy's 'ideas and draftsman-ship' had 'left their imprint on the memoranda submitted by tribal organizations before different government bodies' (Singh 1982: 1–2). Unpacking Roy's descriptions of tribal tradition as a product of his time, which he constructed and reworked in response to new

a Munda Parha Council held some forty miles away from Ranchi in 1921 during the Non-Cooperation Movement; the other was before the annual *yatra* fair or the 'inter-tribal dancing-meets', when the Sub-Divisional Magistrate had expected trouble on the issue of the 'emblem' that was to appear on the flag to be carried to this meet (see Roy 1966 [1938b]: 27–30).

⁵ See the judgment in *Manu Uraon vs. Abraham Uraon*, *The All India Reporter*, Patna Section 1941: 46–7. Reference to this case also appears in the Archer Papers, 'Tribal Justice', European Manuscripts (MSS Eur F 236/51), Oriental and India Office Collections, London. For a reference to the use of his book, *The Mundas and their country*, for understanding 'the customary rules of succession and inheritance amongst the aboriginal tribes', see letter no. 2093-A., dated Ranchi, 27 March 1913, from the Hon'ble Mr H. McPherson, Secretary to the Government, Bihar and Orissa, Appointment Department, to the Secretary of the Government of India, Home Department, in Selections from the Ranchi Settlement Papers, G.P. (D.L.R.) nos 112–60-19.11.1927, unpublished, pp. 71–2. Even as late as 1971 and 1972, Roy's text was used in the cases between Bhaiya Ram Munda vs Anurudh Patar (*The All India Reporter*, 1971) and N.E. Horo vs Smt. Jahan Ara Jaipal Singh (*The All India Reporter*, 1972). Refer to Appendix V, 'The Legalistic Aspect of "The Mundas and their Country"', in Roy (1995 [1912]: lxiii–lxiv).

theoretical and political developments, will serve as a caution against uncritical adoption of his writings in varying contexts.

In his time, Roy occupied a unique space. Late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century anthropology had defined itself unambiguously as the study of primitive societies. As a discipline that was created 'by Europeans, for a European audience' in order to study 'non-European societies dominated by European power' (Asad 1973: 14–15), most of its practitioners in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries belonged to the West. Roy was an exception. A self-taught man with no formal training in the discipline, he took up anthropology as a hobby and yet sought to achieve the standards of a professional. He began to write at a time when the discipline of anthropology was in a stage of infancy even in Britain (Kuklick 1999: 6–8). The first departments of sociology and anthropology in India had not been set up,⁶ and 'anthropologist-administrators' like Archer, Hutton, and Mills and 'professional anthropologists' like Bose, Chattopadhyay, Majumdar, Karve, and Ghurye had not emerged on the anthropological scene.⁷ Roy was therefore 'one of the pioneers of anthropological studies in India'; he was hailed as the 'Father of Indian ethnology' by Hutton (Anonymous 1942: iii). Among his colonial friends, he was the 'native' who had acquired their respect and recognition, whose version was accepted as authentic and authoritative, and whose accounts matched Western standards. Yet towards the end of his life, Roy advocated 'a study of anthropology from the Indian view-point' (Roy 1937, reprinted 1986) as he drew upon, reviewed, and discarded anthropological models and tried to arrive at what he conceived to be a partnership between Western and indigenous writings. Roy, then, was located at the interstices of several cultures. His voice changed over time as he sought to capture the cultural heritage of the marginal societies that he had studied by sympathetically recording what would otherwise have been lost.

Section I introduces Roy as an anthropologist and locates some of his concerns as he embarked on the task of recording the histories

⁶ The first departments of sociology and anthropology were set up in Bombay in 1919 and in Calcutta in 1920 (see Sundar 1997: 158).

⁷ For these terms see *ibid.*

of the peoples of Chotanagpur; Section II discusses his first monograph on the Oraons, published in 1915; Section III analyses the shifts in perspective as he wrote his second text on the Oraons in 1928; Section IV analyses Roy's writings in the late 1930s when he was nearing the end of his anthropological career.

I. INTRODUCING ROY

In India, we have vast fields for historical research as yet lying unexplored or but partially explored. The early history of the so-called Kolarian aborigines of India is one of those obscure tracts that have hardly yet been rescued from the darkness of oblivion. A thick curtain of mystery hangs over the antiquities of . . . prehistoric tribes. . . . Of their real origin and their primitive abode, we are in utter darkness; of their successive migrations in ancient times through different parts of India we have no written records to enlighten us, and of the various vicissitudes of fortune they underwent in the dim dark ages of antiquity our present knowledge is next to nothing. And yet these are the peoples whose remote ancestors were once masters of Indian soil, whose joys and sorrows, once made up the history of the Indian peninsula. . . .

. . . With the lapse of time and the progress of civilization amongst these tribes, they appear every day to have been paying less and less heed to the traditions handed down by their ancestors. And thus it has come to pass that at the present moment a few stray old persons here and there remain the sole custodians of these heirlooms of their past. And the time may not be far off when this valuable traditional lore, now in a rapid course of detrition and decay, may be lost to posterity beyond all chance of recovery.

. . . It is high time, then, that antiquarian investigators should turn their attention to the quasi-historical traditions of these interesting tribes . . . to trace back their early history so far as is still possible . . . (Roy 1995 [1912]: 1–2)

Roy's perspective represents the classic model of 'salvage ethnography' (see Clifford 1986: 112–13), involving the task of recovery. By rescuing 'tribal' tradition from the inexorable logic of history threatening its collapse and disappearance, Roy would restore 'aboriginals' to their

rightful position amongst the peoples of India. Anthropology would capture their 'unadulterated' identity, trace the link between their present and past, and transport readers to a place and space where such 'tribals' had been truly authentic, truly untouched. 'When we think of the rich harvest of anthropological material waiting to be gathered all over India and, here and there, decaying unseen and uncared for', he wrote, 'we can by no means regard with complaisance the comparatively meagre additions made to our store of anthropological knowledge' (Roy 1930: 307). Anthropology also had its personal rewards: he appealed 'to all Indian students who feel attracted to this fascinating branch of study' to make collections of 'interesting anthropological material . . . fast slipping away as the days pass by', assuring them, on the basis of his 'own humble experience', that such a study 'will bring with it in the shape, at any rate, of personal satisfaction and delight, an adequate reward for the time spent and the trouble taken' (Roy 1921a: 54).⁸

Roy's anthropology, however, had a larger intellectual purpose. The central concern of the discipline, he argued, was 'to understand Man—his origin, natural history, his unique adventure in the inner and outer courts of life, and the goal and meaning of human life and human society' (Roy 1937: 243). He identified the tribe as a distinct cultural type that had retained the customs and beliefs which characterised mankind in earliest times: 'The reason why students of Anthropology now pay greater attention to the investigation of Primitive Society is that the social life of primitive tribes is a most fruitful field for anthropological research, for primitive society exhibits the ground-plan on which the more complex structure that we call civilization has been built up' (*ibid.*: 249). Anthropology would locate the past in the present, in the backward, non-progressive, and inert 'other'. The idea of comparison, a faith in the universality of human culture and society, structured Roy's understanding. The intended aim of social anthropology, then, was academic; it was sustained by forces internal to the discipline that sought to evolve specialised tools

⁸ This was an elaboration of Roy's presidential address to the section of anthropology and ethnography of the Indian Science Congress at its eighth annual meeting held at Calcutta from 31 January to 5 February 1921.

of analysis in order to understand social institutions such as the family, state, and religion.

Indeed, for Roy, anthropology was 'the scientific study of mankind' (Roy 1966 [1938b]: 21); it was an objective discipline, a search for the truth. As Elwin wrote in his obituary of Roy in *Man in India*:

Roy's affection for his people was scientific, not sentimental. It was his reasoned love for them that made him intolerant of slovenly and inaccurate writing: love drove him to 'scorn delights and live laborious days' in the Service of Truth that was also the service of his people. . . . For Roy, then, the discipline of anthropology was a pilgrimage towards the *sainte realite*, the country of entire and perfect truth. It aimed at illuminating the whole kingdom of humanity, its obscure past, its sad and doubtful present, the certain triumph (in which he trusted) of its future. Anthropology was the search for Beauty, expressed in terms of Truth. (Elwin 1942: 195–6)

Sir James Frazer wrote to Roy, in appreciation of his contribution to the science: 'I could envy India your possession, for good anthropologists are too rare anywhere; but I am satisfied that for the advancement of our science you are far better situated in India than you would be in Europe, seeing that India includes such an immense diversity of races and of cultures, from low savagery up to high civilization.'⁹ Roy's purpose in founding the journal *Man in India* in 1922 was academic: 'to assist anthropological study and research in India, and to serve as an useful medium for the collection of interesting anthropological information regarding Indian Man' (Roy 1921a: 11). He introduced in the journal a special 'Student's section . . . intended for the benefit of beginners in the study of Anthropology.'¹⁰ Following the 'lines of scientific enquiry . . . suggestions

⁹ Frazer's comment is quoted on the back-covers of certain editions of *Man in India* as part of 'Some opinions' on Sarat Chandra Roy's *Principles and methods on physical anthropology* (Patna University Readership Lectures), Ranchi, 1921.

¹⁰ A representative article was 'Types of cultural theory' (Roy 1921b: 239–61), adapted from a lecture delivered by him to students of Patna University. Roy wrote: 'In a series of articles of which this is the first, it is proposed to present

from Western experts' would also be published 'from time to time . . . in the journal' (Roy 1921a: 11). While Roy believed that the method of enquiry should be drawn from the West, he advocated a common global endeavour among anthropologists towards the development of the discipline: 'A systematic and classified collection and careful recording of different classes of folk-lore material, district by district, *taluk* by *taluk*, and *thana* area by *thana* area, or *pargana* area and *pargana* area, as is being done for the county areas in England, and for other local areas in other parts of Europe and in America, is the first and most imperative task that awaits students of Indian folk-lore' (Roy 1930: 311).

From its outset, British anthropology had sought to present itself as a science,¹¹ one that would prove useful for colonial administration. While the prospect of financial support, particularly in the decades before the discipline was accorded recognition by universities, must have been a consideration, 'in the heyday of imperial enthusiasm, the thought of its possible utility must have sustained some of those who pursued this esoteric and marginal study in Britain' (Kuper 1973: 123). Societies like the Ethnological Society of London, the Folklore Society, the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Royal Anthropological Society argued for the practical uses of their subject as a means of getting recognition from the British public and government. Roy appealed to similar considerations: 'It is a matter for regret that, although the scientific value of anthropological research is now generally recognized in official circles, its practical value in the promotion of human welfare has hardly yet received recognition in India' (Roy 1966 [1938b]: 21).

the student with a general elementary view of Cultural Anthropology, the method it follows, and the results it has hitherto achieved' (Roy 1921b: 240–1).

¹¹ Though colonial science, itself an evolving discipline, remained distinct from the practice of science in the continent, there was an emerging consensus on what scientific method entailed. The mission of science implied a critical, 'judging' epistemology: dominated by the model of natural history, science sought to reach behind, and classify, everyday phenomena by comparing specimens of species, languages, or forms of civilisation, and establishing their basic units and the relations between them. See Pels (1999: 87–8).

Like his colleagues in Britain, with whom he was in touch, he appealed to the colonial state to encourage the study of 'Anthropology in Indian universities . . . by recognizing efficiency in Anthropology as a special qualification for suitable judicial and administrative appointments' (Roy 1930: 304): 'It is high time . . . that our Provincial Governments as well as the Imperial Government should, for the improvement of the quality of administrative and judicial work, prefer candidates having anthropological training, in judicial, executive and other departments of Government, such as Forest and Excise, in aboriginal areas, and that officers lacking such knowledge should, at any rate, be required to undergo a course of training in Anthropology' (Roy 1966 [1938b]: 30).

Yet, even as Roy was critical of the lack of official patronage to the discipline, he was appreciative of the contributions of colonial ethnographers and 'proto-anthropologists' towards the genesis of anthropology as a discipline in India.¹² 'It is to the Asiatic Society of Bengal', Roy wrote, 'that we owe the beginnings of anthropological investigation in this country' (Roy 1921a: 12). 'Almost the whole of the present anthropological literature relating to India', he pointed out, was 'the result of the labours of European investigators—mostly hardworked officers of government and Christian Missionaries, and to them India shall ever owe a heavy debt of gratitude for this invaluable pioneer work' (ibid.: 48). Roy's anthropology was intimately engaged with official ethnography and yet distinct from it. He depended upon, and interpreted, the writings of colonial officials; at the same time, these writings, particularly in the context of Chotanagpur, were often informed and structured by his ethnography. For example, in his foreword to Roy's first volume on the Oraons, Haddon acknowledged that Roy had 'placed ethnologists further in his debt' and emphasised the 'great importance' of such studies 'for administrative purposes' (Haddon 1984 [1915]: 1–7). Roy, in turn, acknowledged that it was Gait, the Census Commissioner of 1911, who was responsible for his 'initiation into the study of anthropology as a science' (Roy 1984 [1915]: v–vi). It was due to Gait's initiative that Roy was awarded the

¹² For a history of the relationship between administrative needs, such as the census, gazetteers, etc., and anthropology, see Cohn (1990b).

Kaiser-i-Hind medal in 1913 and given a grant to undertake his study of the Oraons; in 1919 he was given the title Rai Bahadur. Statistics and observations from reports, survey and settlement records, Dalton's writings, and Risley's anthropometric indices were seen by Roy as incontestable products of careful and objective analysis, and therefore duly used in his initial descriptions of the Oraons.

For all his interest in studying the tribes of Chotanagpur, Roy was not an anthropologist by profession. A graduate in English in 1892 from the General Assembly Institute (later renamed Scottish Church College), a postgraduate in 1893 from the same institution, and a graduate of law in 1897 from Ripon College, Calcutta, Roy's interests, when he joined the bar at the Alipore District Court of the 24 Parganas, Calcutta, were far removed from anthropology. In 1898 he left for Ranchi to take up a job as an English teacher at the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Missionary school.¹³ Roy's arrival in Ranchi was an accident which changed the course of Indian anthropology, for it was here that Roy spent the next forty-four years of his life.

He was struck by the contrast that Chotanagpur presented to the rest of the province of Bengal, of which it was then a part: here was a land of colour and scenic beauty; he had the deepest sympathies for its inhabitants, who were so markedly different from the other peoples of Bengal:

Remarkably refreshing is the contrast its blue hills and rugged ravines, green *sal* jungles and terraced fields of yellow paddy, limpid hill-streams rushing down their narrow beds of rock and sand, and picturesque waterfalls leaping over abrupt precipices, present to the monotonous stretch upon stretch of Bengal plains. . . . If the difference in external features between the Chota-Nagpur plateaux and the rest of the Province is thus great, the difference in the races and tribes that people the two tracts, their languages, their manners, their religions, their social customs and political history . . . is, if possible, still greater. (Roy 1995 [1912]: 223)

¹³ For a detailed bibliographical sketch of Roy, refer to Ray (1996: 3–8, 41). This rare biographical essay on Roy has been written by Roy's grandson, who is himself a student of anthropology. He refers to family history and draws upon childhood memories of his grandfather.

As Roy moved from teaching to legal practice, became an advocate in the bar of the Judicial Commissioner's Court, and later assumed the post of official interpreter in government litigation, he acquired prodigious knowledge of the traditions and customs of the peoples of Chotanagpur (Ray 1996: 4). Moved by the hardships they faced at the hands of apathetic administrative and judicial authorities, Roy decided to learn their language and 'study' them assiduously.¹⁴ As he familiarised himself with their customs and society, visited their poverty-ridden homes and dealt with them in court, he made copious notes, some of which can still be found in his private papers at the *Man in India* office at Ranchi. But for his field notes to be converted into texts, Roy required tools for analysis. He found *Ancient society* by Morgan in the shelves of the mission library. Thereafter, other books from Europe arrived, helping Roy to write his monographs and articles with remarkable rapidity and 'with a lawyer's keenness for details' (Madan 1952: 48): *The Mundas and their country* was published in 1912; *The Oraons of Chota Nagpur* in 1915; *The Birhors* in 1925; *Oraon religion and customs* in 1928; *The Hill Bhuinyas of Orissa* in 1935; *The Kharias*, in two volumes, in 1937. Interspersed with these were several articles (over a hundred in English and seventeen in Bengali).¹⁵ These appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society*, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, *Calcutta review*, *Modern review*, *Prabashi*, *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, and of course *Man in India*, of which he was the founder-editor. Besides his research in social anthropology Roy was interested in 'Prehistoric Archaeology', or what he termed 'Prehistoric Anthropology'. As he looked at what were locally referred to as 'Asur' sites in Chotanagpur, Roy believed that 'a systematic search for and a regular stratigraphical study of the skeletal and industrial remains

¹⁴ Roy wrote: 'Any one having had occasion to watch at close quarters the administration of justice in certain aboriginal areas of India will be struck by the amount of injustice done, in spite of the best intentions, by judges and magistrates and police officers of all grades, owing to their ignorance of the customs and mentality of the aboriginal tribes they have to deal with.' See Roy (1966[1938b]: 27).

¹⁵ For bibliographical references on Roy, refer to Anonymous (1968: 217–25); Archer (1942: 261–2); Sarkar (1972: 354–8).

of prehistoric man in India may yield most important results towards the elucidation of the Prehistory of man, from the Late and Early Iron Ages through the Copper Age and New Stone Age back to the Palaeolithic and perhaps pre-Palaeolithic times' (Roy 1921a: 45).

Apart from the infinite love that Roy received from the poor 'aboriginals' whose cause he championed, recognition came from various corners. In 1915 he became a Corresponding Member of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, and thereafter regularly published in their journal; in 1920 he was elected an Honorary Fellow at the Folklore Society of London, the only Indian to have received this honour (Ray 1996: 6). In the same year he was elected President of the Anthropological Section of the Indian Science Congress and in both 1932 and 1933 he was elected President of the Section of Anthropology and Folklore at the All India Oriental Conference. Roy was also elected member of the Council d'Honneur of the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences; he was a Foundation Fellow of the National Institute of Sciences in India, as also of Patna University. He was the first to deliver a course of lectures on anthropology in an Indian university (the Readership Lectures at Patna University under the subject heading of Principles and Methods of Physical Anthropology), and he helped the introduction of anthropology as a discipline in several Indian universities.¹⁶

Roy's long and varied career witnessed the rise of Victorian evolutionism, then diffusionism, and the eventual displacement of these by functionalism; at different points in time he applied all these concepts to the Indian context. At the same time, as a professed Hindu and nationalist Indian, particularly in the later phases of his career, Roy sought to methodologically establish an 'Indian view-point' for anthropology, believing that anthropology would help in the integration of national life (Roy 1937: 254).¹⁷ The advancement of

¹⁶ For biographical sketches of Roy, refer to Anonymous (1942: i-v); Madan (1952: 48-51); Bose (1966: i-iv); Anonymous (1971: 263-6); Sarkar (1972: 354-8); Ray (1996: 3-8, 41).

¹⁷ In the context of tracing the sociology of Indian sociology, Ramkrishna Mukherjee writes: 'Most of the pioneers were ardent nationalists, but only a few of them were actively involved in politics. Also, even those who were engaged

anthropology was not just a vocation for him; Roy was almost like a visionary with a mission who, as he sought to understand the subjects of his concern, experimented with different models and discarded these when he failed to reach conclusions that satisfied him. At a personal level, his life reflected the contradictions of an enlightened Indian under colonial rule—he was a friend of administrators and missionaries, and yet often their harshest critic. And even as Roy extensively quoted the works of anthropologists, missionaries, and administrators, he referred to and upheld in his writings the authenticity of the ancient Sanskrit literature of the Vedas, the Samhitas, the Smritis, the epics, and the Puranas.

II. AN 'OBJECTIVE' ANTHROPOLOGIST

Armed with a medley of anthropological concepts, rather than any one theory, Roy embarked on his project of writing on the Oraons of Chotanagpur. His desire to present a 'complete picture' of tribal culture was influenced by Tylor's definition of culture and civilisation as a 'complex whole' that included 'knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'.¹⁸ His study belonged to the realm of 'Cultural Anthropology', attempting 'the no less intricate task of retracing, so far as possible, the probable course followed in the evolution of the mental life of man—of his mental achievement or culture from its earliest inferable beginnings', seeking 'to understand, so far as is possible, the forces or factors either in the physical or mental constitution of man or in his physical or social environment that may have guided or influenced the course of that evolution' (Roy 1921b: 241). Hence, Roy's first monograph on the Oraons, *The Oraons of Chota Nagpur* (1915), dealt with the origin and early history of the Oraons, their geographical and social environment, their physical characteristics and personal adornment, their village organisation, their economic life and social organisation. He had by then conceived his second

in active politics were not dogmatists or doctrinaires in so far as their academic life was concerned' (Mukherjee 1979: 29).

¹⁸ Roy refers in several of his writings to E.B. Tylor's monograph *Primitive culture* (1871). See, for example, Roy (1921b: 241).

monograph on the Oraons, *Oraon religion and customs* (1928), 'an account of the religious and magico-religious system, the domestic ceremonies and usages and the language and folklore of the Oraons so as to complete our picture of the tribe' (Roy 1984 [1915]: v).

For Roy, Victorian anthropologists were the pioneers in the field. In the 'ethnological notes' found among his private papers are references to *Ancient society* by Morgan, *Totemism and exogamy* by Frazer, *An introduction to cultural anthropology* by Lowie, and *Primitive traditional history*, Volume I, by Hewitt. Evolutionists believed that primitive society was marked by an absence of datable documents and events. Hence, the laws of social development were to be reconstructed through the comparative method: the belief was in the historical unity of mankind and in the universal progress of man; the search was for origins; the sources of anthropological studies were accounts by travellers, missionaries, and colonial administrators who reported on natives and native customs; the constituents of the discipline were physical anthropology, archaeology, comparative philology, ethnography, and ethnology, though the importance accorded to any one of these varied over time (see Urry 1984: 84). In 1921, at a time when he had already discarded many of their tenets, Roy summed up the position of the evolutionist school:

An earlier generation of ethnologists, such as Bachofen, Tylor, Lubbock, Morgan, Bastian, Waitz and others were impressed with the astonishing similarity of cultural features among different human groups separated by oceans and continents, as also with the occurrence of apparently meaningless customs and usages in civilized communities which could only be understood as 'survivals' or 'vestiges' of older customs of primitive folk in different parts of the world. With untiring zeal they set themselves to comparing, co-ordinating, classifying and systematizing all available cultural data collected from various parts of the globe by the study of existing primitive tribes, of archaeological remains and of 'survivals' and 'vestiges' of an earlier culture in modern civilization . . . the similarity of different cultural features in widely-separated areas was generally attributed . . . to the similarity of the working of the human mind in similar conditions, and in a few instances to migration from a common original home. . . . The successive stages of the cultural development of man were arranged in an evolutionary series which

represented human society as having developed through well-defined sociological types from the simple to the more complex. (Roy 1921b: 241–2)

However, when writing in 1915 Roy drew upon many of these concepts, often uncritically. For instance, in a direct application of Darwin's notion of the 'survival of the fittest', Roy says: 'Among the purely aboriginal tribes of the Plateau, the Oraons appear to occupy the first rank in intelligence and social progress as they stand foremost in numerical strength' (Roy 1984 [1915]: 8). Physical anthropology was given importance: Risley's anthropometric indices were quoted (ibid.: 52), skin, eyes, hair, and head forms analysed, and the Oraons found to be a 'short-statured, narrow headed (dolicho-cephalic) and broad-nosed (platyrrhine) people' (ibid.). In order to trace the transition of the Oraon tribe from its 'savage or hunter state' to a 'nomadic or herdsman state' to a final 'settled agricultural stage of social culture' (ibid.: 8), Roy tried to explain Oraon 'origin and migrations' with references to 'racial and linguistic affinities' (ibid.: 16–17). Discussing the connection made by philologists like Bishop Caldwell between the Oraon language, Kurukh, and the Tamulian languages of southern India,¹⁹ the Malto, Kui-Khond, and Gondi of northern India, and the Brahui of Baluchistan, he made the point that the Oraons 'appear to be both linguistically and ethnologically a Dravidian tribe'. 'Race and language appear to coincide' in the case of the Oraons, Roy wrote, 'although language in itself is no test of race' (ibid.: 17).

To corroborate philological evidence, Roy used the Oraon's 'own traditional [*sic*] legend as to the origin of the tribe coupled with the account of the Vanaras [monkeys] contained in the ancient Samskrit epic, the Ramayana' (ibid.: 18).²⁰ To the latter he attributed the status of an historical and authentic text. In one of his many references to the above, he wrote:

¹⁹ The Tamulian languages, Roy wrote, included Tamil, Malayalam, Kanarese, and Telegu, together with such minor dialects as Koragu, Tulu, Toda, and Kota (Roy 1984 [1915]: 17).

²⁰ The importance of folklore and tradition was accepted as an important constituent for debates on race in the latter half of the nineteenth century (see Urry 1984: 86).

In the long story of the genesis of man and the spirits recited by the Oraons at their periodical Dandakatta or ceremony of 'cutting the (evil) teeth', Rama is spoken of as their 'grand-father', his wife Sita as their 'grand-mother', and his monkey-general Hanuman as their 'uncle'. . . . In the Ramayana, the Vanaras are described as a dusky 'cloud-coloured' people . . . with large teeth . . . and their men and women are represented as addicted to drink . . . and as taking a great delight in singing to the sound of the *mridanga* or *mandal*. . . . All these characteristics are to be met with in the Oraons of Chota Nagpur, in common, indeed, with many other Dravidian jungle tribes . . . (ibid.: 18).

It is clear that the 'tribe', or the 'aboriginal tribe', in Roy's understanding, was an irrefutable and universal category. It therefore required no definition. With clearly marked characteristics, it was a community that was essentially pure, simple, and isolated. Its culture was 'rude' and 'primitive'. These communities possessed no written language, their industrial arts were few, and in a rudimentary stage of development; and the 'fine arts', unless their 'rude style of music and dancing be dignified by that name', were practically unknown amongst them. Custom was the only code of morality that a tribe recognised, and 'erroneous ideas' as to the causes of natural phenomena along with "superstitious" beliefs as to the nature and powers of the supernatural world' constituted their world of 'science and religion' (ibid.: 124). The Oraons, as a 'tribe', displayed these features. According to Roy, their 'low level of culture' had continued for centuries, while they led a 'semi-conscious life of a sensuous nature' (ibid.: 246). Temporal change, for Roy, was possible only on account of contact with external agencies. Contact with the Aryans had brought about for the Oraons a 'moderate lift in the ladder of civilization' (ibid.: 22): 'it was probably during their long association with the Aryan hero and their long travels in his company through the country of the more civilized Dravidians of the plains who had already taken to agriculture and evolved a much higher civilization than their own, and more particularly during their friendly visits to Ram Chandra's dominion in Northern India, that the Oraons first understood the benefits of cattle breeding and agriculture, and the use of metal implements and utensils . . .' (ibid.).

He believed that under British guidance the 'primitive tribes' of Chotanagpur would *eventually* chart their journey towards progress. Hence, for Roy the intervention of colonial masters was crucial for the future of these communities of Chotanagpur. 'Providence in His mercy, had brought the mighty British lion to introduce law and order' into the 'distracted country' of Chotanagpur (ibid.: 31). 'These younger brethren of humanity, so long lagging behind in the race of life, are being at length launched on the forward path of social, intellectual, moral and material progress' (ibid.: 248). Their 'uplift', when it came about, would be 'one of the noblest of the innumerable noble achievements of the British Government in India in the cause of humanity and civilization' (ibid.: 123). In other words, a tribal community lacked self-generating tendencies and required the aid of external agencies to give it momentum.

Significantly, in order to understand Oraon 'tribal' characteristics, Roy referred not to their material culture but to their social structure, which was seen as a survival of the past. Like the evolutionists, he searched for 'archaic and primitive elements'; the 'survival' of these was made easier, he argued, by the geographical seclusion and relative isolation of Chotanagpur. For example, Roy described the institution of *jonkh-erpa* or *dhumkuria*, translated as the 'Bachelors' Hall', as 'a very archaic form of economic, social, and religious organization', 'a genuine and unadulterated product of "primitive" Oraon culture', an institution 'which is of interest only as a survival of savagery' (ibid.: 124–5). Within the social organisation of the Oraons, Roy identified the markers of 'tribalism': Frazer's distinction between the different categories of totems (clan totems, sex totems, and individual totems) determined Roy's classification of Oraon totems, totem taboos, and totem origins. He translated *gotras* (yet another non-Oraon word) as 'totems' and observed that 'totemism' was 'the fundamental feature of their social organization in so far as kinship, marriage, and the relation of the sexes' were concerned, at least in their 'hunting and pastoral stage' (ibid.: 186). (He later reviewed his statements and admitted that in the 'changed circumstances' created by the establishment of agricultural villages and the expansion of the Oraon population, totemism was 'now a dying institution among the Oraons' [ibid.: 189]). In yet another direct application of concepts

developed in British social anthropology, Roy identified the Oraon kinship system as 'the kind termed "classificatory" by Morgan' (ibid.: 197), while Tylor's concept of 'animism' was adopted to explain Oraon religion.

For Roy, the tribe was a static social category. External influences were seen to impinge upon the Oraons, although the changes brought about were adhesions that did not effect any alteration within their essentially 'tribal identity'. Contrasting them with neighbouring communities, locating them within an interactive social environment, and focusing on the interplay of various influences, only enabled one to understand changes in Oraon customs, not dissolve their 'tribalism'.²¹ But even as Roy viewed the tribe as somehow out of tune with time, conforming to the universal parameters of 'primitive society', he believed the Oraons were a historically constituted and therefore changing community. A disjuncture had appeared, and to explain it new designations and characterisations were employed. Thus Roy used, in addition to the category 'tribes', the term 'agricultural community' to describe the Oraons. It is in this context that he detailed the land system of the Oraons, their agricultural practices, their village structure, and the organisation of their households. It is also in this context that Roy moved away from his goal of providing an objective and scientific account of the Oraons as a tribe and expressed his sympathies for an Oraon agricultural community: 'Ill-housed, ill-clad, and underfed, generally over-taxed by the landlords, frequently oppressed by the money-lender, and occasionally duped by the labour-recruiter or fleeced by the law-tout, the Oraon of Chota Nagpur has indeed had an exceptionally hard lot in life' (ibid.: 122). The inevitable conflict between a personal narrative and an impersonal piece of ethnographic writing, between experience and received theory, had begun to emerge.

²¹ The Oraons were not, Roy argues, an isolated people but were in constant interaction with the landlords of the village 'who were for the most part Hindus and occasionally Muhammadans', and with the 'low class Hindu or Hinduised castes' of the Lohars, Kumhars, Jolahas, Chicks, Baraiks, Turis, Mahalis, Ors, and Goraitis. In addition, contact was established with other 'purely aboriginal tribes' like the Mundas, Kharias, Korwars, and Asurs (Roy 1984 [1915]: 45).

III. A SHIFT IN PERCEPTION

By the 1920s British anthropologists had turned radically away from the comparative studies of the nineteenth century. With Malinowski's *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), fieldwork—the direct, first-hand observation of native peoples—became the hallmark of anthropology. Unlike older, less specialised forms of writing by missionaries, colonial officials, travellers, and journalists, Malinowski's anthropology celebrated the advent of professional, scientific ethnography. Apart from direct observation of social practices, linguistic competence gained importance, for it would render 'the verbal contour of native thought as precisely as possible' (Malinowski 1972 [1922]: 23).

While reviewing the early evolutionary theory of culture in 1921, Roy pointed to its defects:

the rigid determinism and a too absolute classification of the earlier evolutionist school which takes little account of tribal migrations and the transmission of cultural elements from one people or area to another and the intermixture of races and cultures, was . . . soon found to be incompatible with all the ascertained ethnological facts. It was discovered that similar cultural features did not everywhere spring from the same cause and that different ethnic groups have not always advanced in culture in the same uniform order . . . no hard and fast line could be always drawn between savagery and barbarism and civilization and . . . the course of cultural advance has seldom proceeded in a straight line from one dominant sociological type to another: On the other hand, it was found to exhibit, in even a greater degree than man's physical evolution, an irregular alternation of progress and retrogression, of tardy marches, temporary halts, backward slips and occasional forward leaps and sudden transformations. The evolutionary or psychological interpretation of cultural phenomena as conditioned solely and absolutely by the psychological unity of mankind came to be regarded by many anthropologists as inadequate. (Roy 1921b: 250)

Roy's second monograph on the Oraons, *Oraon religion and customs* (1928), reflected this changed anthropological milieu. The

sources referred to in his earlier writings now receded in importance; these were to be either corrected or corroborated by a scientific Roy, for whom fieldwork and participant observation, as advocated by the functionalist school, now became a fetish. This would sustain the anthropologist's claim to authority; it was in this context that he became, for the first time, critical of Risley's writings:

Inaccurate and even erroneous statements . . . are unfortunately not rare in Risley's accounts of different tribes, and indeed are inevitable in a writer whose information was in most cases not collected first-hand but was made up of varying information supplied by subordinate officers of Government and other correspondents most of whom had little interest in the enquiries, had no clear idea of what was wanted and lacked the equipment and the discernment needed to discriminate between things bearing the same or similar names but differing in essentials. (Roy 1928: 322)

In a diary titled 'Ethnological Notes', Roy outlined his now preferred method of anthropology:

(1) Direct observation of ceremonies and c [sic]. (2) Failing (1) getting it exacted [sic] by men who habitually perform it. (3) Detailed accounts from persons who habitually perform the ceremonies. (4) Failing (1)(2)(3) from correspondents who follow (1) or (2) or (3) by questionnaire forms of new accts in [sic]. (5) Recourse to old books, pictures, sculptures etc.

1. Equip yourself with a theoretical study of the subject
2. Have a clear idea of the nature of your problem—the exact point of your intended observations
3. Full and complete record of observation should be made forthwith in the field, and no point or detail however insignificant or trivial it may appear should be committed or trusted to memory
4. Photographs and free hand sketches should be taken whenever possible
5. Omit all theoretical considerations in the report
6. Make a full analysis of your data to discover (1) how much of this was the contribution of the people themselves (2) how much was borrowed

[On the margins of point (6) find mention: 'natural origin, historical origin and environmental origin.']²²

Thus, although paradoxically Roy's second work was intended to follow up his earlier volume (Roy 1928: Preface, ix), it was different from his first. While fleeting continuities may be traced between the two—for instance in the way Roy interpreted Oraon religion as 'a system of animism' and Oraon magic as a 'force of the nature of "mana"' (ibid.: 1)—his second text was replete with information 'straight from the horse's mouth'. This included personal interviews with Oraons, their observations and classifications, and verbatim representation of mantras, legends, and stories narrated during ceremonies and ritual performances. As Roy's emphasis on personal observation increased, legends and songs that found mention only in the appendix of the earlier work now became integral. Yet, even as Roy had hoped that his fieldwork in Oraon villages would help him to capture local nuances and Oraon specificities, local cultural meanings were explained by expressing them in universalistic terms. There is therefore an intermingling of 'native' and alien words in his account as indigenous terms are translated into anthropological jargon. *Dains* appear as 'witches', *sokhas* as 'sorcerers', *bhuts* as 'ghosts', *najar gujar* as the 'evil eye', *bhagats* as 'white magicians', and *matis* as 'black magicians'.

Following functionalist logic, Roy found that Oraon religion and magic served a purpose: magic served 'practical needs', while religion was meant primarily to satisfy 'a psychic need' (Roy 1928: 5). Both were part of a 'system of belief and practice, doctrine and behaviour' that were 'evolved and organized' by 'generations of Oraon society' in order to 'face the unknown supernatural world and restore confidence to the mind of the community and the individual when it is shaken by crises and dangers . . .' (ibid.: 1). The Oraon made offerings to gods and spirits through special rites and ceremonies at stated intervals, Roy argued, in order to ensure safety at the turning points of an individual's life—birth, childhood, puberty, marriage, and death—and to ensure success and prosperity at each stage of the

²² These are copied verbatim from his diary, titled 'Ethnological Notes', found among his private papers in the office of *Man in India* at Ranchi.

agricultural cycle. Such ceremonies, which emphasised relations of mutual harmony between the individual and society, helped intensify feelings of social solidarity in the village, the clan, and the tribe. An institution thus had a function, and its importance could be located in its relationship to other institutions in the same society.

Ironically, the term 'tribe' is rare in Roy's text since there was nothing essentially 'tribal' in Oraon religion. Oraons, he suggested, could be animists, semi-Hinduised, Hinduised, followers of Bhagat cults, or Christians. He discussed in this monograph, in great detail, the Tana Bhagat movement among the Oraons of Chotanagpur which had led to the emergence of 'a new religion which is a curious result of the influence of Hindu and Christian ideas on primitive Animism' (Roy 1921c: 266). This inclusion was an attempt to revise the earlier static notion of 'tribal culture' that he had outlined. 'The doctrines and practices of this new religious movement are not without their interest for the anthropologist', Roy pointed out. 'Cultural phenomena', he intended to show, were 'the resultants of more than one factor'—neither cultural contact and borrowing nor racial heritage and independent evolution alone can sufficiently explain that complex which we call the "culture" of a community . . . This movement is, to my mind, an apt illustration of the relative influences of heredity and environment in culture—of social inheritance and cultural contact' (Roy 1921c: 266).

As Clifford argues, ethnographic accounts 'simultaneously describe real cultural events and make additional, moral, ideological, and even cosmological statements' (Clifford 1986: 98). Roy's description of Oraon religion, then, displays his own religious leanings. Positive changes had taken place in Oraon religion and customs as a result of a 'contact with higher cultures', he says—in this case, the religion of the 'Hindus' (Roy 1928: 314): 'Contact with Hindu ideas, beliefs and practices in time stimulated and fructified the Oraon's original barren belief in *Dharmes* as the Supreme Spirit of Good; and from the belief thus vivified there sprouted in time the blossom of *Bhakti* or reverent faith in and loving adoration of a personal Deity' (Roy 1928: 323). The 'higher culture' that he referred to was, inevitably, the one to which he belonged. Roy, however, denied the exclusive importance of Hindu influences in the development of Oraon religion. In one of his earliest overt appreciations of tribal

culture, Roy claimed that Oraon religion had a proclivity to produce 'an indigenous and purer *Bhakti* movement' of reform and improvement: 'Ancient tribal tradition and certain tribal customs would appear to indicate', he wrote, 'that the germ of the *Bhakti* cult had been long present in the tribal soul' (Roy 1928: 323). This break in Roy's understanding, his first display of admiration for tribal custom, was to become a marked feature of his subsequent writings. The departure from his earlier position (Roy 1984 [1915]) was already discernible, though the rupture was yet to come.

It is in the context of a shift in Roy's approach towards anthropology that one needs to analyse his initial forays in 1921 into the search for an 'Indian school of anthropology' (Roy 1921a: 55). While reviewing the history of anthropological research in India, he believed that the 'Indian student' of anthropology should 'hang down his head in shame' since 'we Indians have culpably neglected to take our proper share' in the collection of anthropological data: 'Instead of taking, as we should have done, a leading part in that work, a few of us have contributed in periodicals only occasional papers of ethnological interest written mostly by way of intellectual pastime during intervals of other business. . . . And it must be confessed that hardly any systematic anthropological work by an organized band of devoted workers has yet been seriously attempted in this country. That is all the more to be regretted as but few countries present a wider field for anthropological investigation and afford promise of a richer harvest' (Roy 1921a: 11–12). As the spirit of nationalism began to surface in Roy's writings, he argued that empathy with his subjects was more important than tools of anthropology drawn purely from the West. Roy thus believed that '*Indian* man' could best be studied by 'educated *Indians*', and that their knowledge would be 'a great gain for the '*Indian* nation' (Roy 1921a: 55, emphasis mine). In other words, cultural affinity born out of an Indian identity had become a consideration for Roy: even if he was not an 'aboriginal', as an *Indian* he was still best equipped to study an *Indian* subject.

If we do not shirk the inevitable initial grind and drudgery, but diligently acquire the necessary equipment for anthropological research, patiently pursue the preliminary spade-work with the same enthusiastic devotion and perseverance that characterize students of the Science in the West,

abjure all unscientific bias and abstain from rushing into hasty conclusions and premature generalizations from inadequate and unsifted data, we may expect to find, in time, a sober well-equipped Indian School of Anthropology to which the scientific world will look for a correct interpretation of the evolution of Indian man—his racial affinities, mentality and culture. For, such a school may very well be expected to interpret these with more intimate knowledge and better insight and consequently with a greater approach to scientific accuracy than foreign investigators, however assiduous and sympathetic, can ever hope to attain. And thus, and thus alone, will Indian scholarship be enabled, in the fullness of time, to bring its own peculiar and invaluable contributions to Anthropology as it brought in the remote past to Philology, Philosophy and Metaphysics, as it has brought in our own days to Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics and as it is expected to bring in the not very distant future to other sciences as well. (Roy 1921a: 55–6)

It needs to be noted that, in Roy's perception, anthropology did not as a discipline exist in India before colonialism. 'Indian scholarship' had contributed to philology, philosophy, and metaphysics from times in the 'remote past', and to the disciplines of physics, chemistry, and mathematics in the present;²³ the 'Indian school of anthropology' was however a subject for the future.

This interpretation was to change in the 1930s.

IV. TOWARDS AN 'INDIAN' APPROACH TO ANTHROPOLOGY

By the 1930s, anthropology had been firmly established as a discipline in India. As the 'formative phase' of Indian anthropology (Sinha 1971: 2), initiated largely by British administrator-scholars and European missionaries, ended, anthropologists moved 'in the direction of the study of culture change . . . and even included peasant, urban and industrial communities within their purview' (ibid.: 6). Anthropological debates on tribes entered a new phase as 'protectionists' and 'interventionists' argued their case over social and cultural transformation and suggested methods of adjustment to be adopted by tribes

²³ C.V. Raman had already been awarded the Nobel Prize by the time Roy had written this paper.

in a changing environment. The former line of thinking was upheld by anthropologist-administrators like Archer, Hyde, Hutton, and Mills who propagated an isolation from the corrosive influences of mainstream India; professional anthropologists like Bose, Chattopadhyay, Majumdar, and Ghurye, on the other hand, preferred assimilation as a way of 'uplifting' the tribes as they argued that protectionism would further the British policy of divide and rule within the Indian population (Sundar 1997: 159). Archer was the protectionist in Chotanagpur; Roy too shared some of his views, though he could never completely discard reformist logic. But his early parameters for defining the tribe were now transformed, once his pursuits had shifted from academic to activist, and his targeted audience comprised, in addition to university scholars, those interested in political solutions and constitutional reform.

For Roy, this period was of particular historical significance: it marked his ascent into the public arena. The Second Round Table Conference had been held; separate electorates and the minority issue were on the agenda. This was the time when varying methods for dealing with the 'aborigines of Chota Nagpur' were being animatedly debated in the forthcoming constitution under the Act of 1935. They could be assimilated into the general constitution without any distinction; they could be treated like the communities of the Santal Parganas and Angul as 'Partially Excluded' from reforms; or they could be treated as an important minority community (Roy 1936: 25). As a member of the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council, to which he had been elected for successive terms (Anonymous 1971: 264), Roy suggested that the aborigines of Chotanagpur be treated as a minority community with special rights and privileges. The Bihar government, on the other hand, opposed the resolution, arguing that these communities had not attained the status of other minorities in terms of wealth, position, literacy, and political organisation. In the midst of this uproar, a series of articles by Roy appeared in journals and newspapers, some of which will be taken up for discussion here: 'The effect on the aborigines of Chota Nagpur of their contact with Western Civilisation' appeared in the *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* in 1931; 'The aborigines of Chota Nagpur: Their proper status in the reformed Constitution' appeared in the *Indian nation* in 1936; 'The study of anthropology from the Indian

view-point' appeared in the *Journal of the Benaras Hindu University* in 1937; 'The importance of anthropological studies in India' appeared in *The new review* in 1938.

It was the image of the 'primitive savage' that Roy wished to reverse in these articles. From a chronicler of tribal customs and practices in 1915 for whom 'scientific objectivity' in the discipline of anthropology had been uppermost, Roy had become an avid champion of the tribal cause. 'Concern for the welfare of the aborigines has, for the last thirty years and more, been uppermost in my thoughts and heart' (Roy 1936: 25), he wrote. The anthropologist, who had earlier condemned the 'aborigines' as 'primitive', and their culture as 'rude' and 'backward', now reversed his stance: 'Perhaps the hypnotic suggestion of the inappropriate term "primitive", sometimes loosely applied to them, is responsible for the illusion that the Chota Nagpur aborigines are still savages who should be regarded as a standing menace to peace and good government' (ibid.: 24). 'As for the principal aboriginal tribes of Chota Nagpur—the Mundas, Oraons, Kharias, Santals, Hos and Bhumijes—they too possess a culture of their own which is not insignificant or of a mean order' (ibid.: 22). Interestingly, the term that Roy chose to describe the communities of Chotanagpur was aborigines: reclaimers of land and founders of the villages of Chotanagpur. His repeated use of the term was intended to stress the point that these were people who had the greatest claims on the lands of Chotanagpur.

How, then, did Roy describe the Oraons? What were the determinants of their culture? On the one hand, Roy's search was, as before, for survivals of the past—for organisations that had 'long' existed among the Oraons, and which could still be traced amongst them. Even though 'within the last hundred years or so, these organisations have been weakened through the inevitable loss of much of their older functions and powers, the outer form and some of the social and even judicial functions of the older organisations still survive', he pointed out (Roy 1936: 22). It is in this context that Roy referred to the Oraon's 'effective form of village self-government with village headmen and their assistants', 'councils of village elders discharging judicial and executive functions', and 'a village militia of unmarried young men'; to 'their federations of villages' known as the 'Parhas or

Pirs', and their federal executive and judicial councils known as 'Parha Panchayats'; and finally, to their 'wider confederations or inter-parha leagues' (ibid.). In effect, Roy was trying to develop a universal story of the progress of civilisations, a teleological movement from an experiment in 'an effective form of village self-government', to a stage of 'further' advance in 'local self-government', to the final emergence of a structure that 'contained the germs of a State', the development of which was 'arrested under adverse circumstances' (ibid.). Thus, Roy provides in his writing two representations: an image of a localised Oraon culture, and a more general story of the progress of civilisations. Significantly, his interpretations of Oraon institutions of the past had changed: these were now seen as 'reminisces of a *glorious* past' (ibid., emphasis mine). Oraon culture was rich enough 'in the past' to have 'contributed, more or less, not only to the racial makeup of the Bengalis, Beharis and Oriya, but also to the social, religious and cultural equipment of these peoples', as 'every student of Indian sociology and anthropology is aware' (ibid.). Further—for the first time appreciating tribal literature—Roy found in their songs 'a high poetic quality'. For a people who 'had no written literature of their own', the 'exquisite but simple poetic imagery' in their songs 'sometimes puts one in mind of such poets of the civilized west as Robert Burns' (ibid.). Roy's attempt to compare Oraon culture with that of 'the Bengalis, Beharis and Oriya', and with the 'civilized West', exemplifies his earlier tendency to accept the inevitable superiority of 'higher cultures'; yet, implicit in the comparison is also a challenge to the hierarchisation of cultures.

For Roy, in order to capture aboriginal culture, it was now as important to locate these communities in the present—yet another change in his method of perceiving the tribe. Understanding their present, along with their past, would contest the stigma of inferiority that had been thrust upon them. Indeed, Roy suggested that the progress that these communities had achieved in recent years was 'phenomenal' (Roy 1936: 23), as the 'aborigines' had 'peaceably applied themselves to the betterment of their economic, social and intellectual condition' (ibid.: 24). The percentage of tribal literacy was comparable to that achieved by the most advanced groups of the province; a section amongst them were English-educated and had travelled to

Europe and America; posts were secured in the provincial and subordinate services of government, and in the 'liberal professions'; almost all of them owned property; some of them engaged in trade and banking; improvement societies, co-operatives, and *sabhas* developed public opinion among the community, fostered unity, and testified to the power of organisation and discipline (ibid.: 22). Roy concluded his account: 'In these circumstances, it would appear that the balance of advantages is in favour of the "Minorities Scheme" for the aborigines of Chota Nagpur, supplemented by their more adequate representation in the legislatures, and such additional provisions for the promotion of their cultural and economic interests as may be found suitable and necessary' (ibid.: 25).

The political prescriptions that Roy suggested were accordingly in keeping with what he considered to be the special problems of the aborigines. Protection of their agrarian rights called for the implementation of special tenancy rules and a tenancy law, along with the promulgation of an equitable law against usury and provisions for wider employment. Grants and suitable institutions were sought for the promotion of their education and culture. Measures that would ensure temperance were advocated (once again Roy's affiliation with 'higher cultures' is evident). For the administration of the area, qualified and sympathetic officers, conversant with aboriginal language and customs, were immediately required.

Caught between two worlds, Roy's essay is marked by ambivalence. He celebrated tribal culture but, at the same time, was persuaded by reformist logic. On the one hand he argued for the value of tribal culture and suggested that aboriginal culture was comparable to other cultures; at the same time he was unable to completely break away from a conservative position: 'It is only lack of adequate opportunities of development and absence of sufficient contact with other civilizations, for which a large portion of them are now fit, that had long kept them backward. In so far as facilities have been extended to them, they have proved their capacity to profit adequately thereby' (Roy 1936: 22-3). In other words, even though 'primitivism' was no longer seen as an intrinsic characteristic of tribalism, the image of a tribal community as 'backward' persisted in Roy's mind; moreover, only external agencies could, and had, revealed the path towards enlightenment.

Even as he was unable to completely break away from the parameters of Western anthropology, Roy's perception of tribal culture had markedly shifted. His tools of representation now acquired a new interpretation. Although he continued to borrow analytic tools from Western scholars, appreciated scientific methodology, and approved of colonial intervention, his search, particularly in the last stages of his career, was for an orientation that did not always endorse the approach of the West. Indeed, the imprint of the prevailing spirit of nationalism, and of his Indian identity, was conspicuous in his writings, as his new agenda was to arrive at a novel methodology, an 'Indian outlook on Anthropology' (Roy 1938a: 146–50).

Anthropology—a *scientific* discipline that was earlier seen as 'a comparatively recent branch of systematised knowledge in Western countries' (Roy 1937: 243)—was now seen as a part of the Indian tradition from earliest times,²⁴ a shift from the position that Roy held in 1921. What was to be lamented, he pointed out, was the 'deplorable lack of interest in the scientific study of Man' in modern India (Roy 1938a: 245), for 'In ancient India, the study of the Science of Man did not suffer from such neglect or indifference as at the present day. . . . The different branches of modern learning known as History, Social Anthropology and Jurisprudence were represented in ancient Sanskrit Literature by the Puranas and the Samhitas or Dharma-Sastras and the Grhya Sutras' (Roy 1938a: 246). Further, ancient Sanskrit texts, discarded in conventional scientific approaches,²⁵ were accorded importance as sources of authority in Roy's search for 'origins' and for the past, since he found no 'lack of historical sense' in the 'authors' of the Puranas (Roy 1938a: 251). The information found in the Puranas, he pointed out, matched the requirements of scientific anthropology upheld in the West: they

²⁴ Roy made a similar point in the context of the study of folklore and tradition in India: 'The collection of folk-lore material, particularly folk-traditions and folk-customs and folk-rites, has not hitherto been altogether neglected in India. . . . The Puranas and the two great Epics of India, particularly the *Mahabharata*, are undoubtedly rich store-houses of ancient Indian tradition' (Roy 1932: 353).

²⁵ In its search for origins, or in its search for a 'true' and 'objective' history, scientific analysis discarded the texts of Oriental tradition as symbols of a 'rude age' (see Pels 1999: 88).

‘formed storehouses of contemporary social customs and usages, rites and ceremonies, ethics and politics and law . . . furnish pictures of contemporary Indian society with its ideals and its different types and levels of culture’ (ibid.: 247). Paradoxically, in Roy’s understanding, it was the presence of Western ideas within Puranic thought which corroborated the wisdom of Puranic knowledge!

However, despite his search for parallels between West and East, Roy was quick to point out that there was a difference in the ‘anthropology of the East’. ‘From our Indian view-point’, he argued, ‘the ulterior object of the Science of Man is, or should be, to understand the meaning and goal of human existence . . . the eternal spiritual reality behind life and society, the *Sat* behind the *Asat* . . .’ (Roy 1938a: 243); ‘a study of anthropology’ would ‘put us in tune with universal humanity, and place us in touch with the Absolute’ (ibid.: 250).

The questions that Roy had begun to pose in his assessment of the discipline now displayed a rare humanism as he asked:

In what way can Anthropology or the Science of man help us in the world? (in our spiritual and social and intellectual needs?)

How can I put it so as to be helpful in this way to the needs of the present day to the world?

How can it be expressed so as to have vital impulse for humanity’s future progress?

What is the essence of permanent truth in the science of man?

What is its validity for mankind?

What is there beyond the mere local and temporal—but universal and eternal in the facts of human life and society that ethnology reveals to us?

What is the deeper truth + principle underlying what seems at first sight local and of the time? (This is always implied in the grain of the thought even when not expressly stated in the language.)²⁶

Roy, in the final analysis, advocated an integrated approach to anthropology, a combination of Western and Indian methods:

²⁶ These questions appear in Roy’s ‘Anthropological Notes Part II’ found among his private papers in the office of *Man in India* at Ranchi.

by combining the objective and analytic methods of investigation followed by the scientists of the West, in combination with the subjective and synthetic methods emphasized by the Arya Rsis of ancient India (who, too, did not neglect objective and analytic methods as well), Indian Anthropologists will succeed in establishing before long an Indian School of Anthropology for the pursuit of the Science of Man, which may be expected to give fresh inspiration even to Western students of the Science. (Roy 1938a: 249)

The incorporation of the unique 'synthetic' methodology of Indian anthropology into Western 'objective' anthropology would help in the comprehension of 'mankind in their totality', for 'Then the forest would be no longer lost in the trees. The student's eager ears will at first catch a soft music, and as he approaches nearer the truth, the music will swell louder and louder. Gradually the synthetizing [*sic*] mind of the student of Man will come to hear, contemplate and comprehend the entire gamut of the music of humanity as a whole. And such knowledge of human life is calculated to illumine his mind and chasten his heart' (Roy 1938a: 249). The 'world-consciousness' of a student of anthropology would then be 'supplemented, chastened and elevated' by a 'spirit-consciousness,—the consciousness of the one Eternal self in all' (Roy 1938a: 256).

Was Roy seeking to bring about parity between West and non-West, and challenging the 'primitiveness' that had been bestowed upon the 'other' in anthropological discourse, as he argued for the 'eternal self in all'? Was his attitude—the attempt to chart an integrated approach to anthropology even though he failed to break out of the barriers of Western anthropological methodology and often consciously clung on to it—a reflection of cultural defensiveness, located as Roy was in a colonial context? Alternatively, did these ideas reflect the views of a 'deeply religious mind' (Bose 1966: ii),²⁷ of one who was acquainted with the religious texts of ancient India, who

²⁷ In Roy's 'Anthropological Notes Part II', he cites several studies of religions. These include James Hastings (ed), *Encyclopaedia of religion and ethics*; Hopkins, *A study of Gods—India, old and new*; Worweck, *The living forces of the Gospel*; Daniel G. Brinton, *Religions of primitive peoples*; W.J. Penny, *Origin of magic and religion*; Marett, *The raw material of religion*, etc.

immersed himself in the philosophy of the Advaita Vedanta of Sankaracharya and who regularly attended religious meetings in Ranchi at which various aspects of religion and philosophy were discussed?²⁸ One needs to explore these themes as one reviews Roy's position in 1937, almost at the end of his anthropological career:

The realization of the truth that all humanity has originated from one and the same source, and is inspired by the same or similar currents of thought, feeling and desire, and is consciously or unconsciously proceeding towards the same goal . . . is calculated to expand the student's soul and induce a sense of its universality and infinity. As a result of this indefinite expansion of the self so as to include all humanity, the votary of the science of Man will find the latent springs of universal sympathy and fellowfeeling [*sic*] in his heart opened out; and in contrast to the biological rivalry of the animal world he will be inspired with a sense of universal kinship with man in every clime and in every level of culture. (Roy 1937: 250–1)

Roy had argued for a universalisation of cultures; but this approach, he expected, would have an additional dimension: it would instil in the 'soul' of the anthropologist an empathy, a feeling of oneness or 'kinship' with man across cultures. His dream was for 'the establishment of a genuine Federation of the World, a real Parliament of Man—not a mere political "League of Nations" of the Geneva brand' (Roy 1966 [1938b]: 31). In one of his sharpest critiques of modern, Western civilisation, Roy wrote: 'Then there will be an end of the malady of modern civilization, its crass-egotism, and rank selfishness, its aggressive wars, its gospel of race-superiority and race-hatred, its estimation of material progress as the be-all and end-all

²⁸ Ray provides an interesting exchange between Roy and his eldest daughter-in-law, Kamaladebi. Roy explains to her why, despite his attraction to the Brahmo faith in his more youthful days, he never ultimately converted to that faith: 'In those days, I thought much about it but finally realized that the ultimate religion is in the mind of man, in his behaviour. If true religion is in the mind of man, then all religions are equally good. There is no salvation with conversion. The implication of rituals lies elsewhere: these teach man to be governed by rules; these bind society together. But ceremony is not religion; religion is in the minds of men' (my translation) (Ray 1996: 8).

of human societies, its cult of temporal power based on brute force and on the prostitution of the intellect by the invention of diverse nefarious engines of destruction' (Roy 1937: 256).

If anthropology was a discipline that challenged the idea of a hierarchy of cultures, it could also support a national cause. While Roy had initially found anthropology to have a more generalised administrative and academic intent, it was now found to have a specific practical utility in the context of India. As an Indian who sympathised with the Congress (though he never formally joined it), Roy believed that the discipline would 'help in knitting the bonds of unity between different castes and creeds, races and communities' at a time when 'India' was getting 'swaraj-minded' (Roy 1937: 254). Roy elaborated upon this point in an article published in 1938:

The cardinal lessons of Anthropology may, for one thing, be very usefully applied to certain crying problems of our national life. The study of men of different races and religions of the customs and manners of one another may help in promoting mutual amity and knitting ever more closely the bonds of unity between them, and thus eventually help to banish much of the communal animosity which is the bane of Indian national life at the present day. (Roy 1966 [1938b]: 30)

Seeking to trace the 'practical national advantage that may accrue from a knowledge of Anthropology', Roy saw in the 'modern study of Ethnology' a 'service of humanity', expressed his sympathies for 'the aboriginal and depressed and suppressed classes' and condemned the neglect that had been meted out to them by those 'who boast of a higher civilization' (Roy 1938b: 30–1). Yet, at no point of time could he break out of his belief in the inherent superiority of his own 'higher culture' *vis-à-vis* the culture of the 'primitive tribes' (ibid.: 30). Anthropology would help, he argued,

in devising and adopting suitable methods of acculturation, or rather 'inculturation', of our jungle tribes—*i.e.* the adjustment of these tribes to the dominant higher culture of their comparatively civilized neighbours by inoculating, so to say, the tribal cultures with such helpful elements of the higher culture as may, with suitable adaptations, be profitably assimilated in their social and cultural systems while at the

same time helping to conserve indigenous customs and institutions of social value. (Roy 1938b: 30)

The word 'uplift' continued to be a part of his anthropological vocabulary as he hoped that 'universal fellow-feeling and active sympathy which a proper study of man is calculated to produce' would inspire 'some of us . . . to exert ourselves to the best of our opportunities for the economic, educational, social, moral, and religious uplift of the aboriginal . . .' (Roy 1938b: 31).

Roy's stand was clearly different from that of anthropologist-administrators, or of advocates of protectionism who found the word 'uplift' anathema, people who 'had watched the decay of tribal religion, the collapse of ancient forms of village organization, the extinction of village industries, the weakening of moral fibre that follows the contact of simple and primitive people with civilisation' with horror and resentment (Elwin n.d.). A protectionist, Elwin had argued, 'admires his (tribal) culture and religion and would like to preserve all of it that has survival value . . . He would have education, but of a special kind . . . he would have temperance, but not prohibition; he would have advance, but not headlong advance' (ibid.). Archer supported Elwin's position: 'In Ranchi District, the Uraons, Mundas and Kharias have been exposed to two forms of moral uplift—one from the Christian Missions, the other from Hindu reformers. Each has produced its own type of "moral" tribesman—a type that is puritanical in outlook, is afraid of life, and is on the whole much less happy than the unadulterated tribesman. Moral uplift in this sense is a poison' (ibid.).

In Roy's opinion, however, despite the negative aspects of colonial intervention, it was British rule that had enabled the peoples of Chotanagpur to emerge 'from their century-long social and economic serfdom', and advance 'not, as of old, with the violence of revolution foredoomed to failure but with the slow orderly progress which marks a natural evolution' (Roy 1931: 393). English education, Roy argued, was, 'under present conditions in India, an indispensable condition of an intellectual equipment' that would 'enable the aborigines to hold their own in the competitive struggle of the modern world' (ibid.). Yet, as a Bengali *bhadralok* affiliated to a 'higher culture', in

sympathy with the Congress, and writing as he did within a nationalist milieu, Roy could never advocate unqualified protectionism under the exclusive aegis of colonial officials. Against setting 'back the hands of the clock for Chota Nagpur' (Roy 1936: 25), he argued that the people of Chota Nagpur would feel 'a sense of humiliation and irritation' if they were 'classified' as 'Backward' or 'Protected', and therefore as an 'inferior community' (ibid.: 23). 'To seek at this late hour of the day to pay what I call "Protection's old arrears", by restoring something like the century-old and now obsolete and unsuitable protection . . . might look like "over protection" and a glaring constitutional anachronism, so far as Chota Nagpur is concerned' (ibid.: 25).

If Roy had distanced himself from the administrator-anthropologist, his differences also lay with the professional anthropologist of nationalist bent who had argued for an 'assimilation' and 'integration' of the tribals into mainstream India. Challenging 'state-enforced isolation from Hindu society', Ghurye, to cite an example, had argued that tribals were 'imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society'; their backwardness was caused not by contact with civilisation but because of the economic and legal changes brought in by British colonial rule; the solution to their problem lay in 'strengthening the ties of the tribals with the other backward classes through their integration' (Upadhyaya 2000: 24). Unlike the assimilationists, Roy, despite certain reservations, was appreciative of colonial intervention and blamed those of a 'higher civilization' for not fulfilling their responsibilities towards the tribals:

We who boast of a higher civilization undoubtedly have a heavy responsibility towards these weaker and less fortunate brethren whom we have so long culpably neglected. For have they not for centuries been ground down under the oppression of the rich and the powerful and groaned under various economic and social evils, not the least of which is the cruel stigma of untouchability?

The modern study of Ethnology which began in the service of humanity will, it may be fervently expected, find ever-increasing recognition in India, where the sum of human misery has perhaps reached the maximum at the present day. (Roy 1966 [1938b]: 30–1)

V. CONCLUSION

In tracing Roy's changing views on the Oraons and the tribe, this essay does not seek to contest Roy's enormous contribution to Indian anthropology, or to question his knowledge of the peoples of Chotanagpur. It only seeks to caution against an uncritical acceptance of Roy's ethnography, as this has been crucial in determining notions of the tribe in Chotanagpur. As Clifford and Marcus point out, 'the vision of a complex, problematic, partial ethnography leads, not to its abandonment, but to more subtle, concrete ways of writing and reading, to new conceptions of culture as interactive and historical' (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 25). Roy had seen 'fragments of a cultural field' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 16), or rather, many fragments, and many cultural fields. My purpose has been to recover these fragments, locate them within a historically determined epoch and field, recognise the varying dialogues between Roy and the Oraons, and acknowledge the unintelligibility that creeps in when one is caught within the traditions of British social anthropology and its partnership with colonialism on the one hand, while seeking at the same time to establish an 'Indian' approach to anthropology. Indeed, this essay is an attempt to bring into prominence one of the most committed of men, a prolific writer, and an empathetic individual. Roy's writings on the Oraons illustrate the fertile, sensitive, and ever-evolving imagination of a lawyer-turned-anthropologist whose interaction with various ideas and ideals led to a continuous shift in his perception of the Oraons and of the notion of tribe.

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Patrick Geddes

Sociologist, Environmentalist, and
Town Planner*

INDRA MUNSHI

I. INTRODUCTION

PATRICK GEDDES' FIRST CONTACT WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF Bombay was in 1914–15, when he was invited to deliver a series of four public lectures on the city. The lectures are said to have been a great success. In the summer of 1919 Sir Chimanlal Setalvad, the vice chancellor, offered Geddes the post of professor of sociology at his university. Geddes, then 65, accepted the offer—adding the title 'civics' to the designation of his chair—and set about organising the department of civics and sociology in the university. Before this, Geddes had been lecturing at Canning College in Lucknow; at the University of Calcutta; and had organised a summer school at Darjeeling dealing with a variety of subjects such as regional surveys, town planning, nature study, social evolution, and so on.

When Geddes took charge in Bombay the department was temporarily housed in the Royal Institute of Science, not far from the main university buildings. Characteristically, Geddes gave his daily lectures in the form of conversations and seminars (a style which his

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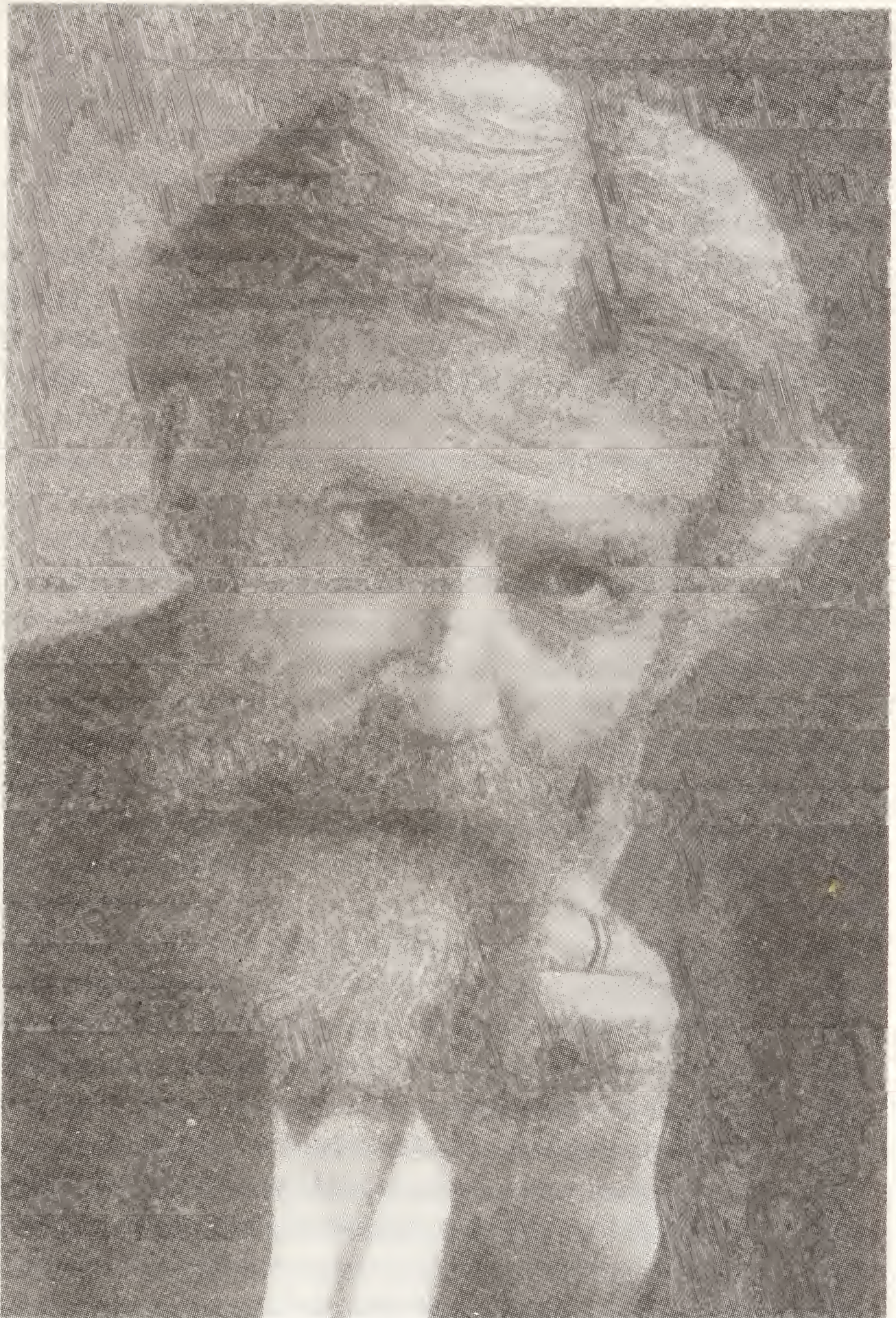


Fig. 5: Portrait of Patrick Geddes (1854–1932). (Source: J. V. Ferreira and S.S. Jha, eds, *The Outlook Tower: Essays on urbanization in memory of Patrick Geddes*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1976)

successors tried but with little success). A course on the Elements of Sociology was also offered to the public three afternoons a week, the lectures being invariably followed by discussions. Geddes being no admirer of mere book learning, Saturdays were devoted to excursions to various parts of Bombay and neighbouring villages and, whenever possible, to more distant places (Ferreira and Jha 1976: xi).

Between thirteen and eighteen students were enrolled in 1919 for a three-year course in sociology. The emphasis of the course was on practical work, for undertaking which Geddes sent his students to his friends in various parts of India. But when Geddes went to Palestine in 1920 and the students were left on their own, the senate of the university did not take a favourable view of the situation. Exasperated, Geddes wrote to the senate saying he was conducting not only a new course in India but an experimental one which had to be allowed to run for three years without interference. Besides, he argued, he was training his students in 'pure' sociology, for which fieldwork was absolutely essential (Meller 1990: 225–6).

The initial recruitment figures dwindled since the course did not run for long periods during Geddes' absence. By 1924, the last year in his five-year contract with the university, Geddes' health had suffered greatly, as had his ability to enthuse students with his unconventional courses. His attempt to find an Indian collaborator did not meet with success either. He sent his best students, G.S. Ghurye and N.A. Toothi among them, to England for further training. Although Geddes wanted Ghurye to become his collaborator and assistant—as he later wanted Lewis Mumford to as well—it did not work out that way. In fact it was Toothi who found Geddes' ideas stimulating and who promoted Geddes' approach after he returned to India. A more favourable response seems to have been evoked in Radhakamal Mukerjee from Calcutta who, as is evident from his studies, found Geddes' ideas inspiring. There is, otherwise, little evidence of the impact of Geddes' approach on sociologists: indeed one of his biographers, Helen Meller, says Geddes' warmest support in India came not from sociologists but from the outstanding natural scientist Sir Jagdish Chandra Bose (Meller 1990: 226–7).

Geddes' influence on sociologists in India remains negligible, although geographers and town planners sometimes show a greater

appreciation and engagement with his ideas and approach. However, in the context of increasing environmental concerns, especially the crisis of urbanisation in India, Geddes' ideas do acquire contemporary relevance. Lewis Mumford, no less, describes Geddes as one 'whose life shows a constant interpenetration of the general and the particular, the philosophical outlook and the scientific outlook, the universal and the regional: this world-enveloping mind was also deeply concerned with the improvement of life at his own doorstep' (Boardman 1944: xi). Geddes certainly deserves greater appreciation, and this essay is an attempt to remind sociologists of his legacy.

II. EARLY INFLUENCES

Patrick Geddes was born in October 1854 at Ballater in West Aberdeen, Scotland, and brought up and educated in Perth. Growing up in the Scottish countryside, renowned for its beauty, in close communication with hills, woods, fields, and gardens, was an experience which greatly influenced his personality and career. He was often to claim that his father was his first and best teacher: he had given him the finest education for life by encouraging his love of nature, and especially by teaching him how to care for a garden (Meller 1990: 6). Significantly, gardens figured prominently in his subsequent work as a town planner.

After an early education which included subjects such as geology, chemistry, and botany, Geddes studied biology for many years under the greatest natural scientists of the time. Huxley's influence upon Geddes is said to have been profound and enduring. The splendid range of Huxley's mind, which went beyond his specialisations, inspired many. But, as Philip Mairet writes, it was in disagreement with Huxley that Geddes developed many of his own ideas. For example, Geddes found Huxley's contemptuous treatment of Comte's positivist philosophy totally unjustified. Like many of his time, Geddes was impressed by Comte, with whose work he is said to have formed an enduring attachment (Mairet 1957: 18–20). He was also attracted to Spencer's application of the concept of evolution to society. He accepted Spencer's view of society as an organism of functionally interdependent parts and appreciated his attempt to trace

evolutionary forces working towards changing society. But it was Fredric Le Play whose method most influenced Geddes' approach to sociology, for it was in Le Play's work that he found 'a point of contact between the naturalistic and social studies which had been pulling him in different directions' (ibid.: 28).

Le Play's method of survey was governed by his postulate that the three key units for the study of society were '*lieu*', '*travail*', '*famille*' (place, work, family). The first, or geographical locality, presents the environmental pressures (needs) and the possibilities (resources) which determine the nature of the work. Work, in turn, determines the organisation of the family, the biological unit of human society. Conversely, the needs and potentialities of the family shape the character of the work, which in turn progressively modifies the environment (Mairet 1957: 28).¹

Armed with the approaches of Le Play and Comte, Geddes felt confident developing his own evolutionary approach to the social sciences. Taking his cue from Comtean sociology, which sought to encompass all knowledge, Geddes developed his position as a generalist and synthesiser of knowledge. He believed he had invented a new and potentially powerful methodology with which the connections between all disciplines could be studied (Meller 1990: 45). Place, work, and people (Geddes replaced 'family' with 'people' or 'folk') have, in his scheme not to be 'separately analysed as into geomorphology, the market economics and the cranial anthropology which still go on, in necessary detachment from each other. . . . Within the single chord of social life all three combine' (Geddes 1968: 267). He argued that geography, economics, and anthropology were so closely related that their union within sociology was sure to yield rich results.

¹ Branford and Geddes call Le Play the father of scientific regionalism. His line of reasoning began with the soil and its natural products; it continued with man, the creature of work and place; it culminated in man the builder of cities and creator of arts and sciences. It returned through all the ups and downs to the renewal or the destruction of the soil, as the case may be, by man's action. The tale of that cycle, they observe, is the history of civilisation (Branford and Geddes 1917: 92).

In academic sociology, Geddes, alongside people such as Victor Branford and J.A. Thomson, belonged to a school of civics sociologists which attempted to reassert the importance of environmental factors in human evolution. This school refuted any attempt to set heredity and environment in opposition. It sought to popularise the sociological method of Le Play and 'to establish the city as a natural phenomenon'. It transcended the nature/nurture categorisation 'since the city expressed the evolutionary process in geographical space and historical time' (Halliday 1968: 380). Hence, it is remarked that for this school 'sociology was the science of man's interaction with a natural environment; the basic technique was the regional survey, and the improvement of town planning the chief practical application of sociology' (ibid.).

In general, for Geddes, a founder-member of the British Sociological Society in 1903, sociology had to have a definite practical purpose. Sociologists were to be people of action who took part in the evolutionary struggle between society and environment so that positive tendencies were identified and encouraged and negative/destructive tendencies repressed. The idea was to plan, by application of laws of nature or social evolution, so that better ways of life might be devised. These were not mere fanciful utopias; being rooted in evolutionary tendencies, they could be realised if one planned with foresight. In contrast to utopian proposals, which are essentially without definite place and therefore futile, utopias of place (i.e. regional) are realisable (Branford and Geddes 1917: 250). To Geddes, utopia really meant making the best of each place 'in actual and possible fitness and beauty' (Branford and Geddes 1919: 87).

III. GEDDES AND THE CITY

Geddes' objective in establishing civics as applied sociology, it is observed, was 'to dispel the fear of cities and mass urbanisation, and to release the creative responses of individuals towards solving modern urban problems'. He pioneered a sociological approach to the study of urbanisation, discovered that the city could be studied in the context of region, that the process of urbanisation could be analysed, and that the application of such knowledge could enhance life in the

future (Meller 1990: 1). He believed that the best method for studying the city was to begin, on the one hand, with 'its geographical location', and, on the other, with the 'evolution of its historical and cultural traditions' (ibid.: 144). In his words, 'to decipher the origins of cities in the past, and to unravel their life processes in the present . . . are indispensable . . . for every student of civics' (Geddes 1915: 4).

Theoretically, Geddes proposed that just as the stone age is now distinguished into two periods, paleolithic and neolithic, so also the industrial age requires distinction into two phases, an earlier one, paleotechnic, and the nascent one, neotechnic. The former was characterised by the dissipation of stupendous resources of energy and materials, great wealth and poverty, and crowded, dreary industrial towns. The latter, with its better use of resources and population towards improving humans and their environment together, seeks the creation of 'city by city, region by region, of its Utopia, each a place of effective health and well-being, even of glorious and . . . unprecedented beauty' (Geddes 1915: 73).

When Geddes began his work in the mid-1880s, industrialisation and urbanisation had profoundly altered the relation between human beings and their environment. Geddes belonged to a generation of writers and thinkers who had developed a critique of the industrial revolution and its social consequences (Meller 1990: 3–4). He sensed unrest—especially among the youth of his times, who were disturbed by the consequences of industrialisation and urbanisation. The unrest was variously manifest in unemployment and mis-employment, disease and folly, vice and apathy, indolence and crime (Geddes 1915: 86).

His critique was, however, not that of a romantic, but of a scientist who wanted to analyse and understand the process of urbanisation. The purpose of acquiring such knowledge was to direct change, away from what was destructive and towards the betterment of the life of individual and community, towards 'city development'—in his own words, 'to criticise the city of the present, and to make provision for its betterment'. His *Cities in evolution* (1915), is regarded as an outstanding introduction to the study of city as an organism. Geddes was the first writer to see slums not simply as something ugly and unhealthy, and therefore to be wiped out, but as a 'living part of the

city' with a past and a future which makes sense in 'relation to the whole' (Summerson 1963: 167).

In Geddes' vision, plans were to aid the improvement of existing cities towards 'cleanliness, good order, good looks'; conservation of nature was not only for recreation and repose but for the hills, rivers, and forests which are essential for 'maintenance and development of life, of the life of youth and of the health of all'; and both were directed towards a greater interaction between town and countryside (Summerson 1963: 94). He believed that in the new period of social and political evolution, within which reconstructions of the city were taking place, new ideals of citizenship and a sense of human fellowship and helpfulness would also emerge. These would express themselves in greater participation in the improvement of the city in the long-term interest of enhancement of life of all citizens. In a sense, Geddes' goal, which transcended the boundaries of conservation, planning, or even geography, was geotechnic, i.e. the applied science of making the earth more habitable. For Geddes, achieving a new equilibrium between a natural and man-made world which went beyond physical environmental planning to cultural evolution, was precisely the challenge of modern civilisation (Meller 1990: 13).

IV. THE OUTLOOK TOWER AND OTHER EXPERIMENTS

An early experiment carried out in pursuit of his civic crusade was to move into a rundown workers' tenement in Edinburgh with his newly married wife, and improve and beautify it. The couple also founded the first student halls of residence in Scotland. A more fantastic experiment, however, was given expression in the Outlook Tower, 'the world's first sociological laboratory', founded in 1892. It was conceived by Geddes as a civic and regional museum, the idea being to educate people to understand their region and the larger environment in all its complexity and from all possible viewpoints. As Philip Abrams puts it, the Outlook Tower, with its collection of maps, photographs, projections, demonstrations by means of 'camera obscura', and ad hoc lectures, 'was the most brilliant of Geddes' many attempts at an action sociology'—a presentation of the sociological

dimension of cities, urban problems, and town planning (Abrams 1968: 66).

Tours conducted by Geddes through the Tower began with the camera obscura on top of the dome, which reflected the panoramic outside view in a series of images, like moving pictures—the way an artist would see it. Then, from the observation balcony outside, Geddes would show how a meteorologist, geologist, geographer, zoologist, and botanist would look at the region. To illustrate each of the outlooks, he set up instruments or specimens, as seemed required. What existed, therefore, was a kind of index museum, representing everything that the natural sciences knew about this region, which extended from the Highlands and Pentland Hills down to the Firth of Forth and the North Sea. Next came the outlook of historians, literary scholars, and men of action like engineers and planners engaged in reshaping the environment. Their methods of observation and samples of their studies were also displayed (Boardman 1976: 4–5).

The storey under the camera obscura was devoted to Edinburgh and the surrounding region. Prints, maps, sketches, and photographs were displayed here, showing the city's chronological history from pre-Roman times to the nineteenth century. There were also constructive plans showing how its defects could be remedied and how its heritage of culture and art could be preserved, for, as Geddes put it, 'after regional survey should come regional service'. The floors below were devoted to Scotland, the British empire, Europe, and the world in general.

A diagram showing a landscape from mountain peaks to the sea, with a text beneath naming the occupation which corresponded to the particular part of the valley section, was displayed. In this simple diagram Geddes saw the basic elements of sociology—place, work, and folk—illustrated. In it he also saw 'the only valid method by which to study nature and man in order to improve them both' (Boardman 1976: 186–7; Fleure 1953: 10).

The Outlook Tower synthesised specialised and even conflicting viewpoints. It also served to highlight all aspects of a place, its ugliness, poverty, and crime against its heritage of scenic beauty, natural resources, and human culture. Geddes' Outlook Tower, it is observed,

‘was far more than a passive repository of knowledge; it was the outpost from which Geddes launched many projects for civic betterment and sent out many exhortations in print and in speech to arouse people to both understanding and action’ (Ferreira and Jha 1976: 5–6).

The Tower was also Geddes’ alternative to the dull, tedious examination-oriented education system which destroyed the creativity of young minds. Inspired by Le Play who urged social scientists ‘to live rather than write’, he proposed to educate the young through practical activities, laboratory work, and field studies. Observation, as opposed to book learning, was to be the key method of education.

V. GEDDES AS TOWN PLANNER

It must be pointed out at the outset that town planning, which Geddes called ‘City Design’, was not a new and special branch of engineering, or of sanitation, building, architecture, gardening, or any other fine art, as most people mistakenly believe. It was not a new specialism added to the existing ones, but a combination of all of them ‘towards civic well being’ (Geddes 1918, I: 15–16). Here, I will examine some of Geddes’ ideas on town planning which became influential among planners. As Geddes’ most distinguished disciple and follower, Lewis Mumford, points out, ‘. . . I believe that a sober historic judgment will show that no other mind had a greater influence upon both movements (cities and regionalist) during the last 50 years. There are many active participators in housing, regional planning, and city development who do not know what they owe to him or how many ideas they found “in the air” were originally conceived by Geddes . . . (Boardman 1976: xi).²

² Sir Patrick Abercrombie, an architect planner and contemporary of Geddes, writes that Geddes’ Edinburgh survey led the way in Britain. The survey appeared in public at the great Town Planning Exhibition in 1910. And, ‘it is safe to say that the modern practice of planning in this country would have been a more elementary thing had it not been for the Edinburgh room and all that this implied. . . . Within the den sat Geddes, a most unsettling person, talking, talking, talking . . . about everything and anything.’ The visitors could criticise the show for being a hotchpotch of picture postcards, newspaper cuttings,

Recognising the significance of the region, Geddes advocated the 'regional survey' to bring about the reunion of town and country. The two could then be considered as 'city regions', each occupying a definite geographical area. The big metropolis, he observed, often grew in wealth and power by exploiting and even exhausting vast areas with their small towns. The latter became increasingly impoverished, and that was why a worldwide movement for decentralisation was growing (Tyrwhitt 1947: 29). His notion of regional planning, it is observed, mediated between the 'abstractions of universalist planning and the parochialism of the locally concrete, and also between town and country' (Visvanathan 1987: 21). Yet, that region was far more central to Geddes' conception is evident from his plea for a 'regional outlook' and 'regional culture', whereby a new vision must arise where people see their life in all its 'ever widening relations, its expanding possibilities', where the personal and the regional, the national and the human are reconciled in a common purpose for a better life. The regional outlook, 'the rustic, the vital and the ethical' must increasingly supplement the present 'too purely urban outlook with its mechanical, venal and legalistic point of view' which has so far dominated politics, education and even science (Boardman and Geddes 1917: 243, 249).

To town planning Geddes brought the methods of 'diagnostic survey' and 'conservative surgery'. The former implied an extensive—preferably pedestrian—tour of the city, meeting and talking to people in order to acquaint oneself with how the city had grown and the problems it faced. Geddes' 'diagnosis before treatment' may seem obvious today, but the idea was new in town planning at that time.

Addressing a gathering in 1910 he argued: 'If you . . . wish to shape effectively the growth of your town, you must first study it, and from every conceivable point of view. Study its location and means of communication, its history and culture resources, its industries, commerce and population, and a hundred other factors; in short, make first a balanced Civic Survey, and then set about drawing plans and

strange diagrams, crude old woodcuts, archaeological reconstructions. But if they listened to Geddes' talk they would no longer feel the same way because 'There was something more in town planning than met the eye' (Abercrombie 1933: 128).

passing ordinances' (Boardman 1944: 248). By his insistence on a survey to examine the city's past and present before trying to shape its future growth, Geddes upset town councillors who wanted quick results. But through his work Geddes demonstrated that detailed and thorough surveys could be done without spending too much time or money.

Conservative surgery, another phrase taken from medical science, meant improvement of the city with a minimum of human and financial cost. He believed that every city had its rundown areas, ugly and unhealthy quarters, congested and narrow lanes which could be upgraded and renewed without adopting drastic and expensive measures. These ideas are well illustrated in Geddes' Indian reports. He viewed the city as an organism—not as a machine, parts of which could be easily thrown away. It was this belief which underlay his argument that it was important to first understand the inner, the older part of the city which might appear chaotic at first, but in it 'gradually a higher form of order can be discerned—the order of life in development.'

In town planning Geddes saw co-operation as the most important method to solve problems. He believed that while competition was an essential part of animal and plant life, co-operation was even more important in the evolutionary scheme: 'it is possible to interpret the ideals of ethical progress through love and sociality, co-operation and sacrifice, not as mere utopias contradicted by experience, but as the highest expression of the central evolutionary process of the natural world' (quoted from Roe 1995: 77). The idea was to involve people in improving their surroundings. That he succeeded in doing so is amply demonstrated by his early experiments, in the Edinburgh slum referred to earlier and by his Indian experiments, to which we will now turn. It is important to remember that, underlying his town planning exercise, was his notion of collaboration between physical planning and social planning. Therefore, according to Geddes, it was absolutely necessary for a planner to possess training in sociology.

VI. THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE

Geddes' earlier engagement and experiments with urban renewal prompted Lord Pentland, the governor of Madras, to invite him to

bring his 'Cities and Town Planning' exhibition and continue his educational work in India. Pentland also succeeded in convincing his friends, Lords Willingdon and Carmichael, governors of Bombay and Bengal respectively, of the value of Geddes' work. Geddes was therefore able to put up his exhibition in important towns. Interestingly, the original exhibition was lost on its way to India, but Geddes' friends and supporters in Britain and Europe sent him fresh material for another, which he took around in India.

Geddes came to India in 1915. During his ten-year stay in the country, he toured the length and breadth of the subcontinent and prepared several reports, describing in great detail the nature of urban problems and the possible ways to overcome them. For the first time in his life he had an opportunity, in India, to supplement his educational and propaganda work with well-paid commissioned town planning reports. These reports, nearly forty, are said to represent the first major contribution to the development of modern town planning in India on a fairly large scale. Geddes is believed to have done more than any other individual to promote town planning in India (Meller 1979: 343).

Although Geddes noticed the collapse of the old tradition of town plans in India, the neglect of sanitary regulations, and encroachments and congestion everywhere, he paid rich tributes to Indian civilisation. For example, he was impressed by traditional architecture and planning in the temple towns of the south. He saw a great deal of 'civic beauty' in simple homes and shrines as well as in the magnificent palaces and temples. He appreciated some of the features of Indian homes and towns, such as the proud place given to the venerated tulsi plant (symbol of the well-kept Hindu home); the shrine in the courtyard, even the narrow lanes in housing areas which opened into squares with shade-bearing trees. The narrowness of the lanes, he found, made for shade and quietness and left the building sites large enough to enclose courtyards and gardens (Tyrwhitt 1947: plate 7).

Geddes was often critical of civic officials and engineers whose interventions for improvement—such as wide, open thoroughfares, destruction of slum areas, flushed sewers, etc. often resulted not only in high expenditure but also in great human suffering. Much of the

work was in the hands of officers who were not trained for it, who were unaware of the sociological aspects of the problems, and whose views on hygiene and sanitation were largely based on European traditions.³ Their attempts to clean up the city or broaden the roads often caused eviction and displacement of people, and were, therefore, extremely unpopular (Tyrwhitt 1947: 18–19). This kind of planning went against Geddes' principle that 'town planning is not mere place-planning, nor even work-planning. If it is to be successful, it must be folk-planning. This means that its task is not to coerce people into new places against their associations, wishes and interest—as we find bad schemes trying to do. Instead its task is to find the right places for each sort of people; places where they will really flourish' (Geddes 1915: 91).

He condemned a scheme proposed for improvements in Lahore, which would have demolished temples, mosques, *dharamshalas*, tombs, shops, and houses, as indiscriminate destruction of labour as well as of the cultural values of people (Guha 1992: 59). He believed that an important function of the town planner was not to be a mere improver of certain streets, however important, at the cost of the city as a whole. Old buildings and streets ought not be destroyed in the process (Geddes 1965: 3).

Geddes' respect for tradition also led him to argue for better maintenance of resources such as tanks and wells. Rather than see them as malarial hazards, as sanitary officers were inclined to do, Geddes valued them not only for being an assured source of water but also for having a positive effect on the atmosphere. Too often the authorities, impatient at the polluted state of the tanks, had filled them up instead of taking steps to keep them clean. In Lucknow, for instance, the engineers had filled up many tanks and water conduits as part of the campaign to eliminate malaria. In the same year, 1915, heavy

³ It is observed that sanitary and civil engineers seldom questioned their priorities. Their priorities suited the British; to cut mortality figures by clearing slums and driving large straight roads through them, as in European cities; fill up tanks to eliminate mosquitoes; and ensure that the 'civil lines' were supplied with running water, a sewage system and a street cleaner. All this largely benefited British residents, although it was paid for by a tax on the entire municipality (Meller 1979: 332).

monsoons which brought torrential rains caused extensive flooding, bringing disaster to the city. An easier solution was to stock the tanks with 'sufficient fish and duck to keep down the Anopheles' (Tyrwhitt 1947: plate 25).

Speaking of the great Masunda tank of Thane, Geddes strongly recommended its improvement not only as a source of water but as a water park, a beautiful evening resort for the public. He argued that 'any and every water system occasionally goes out of order and is open to accident and injuries of very many kinds, and in these old wells we inherit an ancient policy of life insurance, of a very real kind and one far too valuable to be abandoned' (Geddes 1965: 3). For Surat he proposed that, by just planting more trees, cutting a few paths, filling up some unsightly holes, and making a few bridges from bamboos and branches, a public park could be developed from the existing 'Nullas'. Young boys and girls could be mobilised as civic volunteers for the development of the park. No city, he believed, was too poor to undertake such modest improvements or achieve substantial success within half a generation, even without government help.

Elsewhere, he noted with approval the existence in some cities of the tradition of a 'floating car' accompanied by a 'water festival' with illuminated lanterns. Instead of filling up tanks at the outbreak of malaria, he advocated the revival of the 'water festival', not only because it was the most joyous form of festival but also the best way to keep tanks clean. When properly maintained, he found temple tanks and city tanks 'the very finest and most beautiful of public places and public gardens in the world' (Geddes 1919: 469). He also defended the ceremonial procession of Lord Jagannath's 'car' which had obviously come in for a lot of criticism from the authorities. In it he saw 'a civic institution and a festival essentially beneficent'. It encouraged the maintenance of good roads, discouraged perpetual encroachment upon streets, and, during the collective pull, an admirable form of civic education took place (*ibid.*: 468).

Geddes had come to India with the hope of introducing his doctrine of 'civic reconstruction', for modern industrialisation and urbanisation had just begun in India. To many British administrators, however, his reconstruction message appeared superfluous and even

dangerous. The Indian Civil Service, which provided administrators for the municipalities, ignored him. After his initial popularity with liberal governors like Pentland, Willoughby, and Carmichael, he did not get much support from British administrators, who were generally hostile. Meller says 'he remained all his time in India as an outsider, tolerated by the British but not encouraged' (Meller 1979: 204). But Geddes turned increasingly to the princely rulers of the native states and came to be regarded as a prophet of civic reconstruction there. He believed that local knowledge and understanding, along with consideration and tact, were necessary when dealing with the requirements of citizens. By deploying the power of social appeal and civic enthusiasm, the town planner can arouse people to participate in schemes of improvement. For plans to succeed, more than technical expertness and activity, municipal powers and business methods, were required. 'The town planner fails unless he can become something of a miracle worker to the people. He must be able to show them signs and wonders, to abate malaria, plague, enteric, child mortality and to create wonders of beauty and veritable transformation scenes' (Tyrwhitt 1947: 37).

This is exactly what Geddes did for the people of Indore.

VII. THE INDORE EXPERIMENT

Geddes was invited to Indore in 1918 in order to find the means to improve malaria and plague infestation in the city. The maharaja of Indore had spent large amounts of money on an alternative system of water supply for Indore, which was designed to flush water through the sewers and thereby remove the cause of plague. In spite of the effort and expenditure, the scheme had not succeeded. Geddes was consulted, and after ten months of thorough investigation he prepared a two-volume report discussing the issues of water supply and drainage, health and disease, and gardens and parks in Indore, in great detail. More importantly, he proposed the establishment of a new university which would train students for civic reconstruction in Indore and elsewhere. But leaving aside the serious issues discussed in the two volumes, let us look at a delightful experiment Geddes carried out to get rid of the dreadful plague.

As he went around the dusty lanes trying to identify problem areas, the local people are said to have shown signs of open hostility. For them the sight of a white sahib going around with a map forbode trouble in the form of demolition, eviction, and so on. The hostility was so great that Geddes saw people point at him and say, 'That's the old Sahib that brings the plague.' Taking it as a challenge, Geddes went to the ruling prince of Indore and asked to be made maharaja for a day. Having got complete authority to pursue his plans, Geddes set about his campaign for reconstruction in a novel and efficient manner. He spread the news all over the city that a new kind of pageant and festival would take place on Diwali day. Diwali being an important religious festival, but above all it being that 'annual insurrection of the women from which all men can but flee'—known all over the world as spring cleaning—the new festive procession, it was announced, would not follow either the traditional Hindu or Muslim route through the city, but the one along which most houses had been repaired and cleaned. Priests were involved in having the roads outside the temples cleaned, repaired, and planted with trees. Free collection and removal of rubbish was organised, and over 6000 loads were carted away from homes and courtyards. Rats were trapped by the thousand in the city. At the same time, much house repairing, cleaning, and painting were carried out all over Indore, for everyone wanted the procession to pass along their street.

On Diwali day a grand procession took place. First came the stirring spectacle of the cavalry, the infantry, and the artillery of state. Then came elephants carrying cotton and other important crops, rich merchants, and the goddess Lakshmi symbolising prosperity and wealth. Soon there followed a dismal scene of poverty, crumbling houses, demons of dirt, and giant-sized models of rats and mosquitoes accompanied by dreadful wailing and melancholy. After a brief break came cheerful music heading the long line of sweepers in spotless white, with new brooms and freshly painted carts. Behind the sweepers marched a civic procession of labourers, firemen and police, officials, the mayor, and the maharaja, Geddes himself, and after them, enthroned on a stately car, a new goddess evoked for the occasion, namely Indore City. Her banner bore the name of the city on the one side, and on the other a city plan showing the proposed

changes to be made. Next came carts representing all the crafts, on which craftsmen acted out their parts. Carts loaded with fruits and flowers, which were distributed among the children, followed. The last of these contained thousands of pots with seedlings of the tulsi plant to be distributed among the households of Indore. This novel procession passed through almost every part of the city, finally ending at midnight in a public park where the giant replicas of the dirt and rats of plague were burned in a great bonfire. After the symbolic destruction of these enemies, the festival was brought to a close with a grand display of fireworks.

The effect of the exercise was immediately apparent. A new enthusiasm and confidence spread among the people to be clean and beautify their homes and surroundings. Above all, the plague came to an end, partly because the city had been cleaned up, and partly, no doubt, because the season was over. Geddes became a leading figure in Indore. When people saw him, they now pointed at him and said 'There's the old Sahib that's charmed away the plague' (Boardman 1944: 386–90).

Geddes demonstrated unquestioning faith in people's support and participation in any real improvement of their surroundings. To the allegation, probably often made by administrators, that people did not care for improvement, Geddes replied: 'Everywhere in the slums we see women toiling and sweeping, each struggling to maintain her poor little home above the distressingly low level of municipal paving and draining in the quarter. The fault does not lie with the people and I have no fear that people of the cities would not respond to improvements. The immediate problem is for municipal and central government to understand what improvements really are needed and desired' (Geddes 1915: 82).

VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Geddes combined several disciplines—biology, sociology, geography, town planing—to develop his approach to the interaction between human beings and their natural environment. He also combined several activities—lectures, exhibitions, demonstrations, writings and pageants—to propagate his ideas of civic reconstruction with total

devotion and indefatigable energy. Interestingly, his biographer writes, his 'fierce energy and wild enthusiasm' was balanced by his wife's 'calm level-headedness and a strong common sense'. While he indulged in grandiose and expensive schemes, she took the responsibility of working out the practical details on which their success depended (Meller 1990: 7).⁴ In this context, it is of interest to note Geddes' ideas on women, which he developed in his monograph titled *The evolution of sex*, with J.A. Thomson. According to him, women played a vital role in social evolution as wives and mothers. 'Their nurturing tendencies shaped the economic and social environment, creating ever higher levels of civilisation' (Meller 1990: 83). Such a view will not find much support today!

Geddes was essentially a crusader, acutely aware of the need for transformation from the machine and the money economy of the industrial age to one of life and civilisation. He asks the rhetorical question: 'May not the pursuit of personal wealth grow less exigent as we gain a social well-being expressed in betterment of environment and enrichment of life?' (Geddes and Slater 1917: vii). He believed that in the coming age of 'life economy', people will be creative in proportion as two conditions are satisfied: the inner life of people must be enriched and opportunities must be provided to all, irrespective of class, rank, or sex, for the development of personality through citizenship. The university is called upon to play a vital role in the moral and intellectual transformation of the people, the city, and the region. It must not only give rise to the new doctrine but plan and aid its practical application, so that unity of thought and purpose may develop together in a common citizenship (*ibid.*: xii). Geddes and his collaborators dared to hope that the university may hasten the coming of this dawn by preparing the translation of dream into deed—the dream of creating utopia, fulfilling the high ideals of the past, emancipation and renewal of lands, cities and people (Branford and Geddes 1919: 377). Ironically, this was just what the

⁴ Meller also tells us that Geddes tried to keep alive the 'romantic' element in his marriage by occasionally writing special love letters to his wife. Although he started by professing undying affection, he always ended with a general discussion of environmental problems (Meller 1979: 8).

English universities did not do. Geddes believed that with their narrow-minded specialism and academism, sociology was not the sort of thing they would promote.

Geddes' interdisciplinary approach, his eclecticism, his attempt to unite in himself the scientist and the artist, the academic and the planner, the dreamer and the doer, made him and his ideas too complex for lesser mortals to comprehend. The fact that these ideas were expressed through highly unconventional modes did not make it any easier. He had his loyal friends and supporters, among them many women, who promoted and propagated his work with much zeal. But by and large, in his own time, as also subsequently, Geddes did not enjoy the recognition that was his due. This was probably because, in the days of high specialisation, Geddes tried to be a synthesiser of knowledge, believing that specialised knowledge was inadequate to grasp the ever-increasing complexity of life. He belonged to many disciplines, and each of them could claim him. While this quality sometimes left his contemporaries bewildered, upset, and even outraged, rendered his ideas somewhat confusing, and was probably the reason why he did not fit into academia, it was also undoubtedly his greatest strength. He traversed many arenas of the natural and social sciences and was equally comfortable in the lecture hall and with people on the street, giving everywhere his message of the possibility and desirability of improvement of cities, regions, and life itself.⁵

Lewis Mumford sees this as one reason why Geddes failed to make an adequate impression on his contemporaries, although 'he was one of the seminal minds of the last century'. Geddes shunned publicity, but more important, Mumford emphasises, 'he practised synthesis in an age of specialism and stood for the insurgence of life in a world that submitted even more fully to the gods of mechanised routine' (Mumford 1944b: viii). His most important insights were never written down; he had distrust for what he called the modern

⁵ Official honours were given to Geddes for his contributions. In 1911, a knighthood for 'town planning' was offered to Geddes, who turned it down for 'democratic reasons'. Again, in 1932, just before his death, he was offered a knighthood for his service to education. This he accepted.

habit of 'verbalistic empaperment'. And what was written was often in a style difficult to take. But then, as Mumford points out, that was not his main purpose:

Geddes coupled thought to action, and action to life, and life itself to all the highest manifestations of sense, feeling, and experience. . . . Man's existence did not stay at the biological level of organism, function and environment, nor even at the tribal or folk level of folk, work, and place: man perpetually renewed himself and transcended himself by means of that heritage of ideal values, of self surpassing purposes, which are covered by the terms polity, culture, and art. . . . For Geddes life had more than its animal destiny of reproduction and physical survival: it had a high destiny, that of revamping out of nature's original materials, with the help of nature's original patterns a more perfectly harmonised, a more finely tuned, a more balanced expression of both personality and community. (Mumford 1944a: 384)

Mumford's prophesy was that if our generation manages to live down its automatisms and mechanisms and sadisms, its debilitating financial parasitism and its fatal moral complacency—if it actually escapes the necropolis it has prepared for itself—in short, if the forces of life once more become dominant, the figure of Geddes will stand forth as perhaps the central prophet of the new age. There could, in his view, be no better symbol of Life Insurgent and Humanity Resurgent than Patrick Geddes (Mumford 1944b: xiv).

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The Idea of Indian Society

G.S. Ghurye and the Making of Indian Sociology¹

CAROL UPADHYA

SOCIOLOGY WAS ESTABLISHED AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE in India during the late colonial period and developed rapidly after independence with the growth of the university system and the founding of research institutions. Unlike anthropology, which was introduced into the country primarily as an adjunct of the colonial state, sociology retained from its inception a degree of autonomy

¹ I am very grateful to several people for their help at various stages in the production of this essay. In particular, I have to thank Dr S. Devadas Pillai, who generously shared with me his time and extensive knowledge of Ghurye's work and life and gave detailed comments on an earlier draft. I am grateful also to Dr Manorama Savur for sharing the results of her own unfinished work on the history of the Bombay University Sociology Department. Thanks also go to Veronique Bénéï, Mahesh Gavaskar, Ramachandra Guha, Sujata Patel, Kashi Ram, Nandini Sundar, and A.R. Vasavi for their advice and comments on various drafts. The present essay draws on an earlier one on Ghurye presented at the National Workshop on 'Knowledge, institutions, practices: The formation of Indian anthropology and sociology' held at the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, 19–21 April 2000, and on a presentation at the National Institute for Advanced Studies in Bangalore in November 2001. I thank the participants of both seminars for their comments. Remaining errors of fact and interpretation are of course my own.

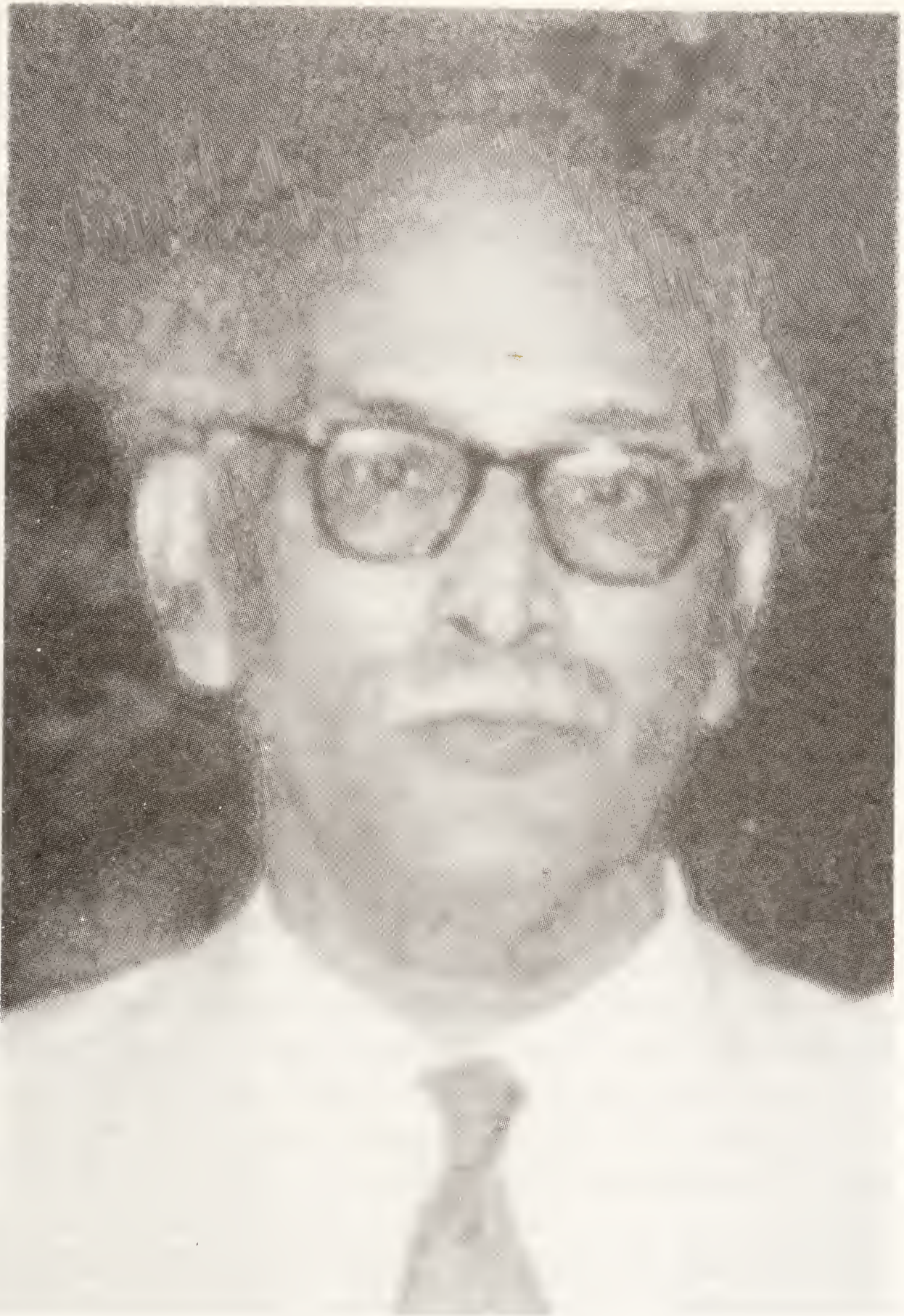


Fig. 6: Portrait of G.S. Ghurye. (*Photograph courtesy N.R. Pillai, University of Bombay*)

vis-à-vis political authority. This autonomy was reflected in the concerns of the first generation of Indian sociologists who, like other English-educated intellectuals, were caught up in the political and intellectual currents of their times, in particular the nationalist

movement. Their overriding preoccupation with the nation was reflected in the ways in which sociology—as the discipline most concerned with understanding Indian society—defined itself. While sociology started out with a nationalist agenda, it was later reshaped by the postcolonial ideologies of economic development and national integration. There has been some discussion of the ways in which sociology was moulded by these dominant ideologies, but a deeper investigation of the growth of the discipline and its key ideas within the context of these overarching discursive regimes is still required. Moreover, little attention has been paid to the structuring of sociological practices by the institutional contexts in which the discipline became embedded and through which knowledge was produced and reproduced.

In writing the history of sociology and social anthropology in India, the institutions and personalities of the 'Bombay School' must find a central place. The Department of Sociology at Bombay University was for many years the premier department in the country, and the head of the department during this period (1924–59), G.S. Ghurye, is often referred to as the 'father of Indian sociology'. Ghurye is most remembered for his leading role in the institutionalisation and professionalisation of the discipline in the country. He built up the Bombay department practically from scratch, and during his thirty-five years as head he produced a large number of PhD and MA students, including several of the most prominent sociologists of the next generation. He also founded and ran the Indian Sociological Society and its journal, *Sociological bulletin*. Although Ghurye's Indological or cultural historical approach to sociology was soon superseded by structure-functionalism, he and his students left a distinctive stamp on the way in which sociology is practised in India.

Much has already been written about Ghurye, and yet another essay on this founding father requires some justification.² First, most of the work on him is biographical, cursory, or laudatory. Just as the

² See Momin (1996), Narain (1979), Pillai (1997), Pramanick (1994), and Venugopal (1986, 1993). In addition to the Ghurye centennial volume edited by Momin, there have been two *festschrifts* for Ghurye—Kapadia (1954) and Pillai (1976)—which include some discussion of his work.

history of Indian sociology is yet to be written, there is no comprehensive account of Ghurye's place in that history or of his intellectual development. Second, by taking a fresh look at the work of Ghurye and his department, I hope not only to place on record some previously unrecorded aspects of this chapter in the history of Indian sociology, but also to reflect on the character of Indian sociology and its representations of Indian society. An understanding of the evolution of Ghurye's thought may throw some light on how and why Indian sociology became what it is today. The excavation of sociology's past should provide not only a better understanding of the development of its key ideas, but also contribute to the development of reflexivity about the discipline and its role in the production of knowledge about society. This task is all the more relevant given that sociology in India is often characterised as being in a state of crisis—mechanically reproducing stale ideas, producing third-rate research, and unable or unwilling to address pressing contemporary problems.³ Perhaps by historicising Indian sociology and its representations of Indian society, we can begin to understand the reasons for this impasse and search for ways out.

In this essay I attempt to understand Ghurye's place within the history of Indian sociology by examining both the development of his intellectual orientation and his role as institution builder and teacher, for it is within institutions that his ideas have been concretised and disseminated. It is possible here only to touch upon some of the significant points within these two broad issues. First, I attempt to locate the roots of Ghurye's ideas by situating him within the context of early twentieth-century Maharashtra and examining his education and other intellectual influences. I then trace the development and dissemination of his distinctive approach to sociology through his work and that of his students, and its institutionalisation through syllabi, examinations, and dissertations. Finally, I point to how this history, especially the imbrication of sociology within nationalist discourse, can provide some insight into the problems and contradictions faced by the discipline today.

³ See Das (1993), Deshpande (1994), Rege (1994), and Uberoi (2000).

I. INTELLECTUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS
OF THE BOMBAY SCHOOL

GHURYE AND THE ELPHINSTONE TRADITION

Govind Sadashiv Ghurye (1893–1983) was born on 12 December 1893 in Malvan, a town in the Konkan coastal region of western India, into a Saraswat Brahmin family.⁴ Ghurye's family owned a trading business, and although his great-grandfather had been prosperous the family's fortunes were on the decline by the time he was born. Ghurye was believed to be a reincarnation of his grandfather, a deeply religious man who had died shortly before his birth, and the young Ghurye was expected to carry on the family traditions of worship (Ghurye 1973: 3–8). The training he received in the performance of rituals provided his first introduction to Sanskrit, the language that was to become central to his sociological work.

From his earliest years Ghurye was a dedicated student, and he recounts with pride in his autobiography (Ghurye 1973) his success in various examinations. His perseverance brought him in 1913 to Elphinstone College in Bombay, the oldest and most reputed college in the city, founded in 1835. Elphinstone was a major source of the new class of Western-educated intellectuals and professionals that emerged from the middle of the nineteenth century in western India, including several prominent leaders such as M.G. Ranade, Dadabhai Naoroji, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak (Ahmad 1998; Dobbin 1972).⁵ In the nineteenth century the professors were predominantly British

⁴ The Saraswat Brahmins, a traditionally literate but non-priestly caste, were by profession village accountants who acted as administrators under the Marathas and became powerful under the Peshwas. With the establishment of British rule, many Saraswats turned to English education and found employment in Bombay and other towns of western India, forming part of the new Western-educated elite of the region, along with Chitpavan Brahmins, Prabhus, and Parsis (Dobbin 1972: 6, 31).

⁵ The first session of the Indian National Congress in Bombay was dominated by Elphinstone intellectuals who had been active in previous decades in Bombay's social and political associations—Naoroji, Telang, Mehta, Tyabji, Gokhale, and others. On social reform and the emergence of nationalism in western India, see Dobbin (1972) and Johnson (1973).

and European, including many from Oxford and Cambridge (Ahmad 1998: 400), who self-consciously sought to create an intellectual elite by imparting a classical English education in the arts and sciences and introducing students ‘to the habits of independent thought’ (ibid.: 405).⁶ Elphinstone was also a centre of intellectual and political activity. The students learned not only the literature and history of Europe but also the principles of English liberalism, and they were encouraged to apply Western rationalist criticism to the social reform of their society—a process that ended in a critique of colonial rule itself.⁷ Exposure to European classical history led students to seek parallel institutions and ideas in their own history: for instance, Ranade’s desire to write the history of his own ‘nation’, the Maratha empire (see Ranade 1961), was born during his student days. The appointment of the first professor of Sanskrit in 1862 further stimulated students’ interest in India’s ancient past (Dobbin 1972: 75): R.G. Bhandarkar, a renowned Sanskrit scholar, trained a generation of Elphinstone students (Dandekar 1999).⁸ A greater awareness of Indian history and Hindu thought fed into the emerging discourse of social reform that constructed Indian society as an ancient

⁶ They also ‘required every statement or criticism advanced on any occasion to be supported and verified by original reference to the text of the work itself, to prevent mere second-hand opinion being mouthed’ (communication from a professor to the principal, quoted in Ahmad 1998: 405), a pedagogical strategy also typical of Ghurye, who required his students to substantiate every point with original textual references.

⁷ The Students’ Literary and Scientific Society at Elphinstone, founded in 1848 to promote the discussion and dissemination of scientific and social topics, spawned many of the educational and reformist associations that were later established by Elphinstonians such as M.G. Ranade. See Ahmad (1998: 406), Dobbin (1972: 53–5), and Naregal (2000: 48–9; 2001: 233–9). Naregal points out that ‘[m]odern liberal ideas travelled to the subcontinent mainly through the official project of education’ (2000: 18), and that access to these new discourses was crucial to the hegemony of the new intelligentsia. Their ideological influence was far-reaching, including not only the formation of nationalism but also a particular conception of Indian society that is reiterated in Ghurye’s sociology.

⁸ On the reintroduction of Sanskrit as a literary language in higher education in the 1850s, see Naregal (2001: 143–4).

civilisation with a glorious past that had become corrupted and required reconstitution.

Although the heyday of the social reform movements and the intellectual ferment centred round Elphinstone were over by the time Ghurye came to the college in 1913, much of the Elphinstone culture remained, tempered by the rising tide of nationalism. There were still several British professors in the college from whom he learned European history, English literature, ethics, and philosophy (Ghurye 1973: 26), and he studied Sanskrit with S.R. Bhandarkar, son of R.G. Bhandarkar. Ghurye does not indicate in his autobiography why he chose the Sanskrit Honours course for his graduation, but he does mention that his choice of college fell ‘naturally’ on Elphinstone, which was ‘well-known for its Sanskrit professors, Library and its prestige with the Government’ (ibid.: 25).⁹ He writes: ‘The Library hall . . . with the huge oil-paint portraits of Justice M.G. Ranade, Principal Wordsworth and others . . . looking over the splendid collection of books, well preserved in fine wooden cupboards with glass panes . . . was an exciting experience to me’ (ibid.: 26). Ghurye completed his BA examinations in 1916, winning the Bhau Daji Prize for the best Sanskrit student (ibid.: 31). He was appointed Fellow of the College and read Sanskrit and English for the MA examination of 1918, in which he got a first class and won the Chancellor’s Gold Medal (ibid.: 31, 34). When he began to study law at Bombay University after completing his MA, he was invited to join Elphinstone as Assistant to the Lecturer in Sanskrit (ibid.: 35).

It is difficult to gauge the impact of the Elphinstone brand of education on the young Ghurye. Although most scholars regard his training in Sanskrit as the greatest influence on his thought prior to his move to Cambridge, Ghurye also appreciated what he saw as the achievements of modern Europe as well as of the other classical civilisations—an attitude that may be traced to his Elphinstone experience. According to Srinivas (1996: 6), Ghurye ‘believed that the modern British were the successors to the culture of the ancient Greeks . . . One of his favourite books was Clive Bell’s *Civilisation* . . .’

⁹ At the time Ghurye was a student, the study of Sanskrit was considered to be a matter of pride and hence not an unusual choice (Desai 1981: 15).

Although he has been labelled an Anglophile (Narain 1996: 21; Srinivas 1996: 6), Ghurye was also a proud Indian—an apparent contradiction perhaps not unusual in men of his background and generation.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AT BOMBAY

Ghurye turned from Sanskrit to sociology when in 1919 the University of Bombay advertised scholarships for training in sociology and economics abroad. The scholarships were intended to help fill positions in the newly established School of Research in Economics and Sociology, because 'qualified persons with adequate research training in Economics and Sociology were not easily available' (Tikekar 1984: 121). Ghurye applied for the scholarship in sociology and was selected, while C.N. Vakil won the scholarship for training in economics. Both men returned to Bombay after completing their studies in England and were appointed to the faculty of the new University School, Vakil in 1921 and Ghurye in 1924 as Reader in Sociology (*ibid.*).

Because Ghurye's training in sociology was made possible by the Government of India's decision to establish a School of Research in Economics and Sociology at the university, the background to this development is of some interest here. The proposal was first made by the GOI in 1914 and the grant of Rs 12,000 was accepted by the University Senate in the same year (Dongerker 1957: 59). The rationale for this decision is given in a letter from the Educational Department of the Government of Bombay: 'GOI considers there is vast field for detailed investigation. . . . [T]he aim of sociological history of India would be to arrive at the conditions which have made the politics, the religion and the general structure of Indian society in its distinctive features . . .' (letter no. 2677 dated 18 September 1913, to Registrar of Bombay University, quoted in Savur n.d.: 13). However, the scheme submitted by the Syndicate to the Senate was approved only in 1918, with the understanding that the School would be a research and not merely a teaching department (Dongerker 1957: 242). The objective of establishing the School, in the view of the University Senate, was 'to promote the study of Indian

social institutions with reference to their effects on the economic and industrial life of the people and to conduct research in economics and sociology' (from senate resolution, quoted in Setalvad 1946: 211). The government's concern about the rising tide of nationalism may have stimulated its interest in initiating sociological research in India, and especially in Bombay, a centre of nationalist agitation. The authorities were also alarmed about the broader surge of radical political activity at this time, especially the rise of trade unionism among Bombay's mill workers.¹⁰ Perhaps they believed that social research on urban and industrial issues would help to formulate policies to deal with the unrest. This was the view held at least by some members of the university senate, who suspected the motives of the government in introducing sociology. According to Ghurye, 'many Senators looked at Sociology with a queer eye, particularly as the urge to its cultivation had come from the anti-national British Indian Government at the Centre' (Ghurye 1973: 60). However, as discussed below, under Ghurye's guidance the Bombay Sociology Department played a very different role from that envisioned by the government.

Patrick Geddes, who was already actively involved in town planning activities in India, was appointed as the first Professor of Sociology (to which he added 'and Civics') in 1919, while K.T. Shah was appointed Professor of Economics in 1921 (Dongerkeri 1957: 59).¹¹ Geddes, a well-known urbanist and sociologist, must have seemed the ideal choice as the first Professor and Head of Sociology at Bombay,¹² but he did not leave a significant mark on the department.

¹⁰ This is Manorama Savur's argument (n.d.). The Viceroy reported to the Secretary of State in 1920 that Bombay was the 'chief danger-point' of social unrest in India and that the city was experiencing 'a sort of epidemic strike fever' (quoted in Hazareesingh 2000: 821).

¹¹ Geddes first came to India in 1914 by invitation of the Governor of Madras along with his Cities and Town Planning Exhibition. In 1915 he brought the exhibition to Bombay and gave a series of public lectures on 'The study of Bombay'. Between 1916 and 1918 he produced his well-known series of town surveys and also lectured in sociology at the University of Calcutta. Subsequently he was offered the post of Professor of Civics and Sociology at the University of Bombay, when he was 65. (See the preceding essay in the present volume.)

¹² That the School was intended to concentrate on urban problems is

There were few students, and the terms of his contract allowed him to be absent for six months of the year on his planning work. Geddes left India in 1924 at the end of his five-year contract, possibly under pressure.¹³

In his autobiography Ghurye gives little insight into his decision to apply for the sociology scholarship, except to note: 'My study of the *Manusmriti* at the B.A. with its eight forms of marriage and the dictum "woman does not deserve freedom" had excited my interest in the study of some institutions' (Ghurye 1973: 37). On the advice of K. Natarajan, editor of the *Indian social reformer*, he studied Westermarck's *History of marriage* to prepare for the selection (ibid.). He was called for an interview with Geddes, who asked him to start reading sociology and attend his seminars. Ghurye was not impressed by Geddes' lectures: 'I could get nothing more out of them than that place created or dictated work and moulded the people who in their turn conditioned their own work and both in the process modified the place' (ibid.: 38). He found more of interest in Geddes' writings and discussions on city planning. For the scholarship selection Geddes prescribed an essay on 'Bombay as an urban centre'; Ghurye's effort was approved and in 1920 he went to England as a research scholar in sociology (Dongerker 1957: 242; Ghurye 1973: 39).

supported by the fact that in 1922 the Syndicate appointed a committee to prepare a scheme for possible collaboration between the university and the city: 'The committee, with the help of Professor Patrick Geddes . . . was trying to visualize the future development of the University and the City which could be brought about by close co-operation between businessmen, the civic leaders and the University' (Dongerker 1957: 288–9).

¹³ According to Savur (n.d.: 25), Geddes was censured by the University Senate in 1920. The reason is not mentioned, but perhaps it was because Geddes managed to stir up public criticism of the Bombay municipal government's performance in tackling urban problems such as housing and sanitation; see Hazareesingh (2000: 803–7). Ghurye also mentions that the university authorities were not happy with the functioning of the department under Geddes (Ghurye 1973: 58). However, Geddes was already 70 years old when he left Bombay, and it is likely that he did not want to renew his contract. For more on Geddes, see Ferreira and Jha (1976) and Munshi (2000; also, this volume).

GHURYE'S CAMBRIDGE EXPERIENCE

Although Ghurye's scholarship allowed him to study in any foreign country (Ghurye 1973: 41), he went to London because one 'naturally went in those days to the London School of Economics' (ibid.: 43). Geddes had advised him to study under Sidney Webb, but when he was not able to contact him he approached L.T. Hobhouse, Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics, a prominent sociologist of the evolutionist school and a New Liberal. While in London Ghurye had some interaction with the LePlay House group—disciples of Comte, LePlay, and Geddes—but he was not attracted to this brand of sociology, nor did he like the 'atmosphere' at the London School. Ghurye had to write an essay on his proposed PhD topic for Hobhouse, but by the time Hobhouse had accepted him as his student he had decided to leave London (ibid.: 45).¹⁴ He wrote to A.C. Had-don at Cambridge, whose visiting card Geddes had given him, and through him met W.H.R. Rivers at a meeting of the Royal Society. That meeting so impressed Ghurye that by the end of it he was 'dead certain' that he would go to Cambridge to study under Rivers (ibid.: 46).

Ghurye does not provide any clues in his writings to explain why he became disenchanted with Hobhouse and attracted to Rivers. He writes only that he left London because he had 'come to the conclusion that the anthropological approach to Sociology was the most appropriate one' (Ghurye 1973: 45), and that he was convinced that he 'could not get anything worthwhile' (ibid.: 53) from Hobhouse or London. Rivers was a famous scholar who had made his reputation in comparative psychology and later in ethnology. He also had an India connection, having conducted field research among the Todas of the Nilgiri Hills in 1902, reported in his well-known book *The Todas* (Rivers 1906). Ghurye's admiration for Rivers is clear in his autobiography, where he devotes several pages to his encounters with

¹⁴ Although Ghurye clearly found Hobhouse uninspiring, his first assignment as teacher of the young M.N. Srinivas was to require him to write a critical review of Hobhouse's *Morals in evolution* (Srinivas 1973: 136)—inflicted perhaps to test Srinivas' dedication to the discipline.

the great man; he wrote that it was a privilege to meet 'such an intellectual luminary once a fortnight' (Ghurye 1973: 46), as was required of students.

Rivers is remembered in anthropology primarily for his contributions to methodology: he was a pioneer of field research during the Torres Straits expeditions, organised by Haddon, and invented the 'genealogical method' for studying kinship systems. He was largely responsible for the major shift that took place in early-twentieth-century anthropology from the 'armchair' to the 'field' (Stocking 1983).¹⁵ But by the time Ghurye met him, Rivers had been converted to the extreme version of diffusionism advocated by G. Elliot Smith (Kuklick 1991: 127; Langham 1981: 119).¹⁶ Diffusionism had emerged as a critique of late-nineteenth-century evolutionism and enjoyed a brief but intense period of popularity in England during the period 1910–30. While evolutionism held that every society would eventually advance towards civilisation, passing through definite stages of cultural development, diffusionists argued that culture was transmitted mainly by the migration of different races, and that 'cultural diversity within an area was *prima facie* evidence that its inhabitants were a racially diverse collection of migrant settlers' (Kuklick 1983: 67). Following this logic, the leaders of the diffusionist school—Elliot Smith, W.J. Perry, and Rivers—surmised that civilisation had been

¹⁵ In this move, anthropology followed the lead of the natural sciences as they became professionalised: direct observation of species in their natural surroundings by the scientist himself became a defining feature of scientific research (Kuklick 1997). The fetishisation of direct experience through 'fieldwork' was to become a hallmark of professional anthropology, which also became defined primarily as the study of 'primitive' or non-Western society, in contrast to sociology, which was more theoretically oriented and concentrated on the 'advanced' societies of the West (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Significantly, it was A.C. Haddon, a zoologist turned ethnologist, who introduced the term 'fieldwork' into anthropology.

¹⁶ According to Langham, Rivers had arrived at a diffusionist position independent of Smith, and after they became collaborators Rivers, Smith, and Perry evolved their theories jointly. However it appears that Smith was the leader of the group and the author of the most far-fetched ideas (1981: 142). See Langham (1981) for a detailed account of Rivers' career and the diffusionism controversy.

invented only once, in ancient Egypt, from where it had been carried by migrants who conquered and civilised the inferior races (*ibid.*: 68). This diffusionist argument was perhaps attractive to Ghurye because it resonated with the established understanding of Indian history—the Aryan invasion theory—which traced the origins of Indian civilisation to the incursion of Indo-Aryan peoples (see the following section).

Intellectual appeal apart, Rivers was a charismatic personality who inspired deep devotion among his students. Ghurye too became attached to Rivers and largely adopted his diffusionist line. One of the four papers he wrote as part of the PhD requirements, 'Funerary monuments of India', was a test of Smith's theory of the 'heliolithic' culture complex through a study of 'megalithic' sites in India.¹⁷ Another PhD paper, subsequently his first published paper (1923b), attempted to trace the 'Egyptian affinities of Indian funerary practices'. Several other early papers, such as 'Disposal of human placenta' (1937b), have similar themes. According to Srinivas, Ghurye defended Rivers' support of Elliot Smith and Perry on the Egyptian origin of certain widely dispersed cultural phenomena (1973: 135) and 'seems to have been in the grip of diffusionist ideas even as late as the 1940s' (Srinivas 1996: 3). Ghurye's dedication to Rivers continued throughout his life: he wrote that with the publication of *Family and kin in Indo-European culture* (1955a) he had realised a long-standing 'intellectual dream' and discharged a debt to his teacher, whose own work had inspired the book (Ghurye 1973: 155–6).

Ghurye was deeply affected by Rivers' sudden death in June 1922, which he regarded as the 'biggest tragedy' of his life (Srinivas 1996: 3): 'With Rivers' death Cambridge had become a blank for me' (Ghurye 1973: 53). A.C. Haddon, a key figure in the history of British anthropology, became his guide, but Ghurye says little about him. He finished the papers required for the PhD soon after Rivers' death and submitted them in January 1923, passed his oral examination (conducted by the archaeologist William Ridgeway and the former ICS officer and well-known amateur ethnologist William Crooke) in February, and left for India in May, degree in hand. As he is careful

¹⁷ Reprinted in Ghurye (1973) as 'Megalithic remains of India'.

to inform us in his autobiography (1973: 54), he was the first Indian in Bombay province to obtain a Cambridge doctorate, and the third in India. Ghurye also left England with a contract from the publishers Kegan Paul for his first book, *Caste and race in India*, an expanded version of one of his PhD papers entitled 'Ethnic theory of caste', to be published in the History of Civilisation series edited by C.K. Ogden—a major achievement for a young scholar. He had already submitted for publication two of his PhD papers, with the help of Haddon (Ghurye 1923a, 1923b).¹⁸

Although Ghurye had been offered a year's extension of his scholarship to continue his studies in England or another country, he decided to go to Calcutta, which he believed to be the centre of anthropology in India. He spent most of his seven months there reading in the Imperial Library (now the National Library). During this period he applied for the post of Professor of Sociology at Bombay University, which had been advertised after Geddes' resignation early in 1924.¹⁹ The other candidate was K.P. Chattopadhyaya, also a student of Rivers, who had earned an MSc in anthropology from Cambridge and who later joined the Department of Anthropology at Calcutta University. Although there were two posts available, only one Reader was selected—Ghurye—because, according to Ghurye, the other post was 'reserved' for N.A. Thoothi, who was completing his training at Oxford and who had good connections with several members of the University Syndicate (Ghurye 1973: 59).²⁰

After some debate in the University Senate, Ghurye was appointed as Reader and Head of the Department of Sociology in June 1924. S.N. Pherwani, University Librarian, who earlier had been appointed

¹⁸ His other two PhD papers were later published in India (Ghurye 1924, 1926).

¹⁹ Ghurye was miffed that the Registrar had not offered him the post or even informed him about it: 'I had earned the coveted PhD, acquiring special exemption granted at most to Cambridge First Class graduates—Cambridge First Classes then straight walked into a professor's post in any Indian University . . .' (1973: 56). He refers here to the exemption of three terms of the usual nine terms of residence required at Cambridge for the PhD degree.

²⁰ Thoothi had gone to England a year after Ghurye to study under J.L. Myres and R.R. Marett (Ghurye 1973: 60).

Assistant Professor of Sociology, retired, and Thoothi returned and was appointed Reader in 1925. Ghurye and Thoothi remained the only two sociologists in the university until 1943, when two new positions for lecturers were created (Dongerkeri 1957: 243–4). While Thoothi propagated the Geddesian style of sociology,²¹ Ghurye became the dominant figure in the department, and it was his brand of sociology that became established in Bombay and later within Indian sociology. Ghurye was appointed Professor in 1934 and remained as Professor and Head of the Department until his retirement in 1959.²² The departments of economics, sociology, and politics and civics (the latter established in 1948) formed a single unit within the School of Economics and Sociology under one administrative head until their separation in 1956.

II. FORMATION OF AN 'INDIAN SOCIOLOGY'

It is not possible to summarise here the substance of Ghurye's prolific and diverse writings; this would require lengthy separate treatment and has been done elsewhere.²³ In this section I only point to several themes that run through much of his work and that provide the key to understanding the type of sociology that developed in Bombay under his tutelage. Before discussing Ghurye's work, it is useful to outline the broader intellectual context within which he developed his sociology of Indian civilisation.

PREHISTORY OF INDIAN SOCIOLOGY

Ghurye was not the first intellectual to attempt to trace the formation of Indian society and understand its structure, nor was this quest confined to sociology. Rather, he drew on an older tradition of social thought that was deeply entangled in the politics of colonialism and nationalism. From the nineteenth century onwards, English-educated

²¹ See Munshi (2000: 485, and this volume) and Srinivas and Panini (1973: 187).

²² Ghurye retired at age 65 but was appointed Emeritus Professor, the first such appointment in the university.

²³ For relevant references, see fn. 2.

intellectuals had grappled with questions about Indian society and its history that had been raised by the work of British and German Orientalists and by the attacks on Indian social institutions launched by English missionaries and ‘Indophobes’ (Trautmann 1997). Much of this intellectual ferment was channelled into the social and religious reform movements of the period, and later into the nationalist movement. The early sociologists, like other intellectuals of the times, were deeply concerned with the question of the ‘nation’ and its future, and their understanding of Indian society was shaped by these broader discourses of social reform and nationalism.

Ghurye’s sociology drew heavily on the traditions of British and German Orientalism that had emerged out of eighteenth-century European debates on the nature and origin of ‘civilisation’ and the West’s fascination with what were thought to be the earliest civilisations—Greece and Egypt. The early British Orientalists sought to reconstruct ancient Indian civilisation through the study of Sanskrit texts, and they regarded it as one of the oldest and most highly developed civilisations.²⁴ The Orientalist discourse, which was ‘dialogically produced’ by European scholars through interaction with Brahmin pandits, identified ancient Indian civilisation with Brahminical Hinduism as embodied in Sanskrit texts and placed Brahmins at the centre of the social order.²⁵ The idea that contemporary society had degenerated from a pristine and glorious Vedic past was derived from both the Brahminical notion of *kalyug* and the Enlightenment conviction that the highest civilisations lay in the ancient past. In this discourse, Muslims were seen as foreign conquerors and despotic rulers responsible for the destruction of a virtuous and enlightened Indian civilisation. Moreover, these scholars regarded the ancient texts as accurate guides to the organisation of the traditional Hindu social order and even for contemporary society, as was done with the codification of Hindu law (Cohn 1987: 143). The strong link

²⁴ Scholars also searched for cultural and linguistic links between India and other ancient civilisations: some believed that the culture of ancient Greece had been transferred to India, while others regarded Sanskrit as the ‘pure unchanged language of ancient Egypt’ (Trautmann 1997: 82)—an argument that is echoed in early twentieth-century diffusionism.

²⁵ See Cohn (1987), Irschick (1994), and Rocher (1994).

made by Orientalist scholarship between the ancient Hindu past and the present has profoundly shaped the modern understanding of Indian society and history (Rocher 1994: 242), including the sociology of Ghurye (as discussed below).

The construction of the Indo-European or 'Aryan' language family through the work of comparative philologists in the early nineteenth century brought the category of the 'Aryan' to the centre of Orientalist discourse, culminating in the 'Aryan invasion' theory of Indian history.²⁶ According to this theory, India was invaded by civilised 'Aryan' tribes who conquered and then destroyed or assimilated the 'dasas', or indigenous non-Aryan dark races. The 'noble stamp of the Caucasian race' is seen in the Brahmins, while the 'lower classes of Hindus consist of . . . aboriginal inhabitants' (Müller, quoted in Trautmann 1997: 175). The Aryan invasion theory, together with the Orientalist construction of Hindu society, formed the discursive basis of the various social and religious reform, revivalist, and nationalist movements that proliferated in the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁷ This theory also underwrote Ghurye's main thesis that Indian civilisation was formed through the slow assimilation of non-Aryan groups to Aryan or Vedic culture (discussed below).

The social reform movement that swept through western India in the nineteenth century provided yet another major source of social thought. The social reform debates in many ways prefigured sociology in constituting 'society' as an object of contemplation and action.

²⁶ The originally linguistic categories of 'Indo-Aryan' and 'Dravidian' were reshaped by late nineteenth-century race theory into racial categories, producing what Trautmann terms the 'racial theory of Indian civilisation' (1997: 191) that was popularised especially by Max Müller. Müller argued that the 'Aryan nations have become the rulers of history and it seems to be their mission to link all parts of the world together by the chains of civilization and religion' (Müller, quoted in Chakravarti 1993: 40). Also see Bayly (1995).

²⁷ The Orientalist glorification of the Vedas, ancient Indian society, and Hinduism were also important elements in the construction of Hindu nationalism from the 1870s onwards, culminating in the formation of the RSS and allied organisations (Chakravarti 1993; Jaffrelot 1996; Thapar 1989). I have discussed the parallels between these ideological currents and Ghurye's conception of Indian society in detail elsewhere (Upadhyaya 2002).

Drawing upon nineteenth-century European intellectual trends, including Comte's positivism and the liberalism and utilitarianism of Bentham, Mill, and Spencer, the early social reformers espoused Western liberal values and argued that society should be based on reason, justice, and equality.²⁸ The discourse of reform was threaded with the language of late-nineteenth-century sociology: for instance, Ranade wrote that their aim was a change from 'status to contract, from authority to reason' (quoted in Phadke 1989: 5). The reformers, most of whom were Poona Brahmins, were intensely concerned with understanding how Indian society came to be formed and how it could be re-formed to adapt to the modern world while retaining its essential difference. Their problem was to reconstitute Indian society to make it both 'modern', by recognising universal rights, and 'Indian', by preserving Hindu traditions and law.²⁹ But the reform movement, like sociology later, focused primarily on issues related to Brahminical and patriarchal norms and kinship structures, such as the widow remarriage and age of consent controversies, while largely ignoring the question of caste. Intellectuals such as M.G. Ranade espoused a liberal-reformist view of caste, arguing that the caste system had played an integrative role in the past but had become ossified over time, and that it would gradually disintegrate with the spread of education, liberal ideas, and economic progress (Chakravarti 1998: 104; Dobbin 1972: 75–6). The notion that caste belongs to 'traditional' society but will disappear of its own accord after the achievement of self-rule is echoed in Ghurye's sociology and in the writing of several sociologists who followed him (Upadhyaya n.d.).

By the 1880s social reform was giving way to religious reform and revivalist movements as the intelligentsia turned to the study of Sanskrit religious texts and the Indian past (Dobbin 1972: 248–9).

²⁸ Comte's positivism also inspired the formation of the Bengal Social Science Association in 1867, which became a centre for discussions on sociology and science (Prakash 2000: 58). Spencer's *Sociology* was another influential text among social reformers (Phadke 1989: 7).

²⁹ On the social reform movement, see Chakravarti (1998), Dobbin (1972), and Jagirdar (1963). For a broader discussion of the political and ideological agendas of the Western-educated elite in nineteenth-century western India, see Naregal (2000, 2001). Also see Prakash (2000) on the cultivation of modern science by the new elite and its relation to social reform and Hindu revivalism.

Ranade, for example, ultimately rejected the utilitarian materialism of his youth in favour of a notion of spiritual and moral progress (Jagirdar 1963).³⁰ By appropriating the discourse of science and rationality and deploying it for the rejuvenation of religious tradition, the Western-educated elite 'gave ideological direction and force to the emergence of an Indian modernity, and defined it in a predominantly Hindu and Sanskritic idiom' (Prakash 2000: 85). This tendency to move seamlessly from liberalism and rationalism to a conservative religious understanding of Indian society is found in Ghurye's thought as well (as will be discussed below). Similarly, the social reform discourse, with its focus on religion as a source of solidarity and transformation and on the institutions of family and patriarchy as repositories of Hindu tradition, and its attempt to reconstitute tradition within modernity, shows striking parallels with Ghurye's sociology.³¹

GHURYE'S CULTURAL-HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY

Ghurye developed a cultural-historical approach to sociology that in many ways reflects how English-educated high-caste intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries conceptualised

³⁰ In 1885 Ranade wrote: 'We Hindus love Dharma more than our lives; and whatever be the value of the opinions of Mill and Spencer to England, for India they are of no use' (quoted in Jagirdar 1963: 12). One manifestation of this ideological shift was the founding of a theistic religious society, the Prarthana Samaj, in 1867 by members of the English-educated Brahmin elite, including Bhandarkar, Ranade, and Chandavarkar. The philosophy of the Samaj, which had links to the Brahmo Samaj, was developed by Bhandarkar and Ranade and drew upon both Western and Vedic philosophy. Although the Samaj claimed universal appeal, all the leading members were Chitpavan or Saraswat Brahmins who believed in gradual social reform based on religion (Dobbin 1972: 249–52; Jagirdar 1963: 7–8).

³¹ Irawati Karve's genealogy of sociology and anthropology in Maharashtra begins with social reformers and nationalists such as Ranade, Tilak, and Gokhale; see Nandini Sundar's essay, this volume. Yogendra Singh (1986: 5) also argues that the first generation of sociologists were influenced by the ideology of the nineteenth-century social reform movements as well as by nationalism, which foregrounded the question of cultural identity (1986: 11). See also Srinivas and Panini (1973: 181).

their society through social reform debates and the emergent ideology of nationalism. 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. As noted above, there is considerable overlap between the diffusionist proposition that superior races transmit civilisation through conquest and the Aryan invasion theory of Indian history. Ghurye's extensive utilisation of ancient texts is often attributed to his academic training in Sanskrit, but judging from his earlier education at Elphinstone and his list of favourite books,³² his intellectual interests were also formed by the broader European debate, located primarily within anthropology, about the origins and development of civilisation. This intellectual orientation was reinforced and structured by his Cambridge experience, where he found in diffusionism a compatible theoretical framework.³³ While his sociology contains elements of Orientalism as well as diffusionism, its basic orientation can be characterised as cultural nationalism. Ghurye pursued the comparative study and history of all major civilisations,³⁴ but his primary interest was the reconstruction of Indian society and history, through which he attempted to locate the sources of contemporary social institutions in the distant past.

Ghurye's sociology of Indian civilisation is clearly outlined in his first book, *Caste and race in India* (1932), in which he attempts to explain the origins and spread of caste through the examination of extensive historical, archaeological, and anthropometric evidence. The book essentially represents a refinement of the Aryan invasion

³² Apart from Bell's *Civilisation*, Ghurye was influenced by A.N. Whitehead's *Adventure of ideas*, J.B. Bury's *Idea of progress*, as well as the work of G.M. Trevelyan and Bertrand Russell (Pillai 1996: 93–4). The remainder of his book collection (many were lost), now in the Bombay University Library, is eclectic. It includes the usual anthropological and sociological classics, a number of standard books of history and political philosophy, some English literature, several Marathi novels, a few contemporary works by Indian sociologists such as Radhakamal Mukerjee, and several sex manuals (perhaps collected for his research on Indian sexuality).

³³ This argument is developed more fully in Upadhyaya (2002).

³⁴ As seen for example in *Culture and society* (1947), *Occidental civilisation* (1948), and *Cities and civilisation* (1962a).

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 'Brahmanic variety' of the Indo-Aryan civilisation. The caste system, he suggests, originated in the attempt by the Indo-Aryan Brahmins to maintain their purity by keeping themselves apart from the local population through endogamy and ritual restrictions (Ghurye 1969: 125). Like earlier British ethnologists, Ghurye also argues that caste derives from the *varna* classification of the early Vedic age, which purportedly referred to skin colour and differentiated the 'arya' from the 'dasa'. However, he rejects the extreme racial theory of caste propounded by Risley and other British ethnologists, and suggests that Brahminism and the caste system spread throughout India as cultural traits rather than through large-scale physical migration of Aryan Brahmins.³⁵

In *Caste and race* Ghurye identifies Brahminism and the caste system as the essential features of Indian civilisation and traces their origin to the Indo-Aryan civilisation in the Gangetic plain. In subsequent work, such as *Family and kin in Indo-European culture* (1955a), *Two Brahmanical institutions: Gotra and charana* (1972), and *Vedic India* (1979b), he extends this thesis by tracing the origins of several institutions and cultural practices to the Vedic age. Ghurye's usual strategy in these books is to examine traditional knowledge systems, religious practices, social organisation, and law as represented in Sanskrit sources in tandem with a discussion of contemporary practices, suggesting continuities between the present and the distant past. In *Gotra and charana* (1972), for example, he investigates the origin, history, and spread of these 'Brahmanical institutions' of exogamy through an exhaustive study of Sanskrit literature and

³⁵ Ghurye criticises specific features of Risley's (1908) theory and methodology and argues that in all the linguistic areas apart from Hindustan, 'the physical type of the population is mixed, and does not conform in its gradation to the scale of social precedence of the various castes' (1969: 124). However, he accepts the overall framework of racial categorisation as valid. The chapter on race was dropped in the second and third editions (entitled *Caste and class in India*); the fourth edition became *Caste, class and occupation*, and in the fifth edition the chapter on race was restored along with the original title (Pillai 1997: 41). On Ghurye's critique of Risley, see Dirks (1997).

inscriptions from different periods, ending with contemporary information on exogamous practices in several communities. Similarly, in *Family and kin* Ghurye argues that the Vedic-Aryan people had the joint family, with four generations living under one roof and sharing food and property (1955a: 47)—clearly suggesting that the ideal Hindu family has its origin in ancient India.³⁶

A central concern of Ghurye's sociology was to demonstrate the unity and antiquity of Indian civilisation. He believed that Hinduism is at the centre of India's civilisational unity and that at the core of Hinduism are Brahminical ideas and values that are essential for the integration of society (Pramanick 1994; Venugopal 1986). For Ghurye, as for the early Orientalist writers, it was through religion that Indian civilisation was formed, as diverse groups were assimilated to Brahminical Hinduism and incorporated into the 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 that of late-nineteenth-century intellectuals such as Ranade, who believed that the Aryans were the 'chosen race' and that Brahminism was the Aryan faith that had united India in ancient times (Chakravarti 1998: 102–4). 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 basis of the nation—a sociological view that underwrote his later political writings.³⁷

The influence of nationalism and Ghurye's desire to locate the unity of the nation sociologically become most evident in his well-known book, *The aborigines, so-called and their future* (1943, republished as *The scheduled tribes* [1959]), in which he attacks the colonial tribal policy of protectionism. Ghurye, like other nationalists,

³⁶ The concept of the 'Hindu joint family', which originated in the formulation of Hindu personal law by the colonial state, became a major theme of Indian sociology.

³⁷ I have discussed elsewhere (Upadhyaya n.d.) Ghurye's political views as expressed in his 'trilogy on Indian political society' (Ghurye 1978: vii), three books on current issues written after his retirement (Ghurye 1968b, 1974, 1978).

regarded the creation of 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded' tribal areas as a colonial strategy of divide and rule. In *Aborigines* he criticises the view of anthropologist Verrier Elwin and several British administrators that the Indian tribes are culturally distinct from caste Hindus and that their way of life should be preserved through state-enforced isolation from Hindu society. Unlike most anthropologists, Ghurye also critiqued the tribe/caste distinction itself and regarded tribals as 'imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society' or 'Backward Hindus' (Ghurye 1959: 19) rather than aborigines. The basis of this argument was his thesis—derived from the Aryan invasion argument developed in *Caste and race*—that Indian civilisation has been constituted by the slow incorporation of non-Aryan or non-Hindu groups to brahminical Hinduism and the caste system. In Ghurye's view, the natural process of 'assimilation of smaller groups of different cultures into larger ones' (ibid.: xi) had been upset by colonialism, and groups that had not been 'properly assimilated' appeared to be different from caste Hindus and were mistakenly labelled by the colonial rulers as 'tribes'. Accordingly, against the stance of Elwin and other anthropologists, he advocated a policy of greater integration of tribals into the 'mainstream' rather than protection of cultural diversity.³⁸

Apart from its historical orientation, a basic feature of Ghurye's sociology was its emphasis on what he identified as the fundamental social institutions—family, kinship, and religion—because he regarded them as central to social and cultural integration. In a lecture delivered at the Gokhale Institute in Pune in 1938, entitled 'The social process', Ghurye argued that the only institution that can create a suitable environment for a smooth and harmonious relation between the individual and society is the family (Pramanick 1994: 84).³⁹ He

³⁸ Ghurye's views on the 'tribal' problem are discussed further in Upadhyaya (n.d.). On the debate between Ghurye and Elwin, see Guha (1996, 1999) and Singh (1996).

³⁹ Ghurye's interest in the family extended to questions of population as well as eugenics. He believed, at least in his early writings, that marriage should be organised so as to breed better individuals: 'Appreciation of heredity and inculcation of eugenic doctrines is perhaps best achieved through the importance attached to the family group' (Ghurye 1963b: 186).

also believed that kinship terms help to identify the social obligations and duties of the individual towards others in society (ibid.: 88). This emphasis on institutions of family, kinship, caste, and religion, usually in their Brahminical forms, which echoes the discourse of social reform, was to become a hallmark of mainstream sociology (see following sections).⁴⁰

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' would speak for themselves.⁴¹ His books are loaded with information, often poorly organised, 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 fieldwork himself, mainly due to ill health. However, he encouraged his students to do fieldwork and directed significant field-based studies of social change in rural India and the impact of urbanisation (Ghurye 1960a, 1963a), as well as an ethnographic study of the Mahadev Kolis (1957a).⁴² Ghurye probably imbibed this stress on empirical fieldwork from his Cambridge training under Rivers. However, Rivers himself was not a pure empiricist: his 'conversion' to diffusionism and his work on the depopulation of Melanesia reflect his historical orientation. Ghurye, like Rivers, never adopted wholesale the naturalism and empiricism that became established in British social anthropology after Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, which rejected historical and broad comparative theorising in favour of small-scale, intensive, and synchronic studies (Stocking 1984, 1995). Instead, he attempted to

⁴⁰ Although Ghurye had a long-standing interest in kinship, he did not publish a book on the subject until *Family and kin in Indo-European culture* (1955a). But according to Kapadia (1954: xiii), kinship systems dominated his lectures on social institutions from the beginning of his career.

⁴¹ *Whither India?* (Ghurye 1974) begins with the following quotation from Lord Bryce: 'It is facts that are needed: Facts, Facts, Facts. When facts have been supplied, each of us can try to reason from them.'

⁴² His major field experience was an archaeological excavation in Sind in 1936 and Gujarat in 1937 (Ghurye 1973: 324–5). He also organised survey research, for example on the 'Sex habits of a sample of middle class people of Bombay' (Ghurye 1938b) and the working life of Bombay suburbanites (1964).

combine older humanistic approaches to the study of human society, through history, language, and literature, with the more 'scientific' or empirical approach of modern anthropology.

Ghurye's publication output was steady, but thicker towards the end of his life than during the early years of his career. His best-known book, *Caste and race in India*, was published in 1932,⁴³ while his second book, *The aborigines so-called and their future*, came out in 1943. Between his appointment to Bombay University in 1924 and the publication of *Aborigines*, his work appeared primarily in the form of articles in various journals—eighteen papers on topics ranging from population to kinship to the sexual habits of the middle class.⁴⁴ After *Aborigines* he published nine books and a number of articles up to his retirement in 1959; after retiring he produced another seventeen books, not including new editions of earlier books (see list of references). Apart from the first edition of *Caste and race*, all his books were published in India, and after his first two papers that were published from Cambridge in British journals, Ghurye never again published in foreign journals—a fact that he notes without explanation in his autobiography (1973: 109).⁴⁵

It is difficult to gauge the direct impact of Ghurye's thought on sociological theory and practice in India. Despite publishing thirty-one books and forty-seven papers and other writings over a span of

⁴³ Four revised editions and eleven reprints of *Caste and race* have appeared subsequently.

⁴⁴ Many of these early articles are collected in *Anthropo-sociological papers* (1963b).

⁴⁵ It is perhaps relevant to the history of the profession to note that after his first book, published from London, Ghurye never had to go through a peer review process in publishing his books. Early in his career he developed a close personal relationship with the owners of Popular Book Depot, G.R. Bhatkal and his sons, Sadanand and Ramdas, and almost all his books were published by them (Popular Prakashan). The University Sociology Series was also distributed by them. Sadanand Bhatkal recalls that in 'the sixties and the seventies he gave us manuscripts at the rate of one book a year—a schedule which was difficult for us to keep' (Bhatkal 1996: 35). However, it should be noted here that not only Ghurye but many other senior and well-known sociologists as well were published without peer review. At that time perhaps only Oxford University Press (OUP) had a consistent policy of peer review.

fifty years, only his *Caste and race in India* and *The scheduled tribes* have been extensively read and taught. As I argue below, it was primarily through research guidance and teaching that Ghurye was able to institutionalise 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. Ghurye wrote on topics as diverse as caste (Ghurye 1932, 1969), family and kinship (1923a, 1936a, 1955a, 1955b), population (1925a, 1925b, 1934, 1938 [with A.P. Pillay]), archaeology (1936b, 1937a, 1939), tribes (1943, 1957a, 1963c), the comparative study of culture and civilisations (1947, 1948, 1960d, 1962a, 1965b), religion (1953c, 1962b, 1965a, 1979a), sexual behaviour (1938b, 1954, 1956b), ancient India and Indian cultural history (1955a, 1972, 1977, 1979b), Indian costume (1951, 1958a), urban studies (1953a, 1956a, 1960c, 1962a, 1963a, 1964), social change (1952c, 1960a, 1961), architecture (1968a), and contemporary politics (1943, 1968b, 1974, 1978, 1980). While his range of interests was extensive, with the passage of time he increasingly concentrated on religion and turned to Sanskrit texts for the analysis of Indian culture. Although Ghurye's approach was heavily Indological, he was also a pioneer of sociological studies of religion in India, exemplified in *Indian sadhus*, in which he analyses the social and political roles of ascetics (Ghurye 1953c; Venugopal 1996).⁴⁶

Ghurye interacted with several American and European sociologists through correspondence, exchange of books and papers, and participation in the International Sociological Association, but his own practice of sociology was scarcely affected by external influences.⁴⁷ He was not oblivious to new theories, but he did not appreciate the functionalist revolution ushered into British social anthropology by Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski because of its neglect of history. He argued that Rivers' approach was superior to the new theories because it combined both historical and functional

⁴⁶ In this book Ghurye reiterates Ranade's thesis that Ramdas had a political mission to fight the 'Islamic onslaught that was threatening the Hindu culture in Maharashtra at that time' (1953c: 66).

⁴⁷ In 1979 Ghurye said that he had worked out his plan of research and writing in the first few years of his career and never deviated from it (Pramanick 1994: 14).

explanations (Pramanick 1994: 226). In this Ghurye was perhaps ahead of his times. Diffusionism is often portrayed as an embarrassing aberration in the history of anthropology, but as Joan Vincent has argued, it also represented a broader historical and contextual approach that attempted to trace historical links among peoples and assess the effects of culture contact, especially between colonial powers and dominated people (Vincent 1990: 116–23). With the triumph of functionalism and fieldwork as the hegemonic theory and method of British social anthropology, history—especially the history of colonialism—was for many years banished from the discipline, only to be rediscovered in the 1980s. Ghurye's imperviousness to changing intellectual trends probably stemmed from his conviction (never explicitly expressed) that he had already discovered an appropriate framework for the study of Indian society, that a deep indigenous knowledge of Indian society and culture (including Sanskrit) was a necessity for such study, and that Indian sociology should not be dependent on imported theories but should find its own path.

III. THE INSTITUTIONALISATION AND PROFESSIONALISATION OF SOCIOLOGY

New forms of knowledge are likely to become historically significant only when they become embedded in and reproduced and disseminated through institutions. In this and the following section, I examine the institutional mechanisms through which Ghurye's conception of sociology came to dominate the discipline for a number of years. While the sociology that he invented was transmitted through the medium of the syllabus, research guidance, and department publications at Bombay, the discipline became professionalised largely through the establishment of the Indian Sociological Society.

TEACHING OF SOCIOLOGY AT BOMBAY

A review of changes in syllabi over time provides some indication of how a discipline has developed. However, compared to the contemporary situation, the older syllabi available are usually short general outlines of the prescribed course rather than detailed guides, suggesting that teachers had considerable freedom to mould courses according to their inclinations. In the case of the Bombay University

Sociology Department, for many years there were only two teachers—Ghurye and Thoothi—which must have imparted a high degree of consistency to the course. This consistency was also reflected in the syllabus, which was revised only twice during Ghurye's tenure as head.

The first traceable sociology syllabus of Bombay University (presumably designed by Geddes) appears in the 1922–3 *University handbook*. It included four papers that were to be combined with four papers in economics for the MA degree: Nature and Scope of Sociology, Social Institutions, Indian Social Institutions, and an Essay.⁴⁸ The original course incorporated some topics on the stages of culture and civilisation—a subject not usually included in Anglophone sociology. This is because, according to Ghurye, 'Geddes' Comtist inclination led him to introduce the study of stages of culture and civilisation in Sociology' (1957b: 7). This syllabus apparently

⁴⁸ The description of the papers in the syllabus is very brief, and there are no prescribed readings:

Paper I: Nature and scope of sociology. Origin and progress of sociology; social evolution; influence of physical, biological, and other factors on social life; etc; prehistorical and historical periods.

Paper II: Social institutions. Topics include: (1) forms of social organisation such as occupation, property, slavery, class; (2) 'other forms of social organisation' including sex and family; descent; education; tribe, caste, race; nation and state; village, town, city; etc; (3) religion; (4) social order and law.

Paper III: Indian social institutions. Village, caste, family, marriage, depressed classes, etc; also includes topics such as 'foreign elements', 'assimilation and segregation', 'influence of Mahomedans on Indian institutions'; 'effects of British rule on Indian society'.

Paper IV: Essay.

This syllabus is taken from the *Handbook of the University of Bombay*, 1937. Because I could not find an earlier handbook with the syllabus included, it is not clear whether all these topics were spelled out in the earlier syllabi. However, the paper titles mentioned in the *Handbook* remained the same from 1922 till 1940. I.P. Desai gives a somewhat different list of the four sociology papers offered when he was studying at Bombay University in the mid-1930s, when it was still a combined course with Economics: I. Principles of sociology; II. Caste rank, marriage and family; III. Pre-history, Indian ethnology, and archaeology; and IV. Essay (Desai 1981: 17).

remained in force until 1945, which means that the original syllabus designed by Geddes was taught by Ghurye and Thoothi for nearly twenty years. However, the topics prescribed were very broad and there were no prescribed texts, which suggests that Ghurye was able to teach sociology according to his own inclinations even before the first syllabus revision.

The syllabus was revised in 1945 in connection with the long-awaited addition of two positions for lecturers, in social psychology and sociology (Ghurye 1973: 109).⁴⁹ With the syllabus revision, MA Sociology was offered as a full course of eight papers for the first time, although it was still possible to combine subjects. At this point Ghurye introduced several new papers, including Culture and Civilisation, Social Biology, Social Psychology, and Comparative Social Institutions (*ibid.*), and retained versions of original papers such as Social Institutions and Indian Sociology.⁵⁰ The syllabus

⁴⁹ It is not clear in which year the syllabus was actually revised: one source gives 1943, another mentions 1940 (Savur n.d.: 23), while according to Ghurye it was 1945. I have not been able to trace the University Handbooks for the relevant years.

⁵⁰ The eight papers in the revised M.A. (entire) course were:

SOCIOLOGY. Paper I: General sociology. Nature and scope of sociology; classification of sciences and arts; social sciences and arts; nature of society; individual and society; groups and their inter-relations; race and society; theories of society.

Paper II: Social biology. Biology and sociology; man—his descent and ascent; ABC of genetics; heredity and environment; the development of man; races of man; behaviour in evolution; nature-nurture, culture.

Paper III: Social psychology. Emergence of the psychology of society; the psychology of society; general view of its place among humanistic studies; psychologies of today; thus we are human; mind and society; character and culture.

Paper IV: Indian sociology. Ashrams; marriage and family; caste; backward classes.

ADVANCED SOCIOLOGY. Paper I: Civilisation. Egypt, Mesopotamia, Europe, China: Civilisation and culture.

Paper II: Social institutions (advanced study). Marriage, family, property, rank.

content betrays a strong emphasis on the study of social institutions, especially those of kinship, family, and caste, as well as the comparative study of civilisations and culture. It also reflects Ghurye's empiricist bias in its wholesale neglect of theory and even research methodology.⁵¹ Significantly, the revised syllabus retained much of the old one, while the new papers incorporated the kind of anthropology that Ghurye had studied at Cambridge in the 1920s rather than introducing contemporary debates or alternative theoretical perspectives. Ghurye continued to teach mainly from classical texts, including even nineteenth-century anthropology, rather than contemporary work.⁵²

A hallmark of Ghurye's sociology syllabus was the inclusion of topics and papers that are usually the province of anthropology,⁵³ especially the papers on the Archaeology and Ethnology of India and Social Biology. The latter combined 'the significant data of Biology, Ethnology, Demography, and Human Ecology under one heading' (Ghurye 1957b: 12).⁵⁴ This design reflected Ghurye's conviction

Paper III: (a) Social problems (with special reference to India). Education, crime. (b) Hindu and Muslim social thought.

Paper IV: Archaeology and Ethnology of India.

⁵¹ According to I.P. Desai, research methodology was not taught at Bombay University in Ghurye's time (1981: 197), and a paper on classical sociological theory—now a standard part of sociology courses—was not introduced till a decade after his retirement (Savur n.d.: 32).

⁵² Among the books recommended by Ghurye to his students in the 1930s were *Development of social theory* by Lichtenberger, Westermarck's *History of human marriage*, Russell's *Marriage and morals*, Trevelyn's *British social history*, as well as the work of Briffault and Hobhouse (Desai 1981: 17).

⁵³ Ghurye argued that with the widening of scope of the subject, a new term is needed for sociology; following Roger Williams he suggests 'Humanics', or the science of human beings: 'Humanics should be the department or knowledge-system under which Criminology, Cultural Anthropology, Social Anthropology, Social Biology, Social Psychology and Sociology may fittingly be grouped' (1957b: 15).

⁵⁴ Ghurye taught the Social Biology paper and used it to acquaint students with the question of nature *vs.* nurture, an important task in a caste-ridden

that in the Indian context the distinction between anthropology and sociology is artificial. One reason for his controversial position on this subject (other sociologists and anthropologists have argued for a strict separation) may be the fact that anthropology in India had come to be defined as the study of 'tribes', while sociologists studied the 'civilised' peoples of India. However Ghurye, as noted above, contested the caste-tribe distinction itself and, by extension, the sociology-anthropology divide. He encouraged his students to pursue the study of tribal groups and himself wrote on the 'aboriginal' issue (Ghurye 1943).

Another distinctive feature of the syllabus was a paper on the comparative study of world civilisations. Ghurye argued that an anthropology or sociology course must include a paper on the 'comparative study of culture and another on comparative social institutions of pre-literate, ancient-civilized and modern nations' (Ghurye 1935a: 102), as was done in the Civilisation paper.⁵⁵ He wrote that the study of early civilisations would benefit Indian students by enabling them 'to avoid a sense of inferiority or of complacency whose manifestations are detrimental to our national integration' (ibid.: 98). More broadly, this approach reflected his conviction that the study of Indian society was by definition the study of Indian civilisation in all its historical complexity. Ghurye taught the Civilisation paper from 1924 to 1951, and his book *Religious consciousness* (1965a) was based on his illustrated lectures for this course which were, according to him, 'much liked by many students' (ibid.: vi).

society. The paper was dropped after Ghurye's retirement (interview with S. Devadas Pillai, 30 May 2001).

⁵⁵ The comparative study of civilisations was not a usual topic in anthropology courses in Britain or elsewhere, although Geddes had also advocated this broad approach. By the 1920s anthropology had come to be defined narrowly as the study of pre-literate peoples (in contrast to the work of nineteenth-century proto-anthropologists such as Maine), and even the archaeology that was taught within anthropology departments pertained only to prehistory, or the study of non-literate and non-Western cultures, while classicists and Orientalists studied ancient civilisations such as Egypt and Greece (Urry 1993). See Ghurye (1935a).

Perhaps because anthropology was already closely blended with sociology in the sociology syllabus, a separate paper on anthropology was not introduced at Bombay until after Ghurye's retirement. Moreover, a separate anthropology department was never established in the university, again perhaps due to Ghurye's belief that anthropology and sociology should be combined.⁵⁶ Ghurye did attempt to expand the institutional base of anthropology in the university, but he was not successful. For example, when the University Grants Commission asked for proposals for the academic development of Bombay University to celebrate its centenary, Ghurye submitted a plan that included a reader's post in anthropology and the 'creation of a Museum, illustrating [the] Cultural History of Mankind' (Ghurye 1980: 51). The post of Reader in Anthropology was finally sanctioned a few years after Ghurye's retirement, but funds for the museum were not forthcoming.

The syllabus was revised once more before Ghurye's retirement, in 1955, when the School was split into separate departments (Ghurye 1973: 151), but this was only a 'slight' modification (Ghurye 1957b: 7) made by the addition of two new papers—Industrial Sociology and Urban Sociology (Ghurye 1973: 151). This tendency to carry on with the same syllabus for many years is of course not unusual, as it is an outcome of the academic structure of Indian universities and the rules of the revision process. In addition, Ghurye himself

⁵⁶ The members of the Bombay Anthropological Society, who took an interest in this issue, also did not feel the necessity for a separate anthropology department in Bombay University; instead they encouraged the Sociology Department to include social anthropology in the syllabus and to conduct research on tribal problems (Rao 1974: xxvi–xxvii). The first anthropology department in the country was established at the University of Calcutta in 1920, followed by Lucknow, where anthropology was taught in the Department of Economics and Sociology from the 1920s (Rao 1974: xxiv–xxv). Bombay was the first university in the country to offer a postgraduate course in sociology in 1919, followed by Calcutta and Lucknow in 1921 (Pramanick 1994: 236; Rao 1974: xxxi–xxxii). In 1956 Ghurye wrote: 'It augurs well for India that if, in Bombay, sociology includes social anthropology, in Calcutta, social anthropology is extended to include sociology to some extent as perhaps the source of inspiration came from the same teacher' (1956c: 154, quoted in Pramanick 1994: 221–2). He is referring to Rivers, with whom both he and Chattopadhyay studied.

complained that the combination of departments within the School hindered the process of revision, because non-sociologists could take decisions on departmental matters (*ibid.*). However, university rules affect all departments equally, and sociology is often regarded as being peculiarly prone to the rigid reproduction of received knowledge—a tendency that was manifested even in the discipline's early years.

Ghurye's sociology course exercised influence far beyond the Bombay department, for the Bombay syllabus was widely adopted by other universities in western India when they started teaching sociology, and it remained the standard syllabus for a long time.⁵⁷ This was a major avenue through which sociology, as conceived by Ghurye, became institutionalised within the discipline, at least until the triumph of structure-functionalism. Another reason for the disproportionate influence of the Bombay school on the development of the discipline is that it was the first university to offer a degree in sociology and the first to introduce MA Sociology as a full course of eight papers. Elsewhere, sociology continued for a long time as part of a combined course, usually with economics (Pramanick 1994: 244). Moreover, until 1950 there were only a half dozen departments teaching sociology and anthropology, and Bombay was the only centre of postgraduate research in sociology in the country (Srinivas and Panini 1973: 194).

GHURYE'S RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The colonial state's original notion that the School of Economics and Sociology at Bombay University would carry out useful social and economic surveys was implemented more by the Economics Department than by Sociology, whose only government-funded project during Ghurye's time was the study of the Mahadev Kolis

⁵⁷ Although it was usual to copy the Bombay syllabus, when Srinivas joined M.S. University in Baroda as Professor in 1951 he resolved not to teach this syllabus because it 'had not been revised for some years' and he had his 'own conception of Sociology'. He designed a new syllabus before starting the M.A. programme, prescribing more up-to-date texts and topics, but, like Ghurye's syllabus, his focused on 'Indian social institutions . . . in a comparative context' and combined anthropology with sociology (Srinivas 1998: 29).

(Ghurye 1957a). Most of the research produced in the department was in the form of MA and PhD dissertations and Ghurye's own work. Although research guidance was a prominent feature of the department, there were no collective departmental projects under his stewardship, largely due to lack of funds.⁵⁸

From 1927 Bombay University allowed students to submit a thesis in one subject in lieu of the eight papers for the MA degree, although the normal pattern was four papers in sociology combined with four in either economics or history/politics. In the same year, four MA theses were forwarded by Ghurye (1973: 70), and from then on there was a steady research output from his department. The PhD programme was started in 1936, and the first PhD in sociology was awarded to G.R. Pradhan in the same year—the first PhD in the university and the first PhD in sociology in all of India (Pillai 1997: 400). A total of about eighty theses (25 MA and 55 PhD) were produced under Ghurye's supervision.⁵⁹ Although those who fell out with Ghurye (and there were many) paint a negative picture of his personality, he must have had some positive qualities as a teacher and research guide to be able to attract and sustain the productivity of so many students, many of whom were devoted to him. According to one close observer, Ghurye ran his department like a *gurukul*: he treated his students like members of his family but expected from them in return 'not just reverence but total dedication' (Bhatkal 1996: 36).

The hallmarks of Ghurye's sociology—an Indological approach to the study of Indian society combined with empiricism and an emphasis on fieldwork—were reflected in the work of his students. Students who knew Sanskrit analysed ancient and contemporary

⁵⁸ The closest to a collective effort was a planned comparative study of 'Town-country relations' in Gujarat and Maharashtra, the former to be carried out by K.M. Kapadia in Navsari and the latter by Ghurye in the hinterland of Pune. Although the project was not completed, data collected by Ghurye were published in *After a century and a quarter: Lonikand then and now* (1960a) and *Anatomy of a rururban community* (1963a).

⁵⁹ This is the conclusion of Pillai's efforts to compile a list of theses produced under Ghurye and Ghurye's own count; however, complete information is not available (Pillai 1997: 400).

social customs and norms through the study of classical texts (Srinivas 1973: 136), while the rest (the majority) were sent to various regions of India to pursue rigorous fieldwork on a wide range of topics, usually on a shoestring budget. Although Ghurye did little fieldwork himself, from his chair he 'directed a one-man ethnographic survey of India', as Srinivas put it (*ibid.*). He had students from all over India, and he encouraged them to carry out documentary and field research in their own regions where they had access to the local language and social connections. One motivation for this enterprise, as well as for his empiricist orientation, was Ghurye's conviction that British ethnologists had produced a completely skewed view of Indian society that needed to be corrected, and that this could be done only by thoroughly collecting 'the facts' about India's cultural and social landscape.⁶⁰ According to Srinivas, Ghurye 'laid the foundations of anthropology and sociology in India by encouraging his students to study every aspect and section of Indian society and culture' (Shah 2000: 634).

One of the main objectives of Ghurye's research programme was to document the cultural diversity of India, and at least twenty-six theses produced under Ghurye's guidance were socio-cultural or ethnographic studies of specific communities or localities.⁶¹ Typical thesis titles of this genre include M.N. d'Souza, 'Indian Christian community in Bombay' (MA, 1927); Irawati Karve's 'Chitpavan Brahmins: A social and ethnic study' (MA, 1928); L.N. Chapekar, 'Thakurs: An ethnic study' (PhD, 1949); G.S. Nepali, 'Newars of Nepal' (PhD, 1960); and K.B. Singh, 'Meities of Manipur' (PhD, 1964). Such community studies were being carried out by his students as late as the 1960s. Many of these dissertations echo standard British ethnology, in which 'culture' is defined as 'customs and manners' and cultural traditions delineate the community, as in 'Customs and manners of Central Punjab' (Usha Rani Kanal, MA 1947), 'Manners and customs of the Muslims of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh' (S.M. Haider, MA 1941), and 'Sindhi culture' (U.T. Thakur, PhD, 1944).

⁶⁰ S.D. Pillai, interview 18 March 2000.

⁶¹ The information on dissertations is drawn from the list compiled by Pillai (1997).

Apart from these general cultural and community studies, many of Ghurye's students focused on specific themes in their research, but even here the emphasis was on collecting rather than analysing data. The central themes of Ghurye's sociology—religious beliefs and practices, social customs, and cultural norms—were expanded upon by his students, who were guided to investigate how practices and beliefs varied across communities and regions. Next to community studies, the largest number of theses focused on what Ghurye had identified as the basic social institutions: religion (twelve theses) and family, kinship, and marriage (eleven). There were seven theses on social history, five on tribal communities, and four on urban issues; the remaining addressed a wide variety of other topics (see Pillai 1997: 395–400). Ghurye especially encouraged students who knew Sanskrit to work on the history of social institutions—for example, S.V. Karandikar's MA thesis (1927) 'Hindu exogamy', and K.M. Kapadia's PhD thesis (1938) 'Hindu kinship', as well as Karve's work on early Hindu kinship. Ghurye believed that without Sanskrit it was not possible to study Indian social history (Pramanick 1994: 220). Although most of his students followed his approach and accepted his advice on the selection of topics, Ghurye welcomed new ideas, and he guided research on relatively unexplored themes such as education and communication (Dhanagare 1993: 39). Several students took up completely novel topics, such as cinema (Panna Shah, 'Social study of the cinema in Bombay', PhD, 1949) and the media (P.M. Shah, 'Press and society in India', MA 1938).⁶² Most notably, A.R. Desai completed his well-known study of Indian nationalism

⁶² Savur suggests that Ghurye set his students to work on particular themes to gather data for the development of various sub-disciplines within sociology. Most of the students in the 1930s and 1940s did community studies or documented variations in kinship, family, and marriage patterns, thus filling in the 'mosaic' of India. Post-independence, Ghurye's students laid the groundwork for industrial sociology by studying aspects of industry and labour: they included S.B. Chirde, 'Industrial labour in Bombay: A socio-economic analysis' (PhD, 1949); M.P. Makharia, 'Social conditions of textile labour in Bombay with special reference to productivity' (PhD, 1959); and D.B. Unwalla, 'Human relations in factories' (PhD, 1958). Subsequently, a paper in Industrial Sociology was introduced in 1955 (Ghurye 1973: 151). Similarly, research work by

within a Marxist framework under Ghurye, a confirmed anti-communist.⁶³

The work of Ghurye and his students touched on political and economic issues such as labour relations and nationalism, but on the whole these spheres came to be excluded from sociology as it was practised at Bombay.⁶⁴ In the historical context of sociology's early years, it is striking that the range of topics was so restricted. A partial reason for this may have been the disciplinary structure of the social sciences everywhere, which tends to confine sociology's subject matter to those spheres of social life excluded by economics and political science. But in the case of Indian sociology, this narrowing of scope is also related to the discipline's implicit project of 'nation-building'. In Ghurye's hands, sociology's role was to define the nation through the study of its history, culture, and social order, rather than to elucidate relations of power, domination, or conflict (Upadhyaya n.d.).

GHURYE'S STUDENTS

There were two positions of research assistant in the Department of Sociology, and several of Ghurye's students worked for him while completing their theses. M.N. Srinivas was his assistant from 1942 to 1944, in which capacity he toured Tamil Nadu and Andhra to collect data on folklore (Srinivas 1973: 138). Ghurye was apparently a

Ghurye's students on cities and urban issues built up to a course in Urban Sociology started at the same time (Savur n.d.: 47).

⁶³ According to Pillai (1996: 93), Ghurye was a last resort for Desai, who had been refused by guides in history and other disciplines. Although Ghurye was far from being a Marxist, he gave Desai and other leftist students the freedom to pursue their own inclinations. Desai has said that Ghurye even showed him how to strengthen his argument.

⁶⁴ Six of Ghurye's students completed theses that can be classified under industrial sociology (concerned with labour, technology, or industrial relations) and two concerned specific occupational groups. Class relations were studied directly only by Y.B. Damle in his 'Social differentiation and differentiation in emoluments' (PhD thesis, 1950), and A.R. Desai in his thesis 'Social background of Indian nationalism' (PhD, 1945). It is perhaps significant that here also what was actually a study of class structure was styled as 'social background'.

hard taskmaster: he sent his student assistants to look up references and quotations in the library every day and even made them take dictation for two hours a day—a process Srinivas describes as ‘a tortuous sentence or two’ dictated by Ghurye followed by a ‘quote from Russell, Whitehead or other Western intellectual’ (Srinivas 1996: 10). When Srinivas began to feel overburdened and asked Ghurye to give him more time to work on his dissertation, he was summarily relieved of the position.⁶⁵ I.P. Desai replaced Srinivas and was sent to Bihar and Orissa to collect data for Ghurye’s project on Hindu fasts, feasts, and festivals (Desai 1981: 23). In addition to employing assistants to collect data, Ghurye used the work of his PhD students as sources of information for his own projects. For example, he encouraged his students to collect data on the religious beliefs and practices of the communities they studied regardless of their topics

⁶⁵ Srinivas and Ghurye had a ‘troubled relationship’ (Srinivas 1996). Srinivas later wrote of his feeling that under Ghurye he had become a ‘collector of discrete ethnographical facts without being able to integrate them into a meaningful framework’ (1973: 138). He also became dissatisfied with Ghurye’s historical approach and converted to structure-functionalism under A.R. Radcliffe-Brown’s influence at Oxford. Contending that Ghurye wanted him to study the Coorgs because they had ancestral tombs, which he thought might be due to the influence of ancient Egypt, he remarks: ‘I had started my career in sociology wanting to be a “theoretician” in sociology and I had ended up by becoming a “conjectural historian”’ (Srinivas 1996: 3). However, Srinivas’ criticism of Ghurye is in part an *ex post facto* defence against Ghurye’s attack on him for what he believed was Srinivas’ failure to properly acknowledge the source of the data for his Oxford PhD thesis, subsequently published as *The Coorgs* (1952). Srinivas completed his Bombay PhD in 1945 under Ghurye, and reworked the same Coorg data for his Oxford thesis completed in 1947 under Radcliffe-Brown. However, in the preface to *The Coorgs* (1952: xiii–xiv) he does not mention the earlier thesis, an omission that deeply distressed Ghurye (1973: 117–18). Ghurye attempts to demonstrate Srinivas’ indebtedness to him by quoting from letters written by Srinivas during his early weeks in Oxford (Ghurye 1973: 114–19). These letters show that Srinivas resisted Radcliffe-Brown’s functionalism at first and clung to Ghurye’s historical approach, and that, contrary to the impression conveyed in his published remarks on Ghurye, Srinivas became dissatisfied with Ghurye’s brand of sociology much after he left Bombay and not while he was his student.

(Pillai 1996: 79), and the information they gathered fed into Ghurye's own work on religion that culminated in books such as *Gods and men* (1962b). Although he guided many students and helped them to publish their research, he never collaborated or produced joint publications with students, but pursued his research agenda alone (Pramanick 1994: 245).

The roster of Ghurye's students who became prominent sociologists of the next generation includes M.N. Srinivas, I.P. Desai, K.M. Kapadia, 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. Given the large number of theses produced under Ghurye's guidance and the important positions attained by several of his students in the university system, it is not surprising that the themes identified by Ghurye as central to sociology—religion, caste, family, kinship—became staples of the discipline. There are marked continuities between the work of Ghurye and that of his most prominent students in their research interests, if not theoretical orientation: Irawati Karve worked on kinship and physical anthropology, M.N. Srinivas on caste, village, religion, and social change, I.P. Desai on family, kinship, and education, K.M. Kapadia on marriage and family, and M.S.A. Rao on urbanisation.⁶⁶ With regard to methodology also, Ghurye's influence showed in his students: Karve and Kapadia drew upon Sanskrit texts and other historical sources, combined with large-scale social surveys; I.P. Desai and Damle also carried out systematic, multidimensional survey research; and M.S.A. Rao developed a macrosociology of urbanisation (Mukherjee 1979: 68–9). Srinivas, in his teaching and practice, always emphasised the importance of empirical fieldwork for sociology—an orientation that he probably absorbed from Ghurye even prior to his exposure to Radcliffe-Brown. Also like Ghurye, Srinivas advocated the unity of sociology and social anthropology in the Indian context and stressed the study of social institutions (Panini 2000).

⁶⁶ Only A.R. Desai broke away from this tradition: as a Marxist theoretician and political activist, his research focused on nationalism, labour, agrarian sociology, and peasant struggles. See Sujata Patel's essay, this volume.

Although a comprehensive history of sociology in India is yet to be written, it is safe to assume that its basic orientation and concepts were formed in the few original teaching and research departments, from where they were dispersed as students moved into faculty positions in other departments and transmitted their knowledge through the medium of syllabi, examinations, and research guidance. In this process Ghurye's influence as head of the Bombay University department was surely crucial. With the expansion of the university system in the 1960s and the consequent increase in teaching posts, and with the development of the social sciences under the Nehruvian planning regime, the younger generation of sociologists easily found positions in teaching and research. Several of Ghurye's students founded and developed new departments: Srinivas started the department at Baroda University, which I.P. Desai joined, later succeeding as head; Srinivas later started the department at the Delhi School of Economics as well, which M.S.A. Rao joined; Karve headed the Anthropology Department at Deccan College (Pune University), and Damle joined her until he started the Sociology Department at Pune after it split from Anthropology; Kapadia and later A.R. Desai and D. Narain took over at Bombay, and so on. Indeed, at one time almost every sociology department in the country was headed by a Ghurye product (Pillai 1997: xiii).⁶⁷ As a result, Ghurye's students were instrumental in shaping and consolidating the discipline in the 1960s and 1970s.

ACADEMIC POLITICS AND INSTITUTION BUILDING

The department that Ghurye built was the major sociology department in the country for many years. He did not accomplish the task without a struggle. Indeed, in view of Ghurye's notoriously difficult personality and the viciousness of university politics, it is surprising

⁶⁷ Other Ghurye students who went on to become heads or senior professors in other universities include: K.N. Venkatarayappa (Bangalore University), K.C. and Jalloo Panchanadikar (Baroda), A. Bopegamage (Pune), M.G. Kulkarni (Pune, then Shivaji University, Aurangabad), C. Rajagopalan (Bangalore), V.A. Sangave (Kolhapur), and G.S. Nepali (Benaras, North Bengal University, and Kathmandu). I thank S.D. Pillai for this information.

that he accomplished as much as he did. While a detailed account of Ghurye's political and personal conflicts within the university and the profession may seem unnecessary and trivial, it does reveal something about the ways in which the discipline has been shaped by its institutional framework.

As noted above, the Sociology Department remained part of the School of Economics and Sociology until 1956, a situation that Ghurye intensely disliked. From the beginning of his career he was embroiled in factional politics, even when the School was very small. For a number of years there were only four members: in Economics, Professor K.T. Shah and C.N. Vakil, who was appointed Assistant Professor in 1921 after he returned from England with an MSc degree from the London School of Economics; and in Sociology, Ghurye and N.A. Thoothi, who joined in 1925. The administrative affairs of the school were managed through a committee of which K.T. Shah, as seniormost, was chairman (Ghurye 1973: 63). Ghurye and Vakil, both strong personalities, were intense rivals who headed opposite factions, with Thoothi supporting Vakil against Ghurye and K.T. Shah (Srinivas 1996: 7). Although Ghurye was by far the more visible and active member of the Sociology Department, Thoothi was more astute in university politics and managed to create problems for Ghurye throughout his tenure (Narain 1996: 18). The factional conflict sharpened when Vakil was made professor before Ghurye and became head of the School. In 1930, after the new University Act came into force and teachers had to be reappointed, K.T. Shah was ousted for political reasons and Vakil, who had many supporters in the University Senate, was appointed Professor, while Ghurye was only reappointed as Reader (Dongerker 1957: 243). Thus Vakil became the 'defacto Head of the School' (Ghurye 1973: 80) and subsequently the official director.⁶⁸

After Vakil's ascendancy, the Economics Department expanded more rapidly than Sociology in terms of funding and teaching positions. Internal politics delayed Ghurye's appointment as professor until 1934, and although he was perhaps the best-known

⁶⁸ Ghurye was apparently very bitter about this development; he remarked sarcastically, 'While the London School of Economics had Sir William Beveridge as its Director the Bombay School, not only of Economics but also of Sociology, got Professor C.N. Vakil!' (1973: 80).

sociologist in India at the time, the proposal for his professorship was passed by just one vote in the Senate (Ghurye 1973: 90). The appointment of K.M. Kapadia (whom Ghurye favoured over Srinivas) to the Reader's position vacated by Thoothi in 1950 met with similar difficulties, as the selection committee's recommendation was rejected by the Syndicate due to political manoeuvring (*ibid.*: 127–9). For these and other reasons, Ghurye felt that Sociology was being overshadowed by the Economics Department and wanted to split the school. When this was finally done, he counted it as one of his greatest achievements.⁶⁹ This move enabled Ghurye to 'retire with the utmost satisfaction of a fulfilled academic career and not with the distress of a frustrated one, which would otherwise have been my lot!' (*ibid.*: 155). In spite of the political wrangling, Ghurye managed to enter the university power structure: at the time of his retirement he was a member of all the important bodies, including the Syndicate, as well as Dean of the Faculty of Arts (Narain 1996: 25).

The growing imbalance between the Sociology and Economics departments was not due merely to interpersonal politics but also to a broader shift in academics stemming from the advent of planned development after Independence. State patronage heightened the visibility and resources of economics and facilitated the expansion of the Economics Department at Bombay, possibly at the expense of Sociology.⁷⁰ Contrary to what is commonly supposed, Ghurye was not averse to the participation of sociologists in policy-making: he was apparently responsible for introducing sociology as a subject in the IAS examinations, and he complained that sociology was not

⁶⁹ S.D. Pillai, interview 30 May 2001. Ghurye credits the new vice-chancellor, John Matthai, with pushing the proposal through the Syndicate in 1955 in the face of tough opposition from Vakil and his supporters (1973: 155), thus freeing the Sociology Department from its 'bondage to the Department of Economics' (1973: 154). The actual separation took place in 1956.

⁷⁰ This was not unique to Bombay; at the Delhi School of Economics as well, Srinivas' new Department of Sociology tended to be overshadowed by the larger and more aggressive Department of Economics (Béteille 2000: 20). In Bombay, the disparity is illustrated by the fact that the ISS never had any infrastructure in the university and was run from Ghurye's office, while the Indian Economics Association had an office in the Economics Department and two paid assistants (S.D. Pillai, personal communication).

given its due place on the Planning Commission and other government bodies. But he did not seek out research projects with a policy slant, nor did he sit on high-powered government committees—as did many economists and even some sociologists. Compared to younger sociologists such as Srinivas, Ghurye was not successful in attracting funding or in promoting sociology to the government as a discipline relevant to policy-making and planning.

The disparity between economics and sociology was exacerbated in the 1950s and 1960s with the advent of foreign aid along with the ‘torrential flow of Ford Foundation American experts’ into India (Ghurye 1973: 137). Sociology became temporarily popular with the government under the influence of Douglas Ensminger, Director of the Ford Foundation in India from 1951 to 1970, and sociologists found plenty of work with the government and foreign-funded projects under the Community Development Programme.⁷¹ But none of the development-related research funding that came to the Economics Department in abundance through the influence of Vakil reached the Sociology Department at Bombay. Even when there was a social dimension to a proposal, foreign and government projects were monopolised by the Economics Department.⁷² Although it is commonly believed that Ghurye did not want to accept foreign funding, he was not averse to it in principle: at least once he submitted a research proposal (the Town-Country Relations project) to the Ford Foundation at the request of the vice-chancellor, but the project was not funded (*ibid.*: 159). However Ghurye did not pursue foreign-funded projects because he believed that they were never true collaborations and that Indian scholars were not given sufficient respect and independence by their foreign partners.⁷³ He was especially scathing towards what he referred to as the ‘Ford Foundation occupation of New Delhi’ (*ibid.*: 164) and criticised foreign scholars for not collaborating with local sociologists.⁷⁴ Ghurye also argued that the relations between Indian and foreign scholars are always one-sided,

⁷¹ See Srinivas (1994: 11) and Srinivas and Panini (1973: 198).

⁷² S.D. Pillai, interview, 30 May 2001.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Pillai (personal communication) recalls an incident when Ghurye directly attacked Carl Taylor, chief of the Community Development Programme, when

the foreigners always being the 'visitors' and the Indians the 'visited', which he regarded as a form of 'colonialism in embryo' (ibid.: 163). When requested by the vice-chancellor to respond to a query from W. Norman Brown regarding collaboration on a project, he replied to the university authorities with a long story about a Rockefeller Foundation representative who had expressed interest in funding a project but had never contacted him again, even after 'four years and nine months' (ibid.: 160). His discussions with Brown were equally unproductive (ibid.: 162): perhaps in both cases the representatives who met Ghurye, a notoriously forthright and acidic man, realised that he would not be malleable enough for their purposes.⁷⁵ Ghurye's apparent intention in relating these incidents in his autobiography is to highlight the untrustworthiness of foreign institutions and the arrogance of foreign scholars who came to do research in India with little background knowledge and even less humility. But Ghurye was not rigidly anti-American: he maintained an informal panel of American sociologists who acted as thesis examiners, including Merton, McIver, Ogburn, Mandelbaum, and Nimkoff.⁷⁶

Rather than chasing after prestigious government and foreign-funded research projects, Ghurye pursued his research agenda

his lecture at Bombay took on a patronising tone. Ghurye was famous for asking visitors pointed questions. When the well-known sociologist Tom Bottomore was commissioned to write a sociology textbook for South Asia and visited Bombay in that connection, Ghurye asked him why the sponsoring agency could not find an Indian to do the job. And when Edward Shils came to carry out his study of Indian intellectuals, Ghurye asked him whether any such study had been made in America (Ghurye 1973: 164). Thus he gained a reputation for being jingoistic and anti-American.

⁷⁵ Ghurye refused to work even on the project statement as requested by Brown without prior clarification about what was expected of him and his department. Brown and his colleagues did not pursue the matter (Ghurye 1973: 159–62).

⁷⁶ Ghurye also recommended American textbooks to his students. While Kapadia and A.R. Desai were furious about the influx of cheap American books courtesy PL-480 funds, Ghurye appreciated the fact that Indian students could now afford such books but thought that there should be subsidies for Indian books as well (Pillai, personal communication).

through his students and his own work: he published prolifically and actively encouraged the publication of his students' work. In 1944 he suggested to the university authorities that they bring out a sociological series in view of the large number of theses being produced in the department. Two such series were started—one in sociology, with Ghurye as general editor, and one in economics. The first book published in the series was his own *Culture and society* (1947; Ghurye 1973: 114). Nine books were brought out up to 1959, but after Ghurye's retirement the series stopped. Four books were authored by department members—Ghurye's *Family and kin in Indo-European culture* (1955a), K.M. Kapadia's *Marriage and family in India* (1955), A.R. Desai's *Social background of Indian nationalism* (1948), and D. Narain's *Hindu character*—while the rest were PhD theses by Ghurye's students—L.N. Chapekar (*Thakurs of Sahyadri*, 1957), U.T. Thakur (*Sindhi culture*), K.N. Venkatarayappa, and A. Bopegamage.⁷⁷ From 1931 to 1962 Ghurye was also involved in bringing out the *Journal of the University of Bombay (JUB)*, started in 1931. He was a member of the Editorial Board and of the Sociology Committee, Managing Editor of the History, Economics, and Sociology sections, and Managing Editor of the journal from 1957 to 1962. Ghurye published at least nine papers as well as book reviews in the *JUB* between 1933 and 1961,⁷⁸ as did several of his students.⁷⁹

THE INDIAN SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Apart from establishing the Bombay University Sociology Department on a solid foundation, one of Ghurye's most important contributions to the institutionalisation of sociology in India was the formation of the Indian Sociological Society (ISS), which was registered in December 1951 in Bombay with 107 founder members.

⁷⁷ I have not been able to find full references for some of these titles.

⁷⁸ These include Ghurye (1934, 1935b, 1936a, 1936b, 1937a, 1937b, 1937c, 1939, 1941, 1960b, 1960d).

⁷⁹ Irawati Karve published at least three articles in the journal (1932, 1933, 1937). Although Ghurye was not active in running the journal after 1962, he was still shown as Chairman of the Editorial Board up to 1963–4. After 1964 the journal became defunct (Ghurye 1973: 194).

Before starting the ISS, Ghurye was active in two other associations in Bombay, the Bombay Anthropological Society (BAS)—which had mainly non-academic members—and the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (or BBRAS, as the Asiatic Society of Bombay was then called). Ghurye was a member of the BAS Council as well as president from 1942 to 1948. In 1946 he revived the society's defunct journal (Ghurye 1973: 107), although apparently he published only one article in it himself (Ghurye 1946). In 1926 Ghurye was elected to the Managing Committee of the BBRAS (1973: 86), but he contributed only book reviews to its journal.⁸⁰

Although the ISS was intended to be a national association and sociologists from other parts of the country were included as founder members, until 1966 it functioned primarily as a regional association, closely controlled by Ghurye and with its membership drawn mainly from the Bombay school (Patel 2002).⁸¹ The Bombay-centric nature of the society was partly due to the long-standing rivalry between Ghurye and sociologists at Lucknow and Calcutta: Ghurye told Pramanick that when he started the *Sociological bulletin* 'the whole of North India was against it excepting D.P. [D.P. Mukerji]' (Pramanick 1994: 249, n.109).⁸² Ghurye's major aim in starting the society was to bring out a journal, the biannual *Bulletin*, which he did with clocklike regularity for fifteen years, beginning with the first issue in 1952. Other members of the editorial board in the first few years

⁸⁰ Apparently, there was an undercurrent of tension between Ghurye and the eminent Indologist P.V. Kane, who was also a member of the Managing Committee of the BBRAS (Narain 1996: 27). Kane did not appreciate the intrusion of sociology into areas that he considered the province of Indology, such as the study of *gotra*. His attitude may explain why the Asiatic Society library did not subscribe to the *Sociological bulletin* until very recently, in spite of Ghurye being a member of the Managing Committee. However, Kane was the main speaker at a farewell function held for Ghurye in 1959 (S. D. Pillai, personal communication).

⁸¹ This account draws heavily on Patel (2002).

⁸² This rivalry is evident in the fact that when Ghurye was made a member of the Executive Committee of the International Sociological Association in 1951, Radhakamal Mukerjee made a formal protest (Ghurye 1973: 131). Ghurye was a member of the ISA executive twice, from 1950 to 1952 and 1953 to 1956.

included D.P. Mukerji (the only non-Bombay person on the board), J.V. Ferreira, and B.R. Agarwala (Ghurye's former student who was very active in organising the ISS). From 1956 K.M. Kapadia and D. Narain took the place of the last two. Ghurye continued as editor of the journal and president of the society until 1966, although after his retirement in 1959 Kapadia became the *de facto* editor (Ghurye 1973: 134).

The articles published in the *Bulletin* during Ghurye's tenure reflect his emphasis on the study of social institutions and culture as well as his empiricism and indicate the extent to which Ghurye's approach to sociology was becoming entrenched. Of the 173 articles published between 1952 and 1966, the largest number were on the theme of family, marriage, or kinship (48 total, or more than one-fourth), followed by urban issues, mainly concerning Bombay (17), caste/social stratification (15), and social change (15). Other common themes include theory and methodology (12), and personality and behaviour patterns, village/community studies, and economic development and migration (7 each). Surprisingly there are only 5 articles on religion.⁸³ Most of the contributions are descriptive and empirical, with only 4 articles reflecting on the state of the discipline (by M.N. Srinivas, D.P. Mukerji, Ramkrishna Mukherjee, and A.K. Saran, the last three all of the Lucknow School).

That the *Bulletin* was primarily a Bombay forum and a Ghurye production is shown in the fact that the proceedings of the departmental symposia held each year in March/April were published in the journal.⁸⁴ The in-house nature of the journal is also reflected in the authors: during Ghurye's reign, frequent contributors include

⁸³ These data are based on an unpublished analysis of the contents of the *Sociological bulletin* compiled by Aradhya Bhardwaj (2000). I thank her for sharing her work.

⁸⁴ I thank Sujata Patel for pointing this out to me. Five such symposia were published as theme issues: *Our present discontent and frustration* (vol. 2, no. 1, 1953); *Social conditions and creative activity* (vol. 3, no. 2, 1954); *Caste and the joint family* (vol. 4, no. 2, 1955, including papers by I.P. Desai, M.S.A. Rao, A. Aiyappan, and others); *Rural-urban relations* (vol. 5, no. 2, 1956, with papers by M.N. Srinivas, K.M. Kapadia, and others); and *Nature and extent of social change in India* (vol. 11, no. 1, 1961). The last was the proceedings of the Decennial Celebrations of the Society, held at Mysore, which Ghurye did not attend

I.P. Desai, K.M. Kapadia, Victor d'Souza, M.S.A. Rao, M.N. Srinivas, J.V. Ferreira, and A. Bopegamage—all associated with Ghurye and the department in some way. The first research work of several of his students is also published in this journal, for example, S.M. Haidar (1957) and K.C. Panchnadikar (1952). But the most frequent contributor to the journal was Ghurye himself, with eleven articles between 1952 and 1965, plus an entire issue devoted to his *Vidyas: A homage to Comte and a contribution to the sociology of knowledge* (1957b). Before the founding of the ISS, most of his articles were published in the *JUB*, but after 1952 the *Bulletin* was the major vehicle for his writing, and it was only after retirement that he published most of his work in the form of books.⁸⁵ Many of the articles published in the *Bulletin* prefigured books brought out later; for instance, the argument in 'Cities: Their natural history' (1956a) is expanded in *Cities and civilization* (1962a), and 'Ascetic origins' (1952a) anticipates *Indian sadhus* (1953c). Ghurye's work was famously wide-ranging, and in his *Bulletin* papers he deals with such disparate topics as city and town planning (Ghurye 1953a, 1956a, 1960c), friendship (1953b), and the 'Sexual behaviour of American female' (a critique of the Kinsey Report, 1954). After 1966, when the ISS shifted out of Bombay, no paper by Ghurye appeared in the journal.

In 1966 the All India Sociological Conference (AISC) merged with the ISS and the association shifted out of Bombay, Ghurye having resigned as president. The AISC, established in 1955 by sociologists of the Lucknow School—D.P. Mukerji, R.K. Mukerjee, D.N. Majumdar, and R.N. Saksena—was the only other national-level professional sociological organisation in the country, and its main activity was to hold conferences.⁸⁶ The significance of the merger can be understood against the background of the expansion of higher education and of sociology as a discipline, and the establishment of the department

due to ill health, and includes papers by Ramkrishna Mukherjee, Kapadia, M.S. Gore, and others.

⁸⁵ See the list of references. The *Bulletin* articles are: Ghurye 1952a, 1952c, 1953a, 1953b, 1954, 1955b, 1956a, 1960c, 1961, and 1964.

⁸⁶ D.P. Mukerji attempted to bring Ghurye into the second conference in 1956 by making him President, but the other members of the AISC objected and chose the Mysore-based sociologist A.R. Wadia instead (Patel 2002).

at the Delhi School of Economics in 1959, headed by M.N. Srinivas. Several other sociology departments had been started in North India, notably at the Institute of Social Sciences in Agra in 1956, Chandigarh in 1959, and Jaipur in 1962, developments that tended to diminish the influence of both the Lucknow and the Bombay schools. Another significant factor was the growing influence of structure-functionism, which tended to undermine the legitimacy of Ghurye's historical/cultural approach and swayed even several of Ghurye's prominent students (Patel 2002). When Ghurye came to know in mid-1966 that the merger was being mooted behind his back, he put in his resignation just a few days before going abroad to visit his son. Srinivas took over as president of the society and editor of the *Bulletin* in 1967.⁸⁷

The merger of the AISC and ISS represented a decisive break with the past and marked the waning of Ghurye's influence in the world of sociology. In 1967 the first all-India conference of the ISS after the merger was held at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Bombay (whose director, M.S. Gore, was from the Bombay Department), cohosted by the sociology departments of Bombay University (headed by A.R. Desai) and SNDT Women's University (headed by Neera Desai) (Narain 1968). Ghurye inaugurated the conference, but he left the venue immediately after his address without meeting anyone.⁸⁸ This was perhaps Ghurye's last major public appearance.

⁸⁷ There are different versions of this story. According to S.D. Pillai, Kapadia, then head of the Bombay Department, agreed to the merger proposed by R.N. Saksena because he believed that the ISS would remain in Bombay and that he would become the president. However, A.R. Desai and M.S. Gore, who were discussing the matter with Saksena, knew that Saksena wanted to take over and move the ISS to Agra. When the merger was finalised and Kapadia came to know he would not be president, he was furious. Ghurye got wind of the discussions and diplomatically resigned, without getting involved in the politics of the merger. In his autobiography he says nothing of these events, only that he felt the need to pass on the leadership of the society to younger scholars, and that when he decided to visit his son in March 1966 he took the opportunity to resign (Ghurye 1973: 134). In 1970 Saksena succeeded Srinivas as president.

⁸⁸ The anti-Hindi agitations and caste politics in Tamil Nadu were the subject of Ghurye's address, which he used as an additional chapter (Chapter 13, 'Caste

With his retirement in 1959 and Kapadia's premature retirement soon after, and with the loss of the ISS, Bombay lost its status as the premier sociology department in the country and became more a regional centre.⁸⁹

IV. LEGACY OF GHURYE'S NATIONALIST SOCIOLOGY

The substance and practice of Indian sociology as an academic discipline has been deeply marked by Ghurye's legacy. Under his guidance, sociology came to be defined as the study of Indian (i.e., Hindu) civilisation and of 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, Indian 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 and nationalist notions of what constitutes 'traditional' Indian society (the patriarchal joint family, the caste system) and Indian culture or civilisation (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. The teaching and research programme that he led at Bombay University, the contents of the *Sociological bulletin*, as well as his own work, all reveal the shape of this sociology. While Ghurye's refusal to bow to international intellectual fashions or to become an adjunct to foreign research agendas is laudable, his nationalist sensibility also led to inbreeding: a core set of ideas became institutionalised in sociology and was mechanically reproduced

and politics in Tamil Nadu') in the fifth edition of *Caste and race* (1969). At the same conference he is reported to have made some remarks in support of the Shiv Sena, which had emerged in Bombay in 1966, but there is no written record of this.

⁸⁹ After the ISS moved out of Bombay, a new association called the Bombay Sociologists was started by several of Ghurye's former students including Mabel Fonseca and B. Agarwala. Ghurye attended these meetings occasionally but was not actively involved, and the association became defunct fairly soon (Narain 1996: 32, n.21; S.D. Pillai, personal communication).

through established channels of teaching, research, and publication. After Ghurye's reign, sociology opened out to a large extent, but the understanding of 'Indian society' that is still taught in sociology courses in a number of universities retains his distinctive stamp.

The traditions of the Bombay School are still visible in sociology in other ways as well. First and most obviously, sociology has tended to concentrate narrowly on the study of social institutions such as family, kinship, caste, and religion while neglecting the economic and political dimensions of social life—a thematic focus that has persisted even after the triumph of structure-functionalism and subsequent theoretical shifts. Although sociology today is much more diverse (and even Ghurye wrote on a wide range of issues), the tendency to avoid the 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 questions.

Second, as has often been 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 analyses of caste have highlighted the stability of the caste system and its roots in religious values and ritual practices while glossing over relations of oppression and conflict. Sociologists have also retailed the Brahminical/reformist view of caste as a *system* that had a functional logic in the past but which is breaking down (or should be) under the pressures of modernity (Upadhyaya n.d.). Similarly, feminist scholars have shown how conventional sociological understandings of family and kinship have masked structures of inequality and oppression within the family.

A third significant feature of mainstream sociology is its ahistoricism. Although Ghurye's work appears to be historical in that he attempts to locate the origins of social institutions in the past, it lacks a concept of historical agency and tends to isolate cultural history and change from other historical processes.⁹⁰ 'Social change' in mainstream sociology refers primarily to incremental shifts in social customs and cultural forms, and the motors of change are identified

⁹⁰ This notion of history is very different from that which was incorporated into the sociology of A.R. Desai or Surajit Sinha, for example.

as abstract processes such as 'modernisation' or 'sanskritisation'. Indian sociology's neglect of history and its tendency to lift social processes out of time is symptomatic of the urge to define the nation or Indian society as timeless.

Finally, the discipline has been allergic to engagement with social theory, a shortcoming that derives from its positivist heritage. Ghurye's insistence on 'getting the facts' is echoed in the empiricism of most sociological writing that does not reflect upon the nature or production of its data. This empiricism is in turn related to sociology's self-representation as an objective arbiter of knowledge about society and its refusal to recognise its imbrication within other discursive practices and ideological formations.

While it would be overstating the case to lay all of sociology's problems at Ghurye's door, he clearly played a major role in the institutionalisation of a sociology that reproduced his vision of the nation or Indian society as constituted by certain basic social institutions and rooted in Hindu tradition. In this Ghurye was not alone. As Yogendra Singh (1986) has argued, nationalism provided an ideological basis for the thought of most of the first generation Indian sociologists who attempted, in different ways, to demonstrate the organic unity of Indian society. Ghurye's sociology provides a prime example of this quest. His thought was shaped by the experience of colonialism, the constructed memory of India's 'past glory', and the nationalist project of future emancipation, and his perspective reflected a complex mix of nationalist, Orientalist, and reformist ideas, reworked through the diffusionist and empiricist framework of early-twentieth-century anthropology. Placed against this background, Ghurye's understanding of Indian society—his conception of the nation as essentially one, unified by a common religion and culture and structured by the basic social institutions of caste, kinship, and family—appears almost inevitable.

Sociology did not just draw upon existing discourses about Indian society, it also contributed to the reproduction and refinement of certain dominant representations. It is beyond the scope of this essay to explore the ideological role of the discipline, but it should be pointed out that, through the work of Ghurye and his students, sociology became closely implicated in the nationalist project of defining and manufacturing the nation. The nationalist 'awakening' involved

the discovery of India's past as the source of the emerging Indian or Hindu nation, but also gave rise to debates about how Indian society should be reconstituted to make it both modern enough to deserve independence and 'traditional' enough to retain a separate identity—the model of modernity of course being the West. The reconstruction or reinvention of 'tradition' within the framework of the modern nation-state continued to be a concern of post-colonial elites struggling with the problem of 'national integration' and devoted to the goals of economic development and modernisation. The sociological study of social institutions and cultural practices contributed to this process of redefinition by marking certain social forms as authentically 'Indian' and 'traditional' (the family system, 'Indian cultural values'—the 'good' traditions) in opposition to their 'Western' counterparts and to 'bad' traditions such as caste, and by defining other 'non-traditional' arenas not as 'Western' but as neutrally 'modern' (the state, modern technology).⁹¹

Similarly, Ghurye's sociological project of mapping India's cultural diversity while identifying a common source of national culture validated the nationalist rendering of the nation as a 'unity in diversity'. The documentation and categorisation of India's various communities on the basis of their cultural characteristics was not a colonial practice alone, but was uncritically adopted by nationalist sociology and anthropology as well. In this notion of diversity, communities are distinguished by their cultural differences rooted in 'tradition' and represented as internally homogeneous and demarcated by fixed boundaries (Upadhyaya 2001). Ghurye, like many nationalists, identified a common thread running through this cultural diversity in the Vedic past and the spread of Hinduism, and its social unity in the history of assimilation of diverse groups to Brahminism

⁹¹ In a sense, even modern technology and science were subsumed within Indian 'tradition' through the nationalist recovery of ancient Indian science (Prakash 2000). Prakash (2000: 201–3) points to a central contradiction of Indian nationalism—that the realisation of an authentic national community and a 'different modernity', defined through a critique of Western civilisation, were premised on the appropriation of the modern state and modern science and technology for 'development'.

through the caste system. He believed that the same sources of cultural unity and social integration would be the basis for building a modern Indian nation (Upadhyaya n.d.).

From its inception, sociology in India has been engaged, in diverse ways, with the problem of the nation, just as nationalist imaginings have been tied up with visions of Indian, society and of a future revitalised Hindu community. Indeed, it could be argued that the major problem for sociology (as for history) in the post-Independence period was to invent or reconstitute the nation, which in sociological terms was rendered as 'Indian society'. But as this account of Ghurye suggests, in attempting to break free of colonial hegemony the discipline became trapped within the nationalist terms of discourse, and as a consequence has been slow to develop a reflexive understanding of itself. Perhaps much more research on the history and practice of sociology will be needed before it can begin to reconstitute itself as a discipline capable of producing a truly critical perspective on Indian society.

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⁹² The list of Ghurye's publications included here, though not complete, is fairly exhaustive. I have included several references not referred to in the main text. Some references are incomplete because I have not been able to locate the original articles. Some of the references are drawn from Pillai's *Dictionary* (1997), which has a complete bibliography but in which some references are also incomplete.

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7

Search for Synthesis

The Sociology of D.P. Mukerji¹

T.N. MADAN

I was trained to think in large terms. It made me . . . search for the wood behind the trees.—D.P. Mukerji, *Diversities*

The value of Indian traditions lies in the ability of their conserving forces to put a break on hasty passage. Adjustment is the end product of the dialectical connection between the two. Meanwhile [there] is tension.—D.P. Mukerji, *Diversities*

Myself wars on myself . . .—Y.B. Yeats, *Deirdre*

IN THIS ESSAY ON DHURJATI PRASAD MUKERJI (1894–1961), ONE of the founders of sociology in South Asia, I will first briefly try to locate him in his intellectual setting in Calcutta and in Lucknow. I will then recall, again briefly, my personal impressions of him as a teacher in the last days of his active life in the early 1950s. Finally, I will discuss at some length his contributions as a scholar, with particular reference to his later work (from the early 1940s onward), in which the search for synthesis—in both the unfolding of the historical process and the most fruitful way of its study—was highly salient. It was his considered judgment, I think, that the most fruitful way to

¹ In writing this essay, I have drawn on two earlier articles (Madan 1977, 1994b), but included newly written material also.



Fig. 7: First All India Sociological Conference, Dehra Dun, December 1954–January 1955.

(*Photograph courtesy T.N. Madan.*) For further information, see p. 289.

'read' history was to focus on the dialectic embedded in it and investigate it from an interdisciplinary perspective (combining history, economics, psychology, and sociology).

I. THE SETTINGS: CALCUTTA AND LUCKNOW

The Bengali intelligentsia of the 1890s—the decade of D.P. Mukerji's birth—were participants in a new phase of the renaissance that had been ushered in earlier in the century by the leaders of a nascent middle class, from among whom Rammohan Roy (1772–1833) is the best remembered and even considered the father of modern India. Among the defining characteristics of this new awareness one could mention, first, a fine-tuned receptivity towards the ethical precepts of Christianity and the intellectual, literary, and artistic achievements of the West; and then, in a kind of 'second movement', a resurgent, redefined Hinduism alongside a rediscovered Sanskrit literary tradition. More than any others, perhaps, Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) and Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) compelled attention, and not among intellectuals alone.

After the turn of the century came the partition of Bengal in 1905 and the Swadeshi movement. The latter, and an upgraded Calcutta University with provision for postgraduate studies under the dynamic leadership of Asutosh Mookerji, were the critical components of the intellectual setting in which D.P. Mukerji's generation completed their higher studies. Among Mukerji's nearest contemporaries, who also contributed to the making of sociology in India as an academic discipline, mention should be made of Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887–1949: see Bhattacharyya 1990), Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889–1968; see Singh 1956), G.S. Ghurye (1893–1983: see Pramanick 1994), and K.P. Chattopadhyay (1897–1963). Of these, Sarkar, Mukerjee, and Chattopadhyay were graduates of Calcutta University, and Ghurye of Bombay University.

DP (henceforth I will refer to him, as he was most widely known, by his initials) was born on 5 October 1894 in a Brahmin, middle-class family that had a fairly long tradition of intellectual pursuits. After his 'Entrance' examination, he opted for the social instead of the natural or biological sciences, the latter being preferred by the brightest students of those days. One such student, Satyen Bose, who

was to become a famous physicist, later recalled DP as a warm and friendly fellow student, a gifted conversationist and a lover of books and Indian music (see Mukerji 1972). In the event, DP took the Master's degrees in economics and history: needless to add, he did so with distinction.

DP opted for a career in teaching which began at Bangabasi College, Calcutta. He also began to write and publish in both Bengali and English, and soon acquired a reputation as a brilliant young man with broad intellectual interests and sound critical judgement. As Satyen Bose recalled, 'his critical appreciation and his judgment on the aesthetics of music were held in high regard by all' (see Mukerji 1972). He published in *Sabuj Patra* and *Parichaya* and his writings attracted the notice of Rabindranath Tagore, Pramatha Chaudhury (founder-editor of *Sabuj Patra*), and the novelist Saratchandra Chatterji. He wrote not only on music and literary topics, but also on such themes as democracy, capitalism, and anti-intellectualism. Sociology those days, DP used to tell us (in the early 1950s), was often mistaken by the general reading public for social reform, socialism, or sanitised sex *à la* Marie Stopes (author of the best selling *Married love*)! And this in spite of the fact that already, in the late nineteenth century, many Calcutta intellectuals honoured Auguste Comte at an annual festival: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–94), for one, was familiar with both his and Herbert Spencer's views.

A studio portrait of DP taken around this time (the early 1920s) shows him seated in a large cane chair, dressed in a Western-style suit and shoes, with a stiff collar shirt and necktie. A felt hat rests on a small pile of books on the nearby ornate table. His facial expression already has the intensity that I was to become familiar with thirty years later.

DP joined the newly founded University of Lucknow as a lecturer in economics and sociology in 1922 at the invitation of Radhakamal Mukerjee. Mukerjee himself had graduated from Presidency College, Calcutta, with Honours in history and literature, and then specialised (MA, PhD) in economics. After short stints as a teacher and researcher in Bengal and Punjab, he began his long innings at Lucknow University in 1921, as Professor and Head of the Department of Economics and Sociology, from 'the very day the university started to work'. He introduced, as he himself later described it, 'an integrated

approach in economics, sociology and anthropology in both research and teaching' (1956: 10).

It may be of interest to note here the scope of Mukerjee's lectures as these set the tone for what he expected his colleagues to do. A prolific writer, he published a book in 1925, *Borderlands of economics*, which comprised the substance of these early lectures. The topics that he spoke and wrote about included economic behaviourism and the institutional and anthropological perspectives on it; the 'anti-intellectualism' of economics and its humanisation; the relevance of biology, ecology, human geography, sociology, psycho-analysis, ethics, and even physics to economics; and so on. In a forward-looking concluding paragraph, Mukerjee wrote: 'The acquisitive and possessive impulses which have been so much exaggerated in the last few decades will be duly limited in vital modes of association, and the separation between the intrinsic or final and instrumental or economic ends, which has threatened to corrode social life, will warp no longer the feeling and judgement of peoples' (1925: 270).

Although economics (and the other social sciences) did not develop exactly the way Mukerjee expected, he remained steadfast in his holistic vision. He wrote thirty years later: 'A true general theory of society is the corpus of theories, laws, and explanations of social relations and structures derived from all the social sciences; it is a body of integrated and co-ordinated knowledge relating to society as a whole. For society is not divisible. Only the social sciences for the sake of analysis and specialization are fractionalized' (Mukerjee 1956: 19).

Mukerjee's approach was too loosely eclectic and evasive to be effective in working out the terms of synthesis among the social sciences. Howsoever fuzzy and problematic it was, he held firmly to his vision of holism. It was in the pursuit of his programme of interdisciplinary and comparative teaching and research that Mukerjee brought DP to Lucknow (in 1922), and then, in 1928, D.N. Majumdar (1903–60), one of the first holders of the Master's degree in anthropology (from Calcutta University) in India. Apart from lecturing on the economic life of the so-called primitive societies, and on the intermeshing of the economic, ritual, and social aspects of society,

Mukerjee asked Majumdar to also teach a course on aspects of monetised economies. Majumdar's energies were, however, devoted primarily to teaching and research in cultural and physical anthropology and prehistory. He gradually worked out his own intellectual agenda (see Madan 1994a: 24–36).

Besides Mukerjee, DP, and Majumdar, there were other scholars in the department, mostly economists, but these three clearly were the leaders, and it is they that those who speak or write about the 'Lucknow School' have in mind. The three 'Ms' did indeed share certain basic assumptions about social reality and about its study, but their perspectives were also marked by significant differences. There really was no 'School', formally proclaimed, nor did the faculty share a common approach to teaching and research.

This is not the place to go into details. I will confine myself to noting that, although the three 'Ms' subscribed to social realism and empiricism, they did not have a common conception of the character of social reality or of the methods of its investigation. For Mukerjee, the human was ultimately the divine and the social was inseparable from the cosmic. Consequently, his empiricism was tempered with intuitive understandings. For DP, dialectical materialism and the historically situated human agent were the source of the dynamics of human history. Empirical research uninformed by a sense of history and deductive reason, he maintained, could only be superficial. For Majumdar, human creativity ('the works of man') in its material and non-material expressions was grounded in the interaction of geographical, biological, and cultural endowments. The totality and its elements were best studied empirically through fieldwork and in the laboratory. In his conception of anthropology as a unified 'science', *clinical* theory was preferable to abstract thought.

Although all three scholars were committed to the ameliorative potential of the social sciences, they had different conceptions of what this entailed. Their basically different attitudes to the processes of socio-economic development and secularisation in the wake of Independence were marked by considerable concern about the loss of tradition on the part of Mukerjee (see Mukerjee 1951); caution about change, even if planned, without a clear vision of the new

society ('hasty passage') on the part of DP (see Mukerji 1958: 28–76); and immense enthusiasm for 'applied anthropology' as a means of solving immediate problems on the part of Majumdar (1956–7: 130–43). One of their most distinguished students, A.K. Saran (MA, 1946), questioned the perspectives of all three of his teachers (see Saran 1959, 1965), and rejected both a positivistic conception of a social science as well as a Wittgensteinian alternative to it (see Saran 1962a, 1964).

On the institutional side, an independent Department of Anthropology, headed by Majumdar and providing courses in cultural anthropology, physical anthropology, and prehistory was created in 1951. Soon afterwards the Institute of Ecology and Human Relations was established under the directorship of Mukerjee himself. And then a Department of Sociology too came into existence in 1954, with Professor Sushil Chandra as its head, completing the process of formal dispersal of the three groups of scholars (anthropologists, economists, sociologists) and their relocation, in just four years.

II. D.P. MUKERJI AS A TEACHER

Let us now get back to D.P. Mukerji. His career as an intellectual included, most prominently, his contributions as a teacher. In fact, there would be general agreement among those who knew him personally (as students, colleagues, or friends), and who have also read his written work, that he had a much greater and abiding influence on others through the spoken rather than the written word. The freedom that the classroom, the coffee house, or the drawing room gave him to explore ideas and elicit responses was naturally not available via the printed page. Moreover, the quality of his writing was uneven, and not all that he wrote could be expected to survive long.

When I became his student, DP was already in his late fifties. Lean of build, intense in expression, and stylish by appearance (long-sleeved white cotton shirts, the tails tucked in, and white trousers in summer; suits or tweeds in winter; dhoti-kurta—always—at home), he cut an elegant figure. He usually began his lecture on a formal note (he spoke very softly, at times in whispers), but would soon

spice it with stories, insightful observations, fascinating asides, and witticisms. One could never be wholly sure what DP would speak about on a particular day—the topic addressed on the previous lecture-day, a book he had read since then (he literally devoured books, pencil in hand, at an incredible pace), a concert he had been to or a movie he had seen the previous evening, or a news item in the morning's papers. There was a significant continuity, he seemed to want to tell us, between the classroom and the world outside. If one did not explore this relationship, one was a born loser, and unsuited to the scholarly life. DP did not wholly disown the ivory tower, for he valued the view from afar, but deprecated insularity.

DP took an interest in our political views, in the books we read and the music we heard (the Lata phenomenon had just begun and he was amused!), in the clothes we wore (it took him long to reconcile to the bush-shirt), and so on. His emphasis upon aesthetic values elevated them to the level of the ethical. The students who joined him in the quest for knowledge and the making of a meaningful life became a personal concern to him, as scholars in-the-making and as human beings. He aroused their intellectual curiosity, guided their reading, stimulated their thinking, and watched over them with care and even affection. DP once told me that the best thing about being a teacher was to see eager eyes brighten and young minds blossom. I discovered many years after his death that the well-known bookseller of Lucknow, Ram Advani, had offered to let me buy books on credit when I was still a student without an income, because, as he told me, DP had suggested that he do so. I can recall many other similar acts of personal kindness.

What matters more, perhaps, is that DP conveyed to his students the judgment that the life of scholarship and intellectual quest was a life of daring, and indeed a life very much worth living. It was socially useful no less than personally satisfying. It was a life for the sceptical and the restless, not for the contented and the lazy. The life of the intellectual was honourable and intellectuals were the very salt of the earth. DP had himself once been persuaded to step outside 'the grove of Academe' but had not found the experience particularly exhilarating. In 1938, he had been prevailed upon to become Director of Information to the government after the Congress had formed

the ministry in (as it was then) the United Provinces. He was reputed to have discharged his duties with rare ability and distinction. Among his noteworthy initiatives was the establishment of the Bureau of Economics and Statistics. He quit three years later, as soon as the Congress relinquished office, and returned to the university, happy to be back where he truly belonged. His only other involvement with the government was membership of the Uttar Pradesh Labour Enquiry Committee in 1947.

DP's reputation as a teacher was not confined to students of economics and sociology, but was generally acknowledged in the university. His lectures on the history of economic and social thought, and on historical sociology ('culture and civilisation'), were particularly appreciated during the days of my studentship. Outside the curricula, his radio talks and newspaper articles covered the graphic arts, music, cinema, literature, and politics. I remember two erudite lectures on the social foundations of epic poetry, and impromptu discussions of many new books (including Carr's *New society*, Sorokin's *Social philosophies of an age of crisis*, Hauser's *Social history of art*, and Nirad Chaudhuri's *The autobiography of an unknown Indian*), and films (such as 'Death of a Salesman', 'Snakepit', and 'Rashomon'). I also remember many articles in the *National Herald*, ranging from a discussion of Nehru's personality (the type that prefers 'merger' to 'emergence') to a lament on state-organised cultural 'shows', and an appreciation of Faiyaz Khan's *gayaki* (musical style).

I have heard DP criticised for having been a dilettante, a non-serious amateur. I guess his dilettantism may be admitted, but it would have to be acknowledged as a love of the fine arts and a thirst for knowledge that had range and purpose. It would take wide reading and a discriminating mind, not to mention the rare art of conversation, to make a dilettante of DP's calibre. In an obituary, his colleague, S.K. Narain (of the Department of English), described his conversations as 'rich and varied and wise and scintillatingly brilliant'. The economist Ashok Mitra recalls DP's 'wit' and 'magnetism', and how he would tease curious visitors from Calcutta, saying that their interest in him was a part of their sightseeing in Lucknow (see Avasthi 1997: 261)!

After twenty-odd years as a lecturer, DP was made a reader in 1945. Those days, Indian universities followed the principle of a single

professor in the department. In 1949, Acharya Narendra Deva, the vice chancellor, broke with tradition when he bestowed a personal professorship on DP—a gesture that was widely hailed in the university and amidst intellectuals in the city. Today's university teachers will find it hard to believe that it was only when DP became a professor, at the age of 55, that he was allotted an office room to himself—'life space!' he called it with gentle glee. The writing desk in the room, he proudly said, had come as a gift from his devoted student, A.K. Saran, who was by then his colleague.

Compared to Radhakamal Mukerjee, DP was hardly known outside India. While Mukerjee travelled abroad fairly frequently for conferences and lectures, particularly to England and the USA, DP's first overseas trip came as late as in 1952, when he visited the USSR. The following year he went to the Netherlands as a visiting professor at the Institute of Social Sciences, invited there by the invitation of the well-known Dutch anthropologist Professor Hofstra. Retirement at Lucknow University was due in 1954. Dr Zakir Hussain, vice chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University and an economist (he later became President of India), invited DP to AMU as Professor of Economics for as long as he wished to stay there. Intellectuals of DP's calibre, Zakir Hussain let it be known, enriched the quality of intellectual and social life at a university by their presence, for the presence of such persons was never a mere physical fact. DP accepted the invitation without great enthusiasm, for his life had been a rich tale of two cities, Calcutta and Lucknow, both famous for their differently crafted cultural traditions. In Lucknow, DP's admirers felt deeply deprived: his long-time friend M. Chalapathi Rau, editor of the *National Herald* and no mean intellectual himself, spoke for virtually everybody when he asked why Lucknow was letting Aligarh 'take away one of its glories'.

As it turned out, DP's stay at Aligarh lasted only a couple of years. In 1956, his persistent sore throat was diagnosed as cancer. He underwent major surgery in Switzerland which saved his life but left him physically and mentally shattered. The skilled Zurich surgeon just saved his voice, but DP could never again talk long or sufficiently audibly. For a man who relied heavily on the spoken word, this was a cruel blow. He continued at Aligarh for three more years and then retired to live in Dehra Dun (where he had made his last major public

appearance at the Sociological Conference in 1955 as its president) in the summers, and in Calcutta in the winters, with occasional visits to Lucknow. It was in Lucknow that I last met him in the spring of 1961, at the home of his younger colleague and former student, V.B. Singh. The scene was familiar: friends and colleagues sat out in the lawn in a circle to talk with him. He made me sit by his side so that I might hear him better (he knew I had a hearing problem). Everything was as it used to be, but he was not what he used to be.

DP's last piece of writing was a short memoir of his colleague and friend, D.N. Majumdar, who had died suddenly in 1960. He prepared it at my request for inclusion in a memorial volume. He wrote to me to say that the piece was shorter than he would have wished. 'You wanted me to do it. But it could not be long. As you know, I am too ill for all that' (Mukerji 1962). Like everything else that DP ever wrote, this memoir too was in longhand, and he had such a fine handwriting. Exactly four months later, on 5 December 1961, he died in Calcutta. As A.K. Saran (1962b) noted in an obituary, DP died of physical exhaustion and intellectual loneliness.

III. D.P. MUKERJI AS SCHOLAR-AUTHOR

There are two misconceptions about DP, and I would like to comment on these. The first, and more common of these, is that midway in his intellectual career he became a Marxist but was never able to master the theory and method of Marxism; or that he was a Marxist. Second, he has been described as *basically* a Hindu intellectual, a conservative who was only superficially modern.

Aware of the first characterisation, but scornful of it, DP used to jestingly say that the most that he could be described as was a 'Marxologist'! He had discovered Marx (and Hegel) fairly early, but at no stage was he an uncritical Marxist. His deepest interest was in the Marxian method (see Mukerji 1945) rather than in any dogmas or norms. In a short paper entitled 'A word to Indian Marxists', included in his *Views and counterviews* (1946: 166), he had warned that the 'unhistorically minded' young Marxist ran the risk of ending up as a 'fascist', and Marxism itself could 'lose its effectiveness in a maze of slogans'. Nevertheless, it would not be misleading to say

that DP did indeed favour Marxism in various ways, ranging from a theoretic emphasis upon the economic factor ('mode of production') in the making of culture to an elevation of practice to the status of a test of theory, and that this preference is prominent in his later works. It was a close but not altogether comfortable embrace.

As for his being a Hindu, he was of course a Brahmin by birth and upbringing, and not apologetic about it. He retained a lifelong interest in classical Indian thought, which he considered essentially dynamic. '*Charaiveti, charaiveti*' (forward, forward!) from the *Aitareya Brahmana*, was one of his favourite aphorisms. In the making of the mosaics of medieval and modern Indian cultures, he considered the centrality of Hindu contributions a historical fact. By becoming a part of the pattern, however, it had ceased to be exclusive. (More about this below.) As for Brahminical religious belief and ritual, he rejected these quite early in his own life. Actually, he took a broadly Marxist view of religion as an epiphenomenon, but castigated Indian textbook Marxists for their failure to examine closely the reasons why religion was the social force that it apparently was in India. (As is well known, Marx himself had posed a similar question to Engels.) At the same time, DP rejected what he considered a Western fiction, namely, that the Indian mind was 'annexed and possessed' by religion (see Mukerji 1948: 6). The Charvaka theses on states of consciousness being purely physical fascinated him. It could be that DP failed to squarely face the difficulties that his triple loyalty produced; his Brahminical intellectualism, liberal humanism, and Marxist praxis could not be built into a single, rigorously worked-out theoretical framework. As in the work of Radhakamal Mukerjee, DP's quest for synthesis remained elusive. And he was aware of this, perhaps more acutely than he cared to let others know.

Being an intellectual meant two things to DP. First, discovering the sources and potentialities of social reality in the dialectic of tradition and modernity, and, second, developing an integrated personality through the pursuit of knowledge. Indian sociologists, in his opinion, suffered from a lack of interest in history and philosophy and in the dynamism and meaningfulness of social life. In his presidential address to the first Indian Sociological Conference (1955), he had complained: 'As an Indian, I find it impossible to discover

any life-meaning in the jungle of the so-called empirical social research monographs' (Mukerji 1958: 231). Western sociological theory generally, and its Parsonian version in particular, did not satisfy him because of its overweening accent on the 'individual', or the dyad 'actor-situation'. Paying attention to specificities in a general framework of understanding was a first principle he derived primarily from Marx, and from Weber too. He developed this methodological point in an important essay on the Marxist method of historical interpretation (Mukerji 1945).

EARLY WORKS: THE NATURE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

Let me now turn to DP's major published works. It is interesting that he considered his first two books, *Personality and the social sciences* (1924) and *Basic concepts in sociology* (1932), 'personal documents'—the early fruits of his endeavour to formulate an adequate concept of social science. About the first book, he avowed that it was written with 'the sole purpose' of clarifying his 'attitude towards systematised knowledge of society and life in general'. For this purpose he organised his ideas around the notion of 'personality'. He took up the position that the abstract individual would be a narrow focus of social science theorisation: a holistic, psycho-sociological approach was imperative. It was this 'synthesis of the double process of individuality and the socialization of the uniqueness of individual life, this perfect unity' that he called 'personality' (1924: ii). It remained a core concept in his thinking. Towards the end of his life he returned to its clarification when he distinguished the holistic idea of *purusha* from the Western notion of the individual (*vyakti*). The relationship of *purusha* and society, free of the tension that characterises the relationship of the individual and the group, was, DP maintained, the key to understanding Indian society in terms of tradition (1958: 235).

At the very beginning of his intellectual career DP committed himself to a view of knowledge and of the knower. Knowledge was not, as he put it, mere 'matter-of-factness', but ultimately, after taking the empirical datum and the scientific method for its study into account, philosophic (1932: iv–v). Economics (he used to tell us thirty years later) had to be rooted in concrete social reality, that is, it had to be sociological; sociology had to take full cognizance of cultural

specificity, that is, it had to be historical; history had to rise above a narrow concern with the triviality of bygone events through the incorporation in it of a vision of the future, that is, it had to be philosophical. Given such an enterprise, it is obvious that the knower had to be a daring adventurer with a large vision rather than a timid seeker of the safety of specialisation. He pointedly asked in the mid-1940s:

We talk of India's vivisection, but what about the vivisection of knowledge which has been going on all these years in the name of learning, scholarship and specialization? A 'subject' has been cut off from knowledge, knowledge has been excised from life, and life has been amputated from living social conditions. It is really high time for Sociology to come to its own. It may not offer the Truth. Truth is the concern of mystics and philosophers. Meanwhile, we may as well be occupied with the discipline which is most truthful to the wholeness and the dynamics of the objective human reality. (Mukerji 1946: 11)

Basic concepts in sociology, a product of DP's engagement with Western social thought, discusses the notions of 'progress', 'equality', 'social forces', and 'social control'. His exposition of these concepts is marked by both a positive attitude to the Western liberal outlook as also a lack of ease with the prevailing sociological theories, which he considered excessively ethnocentric and mechanistic. DP emphasised the importance of comparative cultural perspectives and of the historical situatedness of social reality. 'It may be urged against the above point of view that every systematic body of knowledge assumes all these. But when we assume, we forget.' Above all, he stressed the role of reason ('Practical and Speculative Reason') as a faculty—the intellectual ability to deduce or infer—as the primary source of knowledge. Moreover, knowledge was, he believed, 'most intimately related to better living as the Greeks realized and others forgot. . . . The only justification of these pages is to help to the best of one's ability in this installation of Reason in the heart of the subject' (1932: xvi). The ultimate objective was not merely understanding but 'the development of Personality' (ibid.: x).

Rejecting the evolutionist notion of 'progress' as a natural phenomenon, DP stressed the element of 'purpose' in the life of human beings. Development is not growth, he maintained, but the broader

process of the unfolding of potentialities (in this he followed Hegel and Marx though he did not say so explicitly), and added that the 'emergence of values and their dynamic character' must receive adequate consideration (1932: 9). Further:

Progress can best be understood as a problem covering the whole field of human endeavour. It has a direction in time. It has various means and tactics of development. Fundamentally, it is a problem of balance of values. The scope of the problem is as wide as human society, and as deep as human personality. In so far as human values arise only in contact with human consciousness at its different levels, the problem of progress has unique reference to the changing individual living in a particular region at a particular time in association with other individuals who share with him certain common customs, beliefs, traditions, and possibly a common temperament. (Ibid.: 15)

It seems to me permissible to derive from the foregoing statement the conclusion that 'modernisation' was the special form which 'progress' took for peoples of the Third World in the second half of the twentieth century. If this is granted, then the following words need to be pondered over:

Progress . . . is . . . a movement of freedom What is of vital significance is that our time-adjustments should be made in such a way that we should be free from the necessity of remaining in social contact for every moment of our life. This is an important condition of progress. In leisure alone can man conquer the tyranny of time, by investing it with a meaning, a direction, a memory and a purpose. Obstacles to leisure, including the demands of a hectic social life, often mistaken for progress, must be removed in order that the inner personality of man may get the opportunity for development. This is why the Hindu philosopher wisely insists on the daily hour of contemplation, and after a certain age, a well-marked period of retirement from the turmoil of life. The bustle of modern civilization is growing apace and the need for retirement is becoming greater. (Mukerji 1932: 29–30)

The above passage has a contemporary ring; and it is very relevant. If we paraphrase it, using words and phrases that are more familiar

today, we get a succinct reference to the unthinking craving for and the human costs of modernisation, including alienation, to the values of individual freedom and human dignity, and to social commitment. For DP progress was, as I have already quoted him saying, a problem of the balancing of values; and so is modernisation. When we introduce values into our discourse—and the rationalist perspective that he recommended will have it in no other way—we are faced with the problem of the hierarchy of values, that is, with the quest for ultimate or fundamental values. For these DP turned to the Upanishads, to *shantam*, *shivam*, *advaitam*, that is, harmony, welfare, unity.

The first is the principle of harmony which sustains the universe amidst all its incessant change, movements and conflicts. The second is the principle of co-ordination in the social environment. The third gives expression to the unity which transcends all the diverse forms of states, behaviours and conflicts, and permeates thought and action with ineffable joy. . . . On this view, progress ultimately depends on the development of personality by a conscious realization of the principles of Harmony, Welfare and Unity. (Ibid.)

This appeal to Vedanta, while discussing the Western notion of progress, is a disconcerting characteristic of DP's thought throughout. He sought to legitimise it by calling it 'synthesis', which itself he described as a characteristic of the historical process, the third stage of the dialectical triad. He thus evaded, it seems to me, a closer examination of the nature and validity of synthesis. Its existence was assumed and self-validating. One's disappointment and criticism of DP's position is not on the ground of the civilisational source of this trinity of values but on the ground that Harmony, Welfare, and Unity are too vague and esoteric within their elusive appearance in his discourse; and he does not show how they may be integrated with such values of the West as are embodied in its industrial civilisation. On the positive side, however, it must be added that DP's preoccupation with ultimate values should be assessed in the light of his deep distrust of the installation of Science as the redeemer of mankind and of Scientific Method (based on a narrow empiricism and exclusive reliance on inductive inference) as the redeemer of the social sciences.

DP, it would seem, was always deeply sensitive to the social environment around him. To the extent that the society in which he lived the life of a scholar was undergoing change, there was a discernible shift in his intellectual concerns also, and he was conscious of this. He even wrote about it later: 'In my view, the thing changing is more real and objective than change *per se*' (1958: 241). He was a very sensitive person, and many who knew him intimately will recall how a turn in events—whether of the university, the city, the country, or the world—would cast a gloom on him or bring him genuine joy. He had an incredible capacity for intense subjective experience: it perhaps killed him in the end. (One of his favourite books was Goethe's *Werther*.) In all his writings he addressed himself to his contemporaries: he had an unstated contempt for those who write for posterity with an eye on personal fame and some kind of immortality, and I think he was right in this attitude. As R.G. Collingwood put it in his famous autobiography: good writers always write for their contemporaries (Collingwood 1970: 39).

It would seem that what DP was most conscious of in his earlier writings was the need to establish links between traditional culture, of which he was a proud though critical inheritor, and modern liberal education, of which he was a critical though admiring product. The two—Indian culture and modern education—could not stay apart without each becoming impoverished—as indeed had been happening—and therefore had to be synthesised in the life of the people in general and of the middle classes and intellectuals in particular. In this respect, DP was a characteristic product of his times. He was attracted by the image of the future which the West held out to traditional societies and, at the same time, he was attached to his own tradition, the basis of which was the Hindu heritage. The need to defend what he regarded as the essential values of this tradition thus became a compelling concern, particularly in his later writings.

Dualities never ceased to interest DP, and he always sought to resolve the conflict implicit in persistent dualism through transcendence. This transcendence was to him what history was all about—or ought to be. But history was not for him a tablet already inscribed, once for all, and for each and every people. Hence his early criticism that, in the hands of Trotsky, Lenin, and Bukharin, Marx's materialist

interpretation of history had degenerated into 'pure dialectic' (1932: 184). This criticism was repeated by him again and again. In 1945, he complained that the Marxists had made the 'laws of dialectics' behave like the 'laws of Karma—predetermining every fact, event and human behaviour in its course; or else, they are held forth as a moral justification for what is commonly described as opportunism' (1945: 18).

For DP historiography was meaningless unless it was recognised that the decision to 'write history' entailed the decision to 'act history' (1945: 46). And history was being enacted in India in the 1930s, if it ever was during DP's lifetime, by the middle classes and, under their leadership, by the masses. What they were doing increasingly bothered him, for history had not only to be enacted but to be enacted right. The question of values could not be evaded. The middle classes, whose intellectual life was his concern in his earlier work, were also his concern in his later work, but now it was their politics that absorbed him. In this respect DP's concern avowedly with himself was in fact sociological, for he believed that no man is an island unto himself, for he is embedded not merely in his class but also in his larger socio-cultural environment. The focus was on modern Indian culture and the canvas naturally was the whole of India.

MODERN INDIAN CULTURE

The year 1942 saw the publication of *Modern Indian culture: A sociological study*. A second revised edition was completed in 1947, the year of Independence, but also of Partition. It was written under the impending shadow of the partition of India; inquiry and anguish are the mood of the book. The problem, as he saw it, was first to explain why the calamity of communal division had befallen India, and then to use this knowledge to shape a better future. Sociology had to be the interlocutor of history and this was no mean role; indeed, it was an obligation. His analysis led him to the conclusion that a distortion had entered into the long-established course of Indian history and crippled it. The happening responsible for this was British rule. But let me first quote DP's succinct statement of the character of modern Indian culture:

As a social and historical process . . . Indian culture represents certain common traditions that have given rise to a number of general attitudes. The major influences in their shaping have been Buddhism, Islam, and Western commerce and culture. It was through the assimilation and conflict of such varying forces that Indian culture became what it is today, neither Hindu nor Islamic, neither a replica of the Western modes of living and thought nor a purely Asiatic product. (Mukerji 1948: 1)

In this historical process, synthesis had been the dominant organising principle and the Hindu, the Buddhist, and the Muslim had together shaped a worldview in which, according to DP, 'the fact of Being was of lasting significance'. This meant that there had developed an indifference to 'the transient and the sensate' and a preoccupation with the subordination of 'the little self' to, and ultimately its dissolution in, 'the Supreme Reality' (1948: 2). This worldview DP called 'the mystical outlook'. He maintained that Islam could have shaken Hindu society to its very roots upon its arrival in India, but that Buddhism served as a cushion. Buddhism itself had failed to tear Hindu society asunder and had succeeded only in rendering it more elastic. Muslim rule was an economically progressive force but, on the whole, it brought about only a variation in the already existent socio-economic structure (*ibid.*: 65–7), and provided no real alternatives to native economic and political systems. 'The Muslims just reigned, but seldom ruled' (*ibid.*: 24).

British rule, however, did prove to be a real turning point in as much as it succeeded in changing the relations of production, or, to use DP's own words, 'the very basis of the Indian social economy' (1948: 24). New interests in land and commerce were generated; a new pattern of education was introduced; physical and occupational mobility received a strong impetus. Overshadowing all these developments, however, was the liquidation of an established middle class, and 'the emergence of a spurious middle class', 'who do not play any truly historical part in the socio-economic evolution of the country, remain distant from the rest of the people in professional isolation or as rent receivers, and are divorced from the realities of social and economic life. . . . Their ignorance of the background of Indian culture is profound. . . . Their pride in culture is in inverse proportion to its lack of social content' (*ibid.*: 25).

It was this middle class which helped in the consolidation of British rule in India but later challenged it successfully; it was also the same middle class which brought about the partition of the country. Its rootlessness made it a 'counterfeit class' and therefore its handiwork (whether in the domain of education and culture, in the political arena, or in the field of economic enterprise) had inevitably something of the same spurious quality. 'The politics and the culture of a subject country', DP wrote, 'cannot be separated from each other' (1948: 207). To expect such an 'elite' to lead an independent India along the path of genuine modernisation, DP asserted with remarkable prescience, would be unrealistic. He warned that before they could be expected to remake India, modernise it, the elite themselves must be remade. And he wrote a forthright, if not easy, prescription for them: 'conscious adjustment to Indian traditions and symbols' (ibid.: 215), for 'culture cannot be "made" from scratch' (ibid.: 214).

It is important to understand why he made this particular recommendation, why he wanted the withdrawal of foreign rule to be accompanied by a withdrawal into the self which, let me hasten to add, was quite different from a withdrawal into the past or plain inaction. DP was not only *not* a revivalist, he was keenly aware of the imminent possibility of revivalism and its fatal consequences. He noted that it would be the form that political hatred, disguised as civil hatred, would take after Independence. But he was not hopeless, for he fondly believed that revivalism could be combated by giving salience to economic interests through a 'material programme' that would cut across communal exclusiveness. He envisaged India's emancipation from the negative violence of the constrictive primordial loyalties of religion and caste through the emergence of class consciousness (1948: 216). He was silent on class conflict, however, and his critics may justifiably accuse him of not seeing his analysis through to its logical conclusion. His optimism was the sanguine hope of an Indian liberal intellectual rather than the fiery conviction of a Marxist revolutionary.

In any case, we know today, half a century after DP's expression of faith on this score, that class does not displace caste in India. Nor do class and caste coexist in compartments: they combine but they do not fuse. DP's vision of a peaceful, progressive India born out of the 'union' of diverse elements, of distinctive regional cultures, rather

than out of the type of 'unity' that the British imposed from above (1948: 216), however, remains eminently valid even today. The accommodation of various kinds of conflicting loyalties within a national framework, rather than national integration, is the strategy which new African and Asian states, faced with cultural pluralism, are finding both feasible and advantageous. We all know how Pakistan broke up in 1971.

DP's plea for a reorientation of tradition was, then, of a positive nature—an essential condition for moving forward, restoring historical dynamism, and reforging the broken chain of the socio-cultural process of synthesis. Employing Franklin Giddings' classification of traditions into primary, secondary, and tertiary (1948: 34), he suggested that by the time of the British arrival, Hindus and Muslims had yet not achieved a full synthesis of traditions at all levels of social existence. There was a greater measure of agreement between them regarding the utilisation and appropriation of natural resources and to a lesser extent in respect of aesthetic and religious traditions. In the tertiary traditions of conceptual thought, however, differences survived prominently.

It was into this situation that the British moved, blundering their way into India, and gave Indian history a severe jolt. As is generally believed, they destroyed indigenous merchant capital and the rural economy, pushed through a land settlement based on alien concepts of profit and property, and established a socially useless educational system. Such opportunities as they did create could not be fully utilised, DP said, for they cut across India's traditions, and 'because the methods of their imposition spoilt the substance of the need for new life' (1948: 206).

THE MAKING OF INDIAN HISTORY

At this point it seems pertinent to point out that while DP followed Marx closely in his conception of history and in his characterisation of British rule as uprooting, he differed significantly not only with Marx's assessment of the positive consequences of this rule but also with his negative assessment of pre-British traditions.

It will be recalled that Marx had in his articles on British rule in India asserted that India had a long past but 'no history at all, at least

no known history', that its social conditions had 'remained unaltered since its remotest antiquity'; that it was the British intruder who broke up 'the Indian handloom and destroyed the spinning-wheel', that it was 'British steam and science' which 'uprooted, over the whole surface of Hindustan, the union between agriculture and manufacturing industry'. Marx had listed England's crimes in India and proceeded to point out that she had become 'the unconscious tool of history whose actions would ultimately result in a 'fundamental revolution'. He had said: 'England had to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive and the other regenerating—the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in India' (Marx and Engels 1959: 31). Thus, for Marx, as for so many others since—including Indian intellectuals of various shades of opinion—the modernisation of India had to be its westernisation.

As has already been stated above, DP was intellectually and emotionally opposed to such a view of India's past and future, whether it came from Marx or from liberal bourgeois historians. He refused to be ashamed of or apologetic about India's past. The statement of his position was unambiguous: 'Our attitude is one of humility towards the given fund. But it is also an awareness of the need, the utter need, of recreating the given and making it flow. The given of India is very much in ourselves. And we want to make something worthwhile out of it. . . .' (1945: 11). Indian history could not be made by outsiders: it had to be enacted by Indians. In this endeavour they had to be not only firm of purpose but also clear-headed:

Our sole interest is to write and to act Indian History. Action means making; it has a starting point—this specificity called India; or if that be too vague, this specificity of the contact between India and England or the West. Making involves changing, which in turn requires (a) a scientific study of the tendencies which make up this specificity, and (b) a deep understanding of the Crisis [which marks the beginning no less than the end of an epoch]. In all these matters, the Marxian method . . . is likely to be more useful than other methods. If it is not, it can be discarded. After all, the object survives. (Mukerji 1945: 46)

'Specificity' and 'crisis' are the key words in this passage: the former points to the importance of the encounter of traditions and the latter

to its consequences. When one speaks of tradition, or of 'Marxist specification', one means, in DP's words, 'the comparative obduracy of a culture-pattern'. He expected the Marxist approach to be grounded in the specificity of Indian history (Mukerji 1945: 45, 1946: 162ff.), as indeed Marx himself had grounded it by focusing on capitalism, the dominant institution of Western society in his time. Marx, it will be said, was interested in precipitating the crises of contradictory class interests in capitalist society (Mukerji 1945: 37). DP, too, was interested in movement, in a release of the arrested historical process, in the relation between tradition and modernity. He asked for a sociology which would 'show the way out of the social system by analysing the process of transformation' (1958: 240). This could be done by focusing first on tradition and only then on change.

The first task for us, therefore, is to study the social traditions to which we have been born and in which we have had our being. This task includes the study of the changes in traditions by internal and external pressures. The latter are mostly economic. . . . Unless the economic force is extraordinarily strong—and it is that only when the modes of production are altered—traditions survive by adjustments. The capacity for adjustment is the measure of the vitality of traditions. One can have a full measure of this vitality only by immediate experience. Thus it is that I give top priority to the understanding (in Dilthey's sense) of traditions even for the study of their changes. In other words, the study of Indian traditions . . . should precede the socialist interpretations of changes in Indian traditions in terms of economic forces. (Ibid.: 232)

This brings us to the last phase of DP's work. Before I turn to it, however, I should mention that Louis Dumont has drawn our attention to an unresolved problem in DP's sociology. He points out that 'recognition of the absence of the individual [in the modern Western sense] in traditional India' obliges one to 'admit with others that India has no history', for 'history and the individual are inseparable'; it follows that 'Indian civilization [is] . . . unhistorical by definition' (Dumont 1967: 239). Viewed from this perspective, DP's impatience with the Marxist position regarding India's lack of history is difficult to understand. It is also rather surprising that, having emphasised

the importance of the group as against the individual in the Indian tradition, and of religious values also, he should have 'opted for a Marxist solution to the problems of Indian historiography (see *ibid.*: 231). DP hovered between Indian tradition and Marxism, apparently, but not perhaps really, or without much strain. His adherence to Marxist solutions to intellectual and practical problems gained in salience in his later work, which was also characterised by a heightened concern with tradition. His was a classic case of the 'opposed self'.

MODERNISATION: GENUINE OR SPURIOUS?

For DP the history of India was not the history of her particular form of class struggle because she had experienced none worth the name. The place of philosophy and religion was dominant in the history, and it was fundamentally a long-drawn exercise in cultural synthesis. For him 'Indian history was Indian culture' (1958: 123). India's recent woes, namely communal hatred and Partition, had been the result of the arrested assimilation of Islamic values (*ibid.*: 163); he believed that 'history halts unless it is pushed' (*ibid.*: 39). In other words, people make their own history, although (as Marx pointed out) not always as they please.

The national movement had generated much moral fervour but, DP complained, it had been anti-intellectual. Not only had there been much unthinking borrowing from the West, there had also emerged a hiatus between theory and practice, as a result of which thought had become impoverished and action ineffectual. Given his concern with intellectual and artistic creativity, it is not surprising that he should have concluded: 'politics has ruined our culture' (1958: 190).

What was worse, there were no signs of this schism healing in the years immediately after Independence. When planning arrived as state policy in the early 1950s, DP expressed his concern, for instance in an important 1953 paper on 'Man' and 'Plan' in India (1958: 30–76), that a clear concept of the new man and a systematic design of the new society were nowhere in evidence. As the years passed by, he came to formulate a negative judgment of the endeavour to build a

new India, and also diagnosed the cause of the rampant intellectual sloth. He said in 1955: 'I have seen how our progressive groups have failed in the field of intellect, and hence also in economic and political action, chiefly on account of their ignorance of and unrootedness in India's social reality' (ibid.: 240).

The issue at stake was India's modernisation. DP's essential stand on this was that there could be no genuine modernisation through imitation. A people could not abandon their own cultural heritage and yet succeed in internalising the historical experience of other peoples; they could only be ready to be taken over. He feared cultural imperialism more than any other. The only valid approach, according to him, was that which characterised the efforts of men like Ram-mohun Roy and Rabindranath Tagore, who tried to make 'the main currents of western thought and action . . . run through the Indian bed to remove its choking weeds in order that the ancient stream might flow' (1958: 33).

DP formulated this view of the dialectic between tradition and modernity several years before Independence, in his study of Tagore published in 1943, in which he wrote:

The influence of the West upon Tagore was great . . . but it should not be exaggerated: it only collaborated with one vital strand of the traditional, the strand that Ram Mohan and Tagore's father . . . reweave for Tagore's generation. Now, all these traditional values Tagore was perpetually exploiting but never more than when he felt the need to expand, to rise, to go deeper, and be fresher. At each such stage in the evolution of his prose, poetry, drama, music and of his personality we find Tagore drawing upon some basic reservoir of the soil, of the people, of the spirit and emerging with a capacity for larger investment. . . . (1972: 50).²

² DP drew an interesting and significant contrast between Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore. He wrote: '[Bankim] was a path-finder and a first class intellect that had absorbed the then current thought of England. His grounding in Indian thought was weak at first; when it was surer . . . [it] ended in his plea for a neo-Hindu resurgence. Like Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Bankim the artist remained a divided being. Tagore was more lucky. *His* saturation with Indian tradition was deeper; hence he could more easily assimilate a bigger dose of Western thought' (emphasis added, 1972: 75–6).

This crucial passage holds the key to DP's views on the nature and dynamics of modernisation. It emerges as a historical process which is at once an expansion, an elevation, a deepening, and a revitalisation—in short, a larger investment—of traditional values and cultural patterns, and not a total departure from them, resulting from the interplay of the traditional and the modern. DP would have agreed with Michael Oakeshott, I think, that the principle of tradition 'is a principle of continuity' (Oakeshott 1962: 128).³ From this perspective, tradition is a condition of rather than an obstacle to modernisation; it gives us the freedom to choose between alternatives and evolve a cultural pattern which cannot but be a synthesis of the old and the new. New values and institutions must have a soil in which to take root and from which to imbibe character. Modernity must therefore be defined in relation to, and not in denial of, tradition.⁴ Conflict is only the intermediate stage in the dialectical triad: the movement is towards *coincidentia oppositorum*. Needless to emphasise, the foregoing argument is in accordance with the Marxist

³ Marx, it will be recalled, had written (in 1853) of the 'melancholy' and the 'misery' of the Hindu arising out of the 'loss of his old world' and his separation from 'ancient traditions' (Marx and Engels 1959: 16). The task at hand was to make the vital currents flow. That this could be done by re-establishing meaningful links with the past would have been emphasised, however, only by an Indian such as DP. I suspect DP would have sympathised with Oakeshott's assertion that the changes a tradition 'undergoes are potential within it' (1962: 128).

⁴ Many contemporary thinkers have expressed similar views. For example, Popper writes: 'I do not think we could ever free ourselves entirely from the bonds of tradition. The so-called freeing is really a change from one tradition to another. But we can free ourselves from the taboos of tradition; and we can do that not only by rejecting it, but also by critically accepting it. We free ourselves from the taboo if we think about it, and if we ask ourselves whether we should accept it or reject it.' (1963: 122). Shils puts it somewhat differently: 'One of the major problems which confronts us in the analysis of tradition is the fusion of originality and traditionality. T.S. Eliot's essay, 'Tradition and Individual Talent', in *The Sacred Wood*, said very little more than that these two elements coexist and that originality works within the framework of traditionality. It adds and modifies, while accepting much. In any case, even though it rejects or disregards much of what it confronts in the particular sphere of its own creation, it accepts very much of what is inherited in the context of the

dialectic which sees relations as determined by one another and therefore bases a 'proper' understanding of them on such a relationship.

The synthesis of opposites is not, however, a historical inevitability. It is not a gift given to a people unasked or merely for the asking: they must strive for it self-consciously, for 'Culture is an affair of total consciousness' (1958: 189), it is a 'dynamic social process, and not another name for traditionalism' (*ibid.*: 101–2). History for DP was a 'going concern' (1945: 19), and the value of the Marxist approach to the making of history lay in that it would help to generate 'historical conviction' (1958: 56), and thus act as a spur to fully awakened endeavour. The alternative to self-conscious choice-making is mindless imitation and loss of autonomy and, therefore, dehumanisation, though he did not put it quite in these words.

Self-consciousness, then, is the first condition, or form, of modernisation. Its content, one gathers from DP's writings of the 1950s, consists of nationalism, democracy, the utilisation of science and technology for harnessing nature, planning for social and economic development, and the cultivation of rationality. The typical modern man is the engineer, social and technical (1958: 39–40). DP believed that these forces were becoming ascendant:

This is a bare historical fact. To transmute that fact into a value, the first requisite is to have active faith in the historicity of that fact. . . . The second requisite is social action . . . to push . . . consciously, deliberately, collectively, into the next historical phase. The value of Indian traditions lies in the ability of their conserving forces to put a brake on hasty passage. Adjustment is the end-product of the dialectical connection between the two. Meanwhile [there] is tension. And tension is not merely interesting as a subject of research; if it leads up to a higher stage, it is also desirable. The higher stage is where personality is integrated through a planned, socially directed, collective endeavour for historically understood ends, which means . . . a socialist order. Tensions will not cease there. It is not the peace of the grave. Only alienation from nature,

creation. It takes its point of departure from the "given" and goes forward from there, correcting, improving, transforming' (1975: 203–4).

work and man will stop in the arduous course of such high and strenuous endeavours. (1958: 76)

In view of this clear expression of faith (it is that, not a demonstration or anticipation of the inevitable, if that could be possible), it is not surprising that he should have told Indian sociologists (in 1955) that their 'first task' was the study of 'social traditions' (*ibid.*: 232), nor that he should have reminded them that traditions grow through conflict.

It is in the context of this emphasis on tradition that DP's specific recommendation for the study of Mahatma Gandhi's views on machines and technology, before going ahead with 'large scale technological development' (*ibid.*: 225), was made. It was no small matter that, from the Gandhian perspective, which stressed the values of wantlessness, non-exploitation, and non-possession, the very notions of economic development and under-development could be questioned (*ibid.*: 206). But this was perhaps only a gesture (a response to a poser), for DP maintained that Gandhi had failed to indicate how to absorb 'the new social forces which the West had released' (*ibid.*: 35). Moreover, 'the type of new society enveloped in the vulgarized notion of Rama-rajya was not only non-historical but anti-historical' (*ibid.*: 38). But he was also convinced that Gandhian insistence on traditional values might help to save India from the kind of evils (for example, scientism and consumerism) to which the West had fallen prey (*ibid.*: 227).

The failure to clearly define the terms and rigorously examine the process of synthesis, already noted above, reappears here again, and indeed repeatedly, in DP's work. In fact, he himself recognised this when he described his life to A.K. Saran as 'a series of reluctances' (Saran 1962b: 169). As Saran notes: DP 'did not wish to face the dilemma entailed by a steadfast recognition of this truth', that the three worldviews—Vedanta, Western liberalism, Marxism—which all beckoned to him 'do not mix'.⁵ One wonders what DP's autobiography would have been like.

⁵ It may be noted though that in his earlier writings DP had shown a greater wariness regarding the possibility of combining Marxism with Hindu tradition. Referring to the 'forceful sanity' of the 'exchange of rights and obligations' on

THEORIES OF MODERNISATION

I hope to have shown in this necessarily brief presentation that, despite understandable differences in emphasis, there is on the whole a remarkable consistency in DP's views on the nature of modernisation. Not that consistency is always a virtue, but in this case it happens to be true. Genuine modernisation, according to him, has to be distinguished from the spurious product and the clue lies in its historicity. The presentation of the argument is clear, but it is not always thorough and complete, and may be attacked from more than one vantage point.

Saran (1965), for instance, has pointed out that DP does not subject the socialist order itself to critique and takes its benign character on trust, that he fails to realise that a technology-oriented society cannot easily be non-exploitative and not anti-man, that the traditional and the modern worldviews are rooted in different conceptions of time, that traditional ideas cannot be activated by human effort alone, that given our choice of development goals we cannot escape westernisation, and so forth. It seems to me that DP's principal problem was that he let the obvious heuristic value of the dialectical approach overwhelm him and failed to probe deeply enough into the multidimensional and, indeed, dynamically integrated character of empirical reality. He fused the method and the datum.

I want to suggest, however, that DP's approach had certain advantages compared to those others that were current in modernisation studies of his time. An examination of those modernisation theories is outside the scope of this essay; I will therefore make only a rather sweeping generalisation about them. They seemed to fall into two very broad categories. There were, first, what one may call the 'big bang' theories of modernisation, according to which tradition and modernity were mutually exclusive, bipolar phenomena. This entailed the further view that before one could change anything at

which Hindu society was organised, he had written (1932: 136): 'before Communism can be introduced, national memory will have to be smudged, and new habits acquired. There is practically nothing in the traditions on which the new habits of living under an impersonal class-control can take root.'

all, one had to change everything. This view is, however, unfashionable now, and to that extent sociology has moved forward.

Secondly, there were what we may call the 'steady state' theories of modernisation, according to which modernisation was a gradual, piecemeal, process, involving the compartmentalisation of life and living; it was not through displacement but juxtaposition that modernisation proceeded. As a description of empirical reality, the latter approach was, and is, perhaps adequate, but it creates a serious problem of understanding, for it in effect dispenses with all values except modernity, which is defined vaguely with reference to what has happened elsewhere—industrialisation, bureaucratisation, democratisation, etc.—and almost abandons holism.

By this latter view, one is committed to the completion of the agenda of modernisation, as it were, and hence the boredom, the weariness, and the frustration one sees signs of everywhere. The gap between the 'modernised' and the 'modernising', it is obvious, will never be closed. No wonder, then, that social scientists already speak of the infinite transition—an endless pause—in which traditional societies find themselves trapped. Moreover, both sociology and history teach us, if they teach us anything at all, that there always is a residue, that there always will be traditional and modern elements in the cultural life of a people, at all times and in all places.

The virtue of a dialectical approach such as DP advocated would seem to be that it reveals the spuriousness of some of the issues that the other approaches give rise to. At the same time, it may well be criticised as an evasion of other basic issues. I might add, though, that it does provide us with a suggestive notion, one which we may call 'generative tradition', and also a framework for the evaluation of ongoing processes. All this of course needs elaboration, but the present essay is not the place for such an undertaking. Suffice it to say, the notion of generative tradition involves a conception of 'structural' time more significantly than it does that of 'chronological' time. 'Structural' time implies, as many anthropologists have shown, a working out of the potentialities of an institution. Institutions have a duration in 'real' time, but this is the surface view; they also have a deeper duration which is not readily perceived because of the transformations they undergo.

IV. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Looking back at the published corpus of Radhakamal Mukerjee and D.P. Mukerji, we have to note that it has all but disappeared from the sociology curricula of Indian universities and even from the libraries. Most of their books are out of print. Moreover, most of the Indian universities offering sociology courses were established after the death of these two scholars. Three of DP's books (*Modern Indian culture*, *Diversities*, and *An introduction to Indian music*) were reissued in 2002, but I doubt this is a result of any serious revival of interest in his contributions. It would not be incorrect to say that Mukerjee's work, despite its many shortcomings, has left a deeper mark than DP's. As a pioneer, Mukerjee was a man in a great hurry, who wrote a great deal on a wide variety of subjects, but did not go deeply into any of them. He did, however, contribute to laying the foundations of a number of new fields of study, including economic anthropology, institutional economics, social ecology, the sociology of values, and socio-economic studies of rural life and the Indian working class. DP's scholarly output was, by comparison, meagre. He wrote regularly in the newspapers and periodicals, notably *National herald* and *The economic weekly* (the editorial of the inaugural issue of the latter publication was from his pen), on subjects that were usually only of topical interest.

As far as I know, there is no book-length study of the contributions of either scholar.⁶ A *festchrift* in honour of Mukerjee (see Singh 1956) bears witness to his work being relatively well known, particularly in the USA. Among others Pitrim Sorokin, Talcott Parsons, Carl Zimmerman, Emory Bogardus, and Manuel Gottlieb contributed papers to it. Two memorial volumes dedicated to DP (see Singh and Singh 1967; Avasthi 1997) are more an expression of respect than a

⁶ D.N. Majumdar has fared no better. Only one of his books, which is an undergraduate-level text (see Majumdar and Madan 1956), is in print. At a birth centenary conference held in Lucknow in February 2003, under the auspices of the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society (of which he was the founder in 1947), several speakers recalled their close association with him, but no paper devoted to an assessment of his scholarly work was presented. Majumdar's lasting contribution, it seems, is the journal *The eastern anthropologist*, which is now (in 2007) in its sixtieth year of publication. See Madan 1994a.

discussion of his work. It is noteworthy that the Avasthi volume contains a number of tributes to DP as a teacher and lover of books. Several essays or discussions, published in the latter book and elsewhere, have been devoted to aspects of DP's work (see Joshi 1986; Madan 1977, 1994b; Mukherjee 1965; Nagendra 1997; Saran 1965), but an extended evaluation is yet awaited. I do not know whether the considerable body of DP's published work in Bengali has fared better. It includes notably, I understand, an early work on social distance, a volume comprising correspondence with Tagore about literature and music, and a fiction trilogy in which he employed the stream of consciousness technique, apparently for the first time in Bengali literature. What I do know is that there is no one among Indian sociologists today who can put us in mind of D.P. Mukerji. The times have changed and, doubtless, Indian sociology too has moved forward. I only wish there was better-informed and critically nuanced appreciation of what the founders strove for and achieved.⁷ The present volume is therefore very welcome. More welcome is the fact that it is a result of the initiative of a new generation of scholars, none of whom knew the pioneers personally.

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⁷ Actually, there has been quite some misrepresentation of DP's work. Nearly every statement in the two paragraphs devoted to it in a fairly long essay (Srinivas and Panini 1973), is either factually incorrect or otherwise misleading. It is indeed surprising that the authors should suggest that DP 'viewed the process of change under British rule as similar to changes under earlier alien rulers', and that they should think he changed his views about 'synthesis' in his later writings. His concern with the cultural 'specificity' of India is misrepresented as an emphasis on 'uniqueness'.

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Group photograph: Meeting of the First All India Sociological Conference, Dehra Dun, December/January 1954/55 (see p. 257): *Seated:* 3rd from left, Professor R.N. Saxena, Principal, DAV College, Dehra Dun; next to him, Professor D.N. Majumdar, Head of the Department of Anthropology at Lucknow University; Professor D.P. Mukerji, Head of the Department of Economics at Aligarh Muslim University and General President of the Conference; 7th from left, Professor Raja Ram Shastri (who introduced sociology at the Kashi Vidyapeeth); and beside him, I.P. Desai (Baroda). *Standing, first row:* 2nd from left, Brij Raj Chauhan (Udaipur); K.N. Sharma (IIT, Kanpur, the first teacher of sociology at an IIT); 8th from left, Sachchidananda (Patna); 11th from left, V.B. Damle (Poona, who introduced American Sociology in India); Prabhat Chandra (Jabalpur). *Standing, second row:* 2nd from left, A.P. Barnabas (Delhi); 4th from left, Khaliq Naqvi (who did his PhD with D.P. Mukerji in Lucknow on the concept of class); Gopala Sarana (Lucknow); 9th from left, G.S. Bhatt (Dehra Dun). *Standing, back row:* 1st from left, Giri Raj Gupta (Lucknow); 5th from left, K.P. Gupta (Lucknow); 7th from left, K.S. Mathur (Lucknow).

The Anthropologist as 'Scientist'? Nirmal Kumar Bose*

PRADIP KUMAR BOSE

I. THE MAKING OF AN ANTHROPOLOGIST

HE CALLED HIMSELF A *PARIBRAJAK*, A WANDERER. HIS FRIENDS and admirers knew him as a scholar of wide-ranging interests, an indefatigable fieldworker, a person with immense creative energy, and a great nationalist.¹ The only child of Bimanbihari and Kiran-sashi, Nirmal Kumar was born at Calcutta on 22 January 1901. Since his father, a doctor by profession, had a transferable job, Bose went to various schools in Bihar and Orissa. In 1917 Bose joined Scottish Church College, Calcutta, for the Intermediate Science Course. For his BSc degree he studied geology at Presidency College, Calcutta, and it was as a student of geology that he was first initiated into the excitement of fieldwork. He graduated with honours in 1921 and joined Presidency College for an MSc in Geology. The Non-cooperation movement was making a considerable impact on the student community in Calcutta, and Bose too came under the influence of

*I am grateful to Manaswita Sanyal and Gautam Bhadra for lending me books by Nirmal Kumar Bose from their personal collection. These were not easily available elsewhere, and this essay could not have been written without their generous help.

¹ Most of the biographical details presented in this section have been taken from Surajit Sinha (1986) and Purnima Sinha (2001).



Fig. 8: Portrait of Nirmal Kumar Bose (1901–1972).

Photograph courtesy 'Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Archives'

Gandhian politics. We get an idea of Bose's response to this movement from his diary:

In our national life we feel the arrival of a great period! The Non-cooperation Movement is being implemented all around us. Students are leaving their schools, colleges and universities. In all these moves

there are concurrent streams of sentiments and reason. . . . I do not know whether we are going to attain swaraj within a year only on account of leaving schools and colleges. But it appears to me that these movements are going to arouse our national consciousness and life and many of us would wake up and start thinking. (Sinha 1986: 8)

Convinced that social emancipation in India should go hand in hand with political emancipation, Bose decided to abandon his studies to join the Non-cooperation movement. Moving to Puri with his mother, he also, around this time, developed an interest in the architecture and sculptures of the temples of Orissa. Soon he started giving lectures on the temples and their architecture to visitors. Asutosh Mukherjee, then vice chancellor of Calcutta University, was present at one of these lectures and was very impressed with the clarity of Bose's exposition. He persuaded Bose to come to the university, suggesting that he begin with courses at the new department of anthropology then being built up. He pointed out to Bose that, with his training in geology and knowledge of temple architecture, he would find the course challenging. Mukherjee emphasized that Bose should not equate Calcutta University with a government department. Bose joined the Department of Anthropology in 1923 for a postgraduate degree, graduating in 1925. His thesis on 'The spring festival of India' investigates the diffusion of cultural traits in India and remains an important paper (discussed later). This was followed by a research fellowship to study the Juangs of Pal Lahara. He was, however, unable to work in the field for long because of a severe attack of malignant malaria. In a Bengali article, '*Bidyar byabhar*' (Use of knowledge), Bose reflects on his dilemmas in the field, when he found that all Juangs were undernourished and suffering from malaria:

I have to admit that I had not really accepted them as fellow human beings like me. If my own relatives had been affected by similar poverty and disease or could not fully utilise the scope for better form of cultivation due to lack of knowledge, I could not have gone on just measuring heads, and collecting information about the local cults, cults of the womenfolk or mortuary rites for writing a research paper. I would have tried to apply all my knowledge to come to their rescue. What should

be my duty under [such] circumstances? This question started stirring my mind. I have to regretfully admit that I could not properly resolve the problem. (Bose 1949 [1930]: 18–19; Sinha 1986: 13)

Bose's experience with the Juangs convinced him that academic research alone was not enough, and that knowledge must be used for social welfare. In 1930 he left the university to join Gandhi's salt satyagraha movement and set up a night school and a Khadi Sangha in a largely dalit slum near Bolpur, Santiniketan. He was arrested in 1931 for joining the salt satyagraha and was imprisoned first in Suri jail, being later transferred to Dum Dum special jail. During this time, Bose began a serious study of Gandhian literature, spending part of his time in jail thinking and writing about Gandhi, an experience which later culminated in *Selections from Gandhi* (Bose 1934).

Bose had had no opportunity to meet Gandhi in person; he met him for the first time in November 1934. The meeting left a deep impact. Bose decided to devote himself full-time to the study and propagation of Gandhi's ideas. Bose continued his association with the Khadi Sangha of Bolpur all through this time, while writing prolifically in Bengali and English on the caste system, Gandhian thought, temple architecture, and various aspects of Bengali society and culture. He engaged himself in social reconstruction and learnt firsthand about the human condition in which most Indians lived, stepping clean out of disciplinary boundaries and the comforts of a metropolitan lifestyle.

In 1937 Syamaprasad Mukherjee, then vice chancellor of Calcutta University, persuaded Bose to join the Department of Anthropology as Assistant Lecturer. Bose taught prehistoric archaeology to undergraduate and postgraduate classes. A great believer in fieldwork, in 1939 he arranged for his students to be involved in archaeological excavations at Kuliana in Mayurbhanj. He was soon able to build up a large collection of palaeolithic tools for the prehistory unit of the department. During this period he wrote about prehistoric research in Mayurbhanj (Bose 1940a), as well as on Gandhi (Bose 1940b). As a teacher, Bose believed in encouraging students to voice their doubts and ask questions. In a Bengali article entitled '*Bigyan sikshaker abhignata*' (Experience of a science teacher), Bose (1949 [1930]: 28–33) pointed out that if lectures merely transmitted the opinions of

established scholars, anthropology would never emerge as a scientific discipline and remain merely a historical narrative of received theories. On the other hand, lectures based on facts and on an open spirit of enquiry, lectures comparing the interpretations of various scholars of the same set of facts and trying to assess which of these opened new areas of enquiry and observation, would generate in the classroom a healthy spirit of self-confidence and endeavour.

In August 1942, when the Quit India movement was launched, Bose was arrested again. He was released only in 1945, after three and a half years. Upon his release he regained his old job as Assistant Lecturer in the Anthropology Department. In 1946 he was offered a lecturership in human geography at the Department of Geography.

Soon after, in August 1946, communal riots broke out in Calcutta, followed by another series of riots in Noakhali district in East Bengal. When Gandhi came to Sodepur in the aftermath of the riots, Bose was instructed to interview refugees from Noakhali in the various camps at Calcutta and gather eyewitness information of the actual events. Summaries of these interviews were placed before Gandhi almost every day. Eventually Gandhi requested Bose to accompany him on his tour of Noakhali: 'I want you if you can and will to be with me wherever I go and stay while I am in Bengal. The idea is that I should be alone with you as my companion and interpreter. This you should do only if you can sever your connection with the University and would care to risk death, starvation, etc.' (Bose 1974: 44). Bose wrote in great detail about this critical phase of Gandhi's life in *My days with Gandhi* (Bose 1974). In the preface to this book he says he had long planned to write four books on Gandhi: a book of selections from Gandhi's English writings which would serve as a summary of his thoughts on various subjects; an outline of his economic and political ideas; a book on his personality and practices; and finally a critical account of various satyagraha movements. Bose completed the first three; illness presented him finishing the fourth.

Leaving Gandhi's team in 1947, Bose returned to the Department of Geography at Calcutta University. Though primarily attached to the Geography Department, he continued his association with the Anthropology Department and also taught Sociology in the Department of Political Science. In 1951 he took up the editorship of *Man*

in India, the first professional journal in anthropology in the country, which had been founded by Sarat Chandra Roy. Bose continued as its editor for some twenty years, till his death. In 1959 he was invited to join the Anthropological Survey of India as Director and Anthropological Advisor to the Government of India. He immediately initiated a study of the distribution of cultural traits in India, resulting in *Peasant life in India: A study in Indian unity and diversity* (Bose 1961). After retiring from the Anthropological Survey in 1964, he was asked to join a study team for the Hill District of Assam under the chairmanship of Shri Tarlok Singh, as a special invitee. In 1967 he was assigned by the governor of Assam to prepare a report on the educational problems of the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) (now Arunachal Pradesh), and in the same year accepted the statutory position of Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Bose took up this job with his characteristic enthusiasm, travelled extensively, and prepared several reports which bear his distinctive stamp.

In 1970, at the end of his three-year term as commissioner, Bose returned to Calcutta, continuing at the ripe old age of seventy to work with the same energy and dedication that he had shown all his life. He even began learning Urdu from a maulavi for half an hour every morning. However, from 1971 Bose began showing signs of illness and was found to be suffering from cancer. Even during his illness, when he was virtually confined to bed, he continued his writing and participated in a number of important meetings and discussions. He died in October 1972.

II. THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS SCIENTIST?

In 1946 when Bose was accompanying Gandhi on his tour of riot-torn Noakhali, 'an interesting conversation' took place between the two:

He called me . . . and asked me if I did not at all believe in God. I confessed that the problem whether God existed or not, or what was the primal cause of the universe, had never seriously come into my life. I did not concern myself with the question of such ultimates.

'Don't you believe in anything?' he asked.

I said, 'Yes, as a scientist, I do believe in truth. For, in the laboratory or in our scientific investigations, we undoubtedly try to discover the truth by observation and experiment. Unless we believe that there is something worth striving for, why should we engage in the chase at all? Truth may be like a carrot dangling before a donkey's nose, but it is there all the same.'

Gandhiji said, 'that will do'. (Bose 1974: 49–50)

A few days later, when similar questions cropped up, Bose says: 'I told him how scientific research was my true vocation (*swadharna*), while serving in the political campaign, even when it was by intellect, was no more than an emergency duty (*apadharna*)' (Bose 1974: 67).

Bose's conviction that he was engaged as a scientist in a scientific pursuit also reflects his understanding of anthropology, which he always considered a branch of science. Surajit Sinha, one of Bose's former students and a close acquaintance, writes: 'As a younger anthropologist who had been in touch with Professor Bose for over twenty years I have often felt that he was a little too obsessed with presenting himself as a "scientist"' (Sinha 1986: 45). It is no surprise that Bose shared in the twentieth-century discourse of anthropology as a science, emphasising a limited subject focus, in-depth fieldwork, codified data accumulation, and cautiously restricted inferences. He was deeply influenced by Franz Boas and considered him one of his gurus in anthropology (Sinha 1973: 1). Unlike earlier evolutionary theorists, who had emphasised overall cultural similarities, Boas stressed the differences and particularity of each culture as a result of its specific and divergent historical development. It is well known that Boas was critical of the tendency in anthropology towards premature generalisation and speculative history, arguing in favour of the meticulous collection ('total recovery') of ethnographic data before generalisation could be attempted. Anthropology, Boas believed, must ultimately discover some laws, just as any proper science must, but such laws could not be discovered until all the evidence was in. Since all the evidence would never be in, the anthropologist, now a kind of 'connoisseur of chaos', had best stick to particularities and defer concern for pattern or general lawfulness. What impressed Bose most about Boas, he told Sinha, was his inductive natural history

approach which kept the mind open to unexpected discovery: 'Boas started with observations and then moved towards classification and generalisation rather than starting with a deductive hypothetical model' (ibid.). This is the characteristic claim of the science of empiricism, in which induction is considered the indispensable foundation of all factual knowledge.

By implication here, ethnography is a neutral, tropeless discourse that renders and recovers in a 'scientific' language other realities 'exactly as they are'. This language somehow bypasses values and interpretive schema. The language of science has traditionally excluded certain expressive modes from its repertoire, such as subjectivity (in the name of objectivity), rhetoric (in the name of 'plain', transparent signification), and fiction (in the name of fact) (Clifford 1986a: 5). The qualities eliminated from science were localised in the category of 'literature'. Whatever may have been the case in other sciences, in ethnography the crucial problem was to reconcile the 'contradiction . . . between personal and scientific authority', a contradiction that had taken an acute turn 'since the advent of fieldwork as methodological norm' (Pratt 1986: 32). James Clifford says: 'Anthropological field work has been represented as both a scientific "laboratory" and a personal "rite of passage". The two metaphors capture nicely the discipline's impossible attempt to fuse objective and subjective practices' (Clifford 1986b: 109). It has been argued that ethnographic texts are not simply objective descriptions of reality but are constituted in terms of a set of problematic links between ethnographic authority, personal experience, scientism, and literary style. Personal experiences of fieldwork, often narrated at the beginning of the text, produce a kind of authority that is located in the subjective experience of the ethnographer (Pratt 1986: 27–50). However, a formal text has to conform to the rules of a scientific discourse whose authority demands that the speaking and the experiencing subject be effaced. Tensions between these competing authorities are inscribed in all ethnographic texts. As Pratt points out, 'There are strong reasons why field ethnographers so often lament that their ethnographic writings leave out or hopelessly impoverish some of the most important knowledge they have achieved, including the self-knowledge' (ibid.: 33).

We witness a similar tension in Bose's writings, exacerbated by his claims to being a scientist, even as he was aware of the sensuous and experiential side of his fieldwork. Bose was never only an anthropologist, he wrote on social history, art, politics, temple architecture, archaeology, geology, human geography, education, social work, nationalism, and Gandhism. He also wrote prolifically in Bengali: many of his Bengali essays are in the form of travelogues, autobiographical sketches, personal narratives, and social portraits anchored in personal experience. These were published in journals like *Prabasi*, *Desh*, *Sanibarar chithi*, and *Sahitya Parisad patrika*, and later included in two remarkable collections, *Paribrajaker diary* (Diary of a wanderer) (Bose 1982 [1940]) and *Nabin o prachin* (New and old) (Bose 1949 [1930]). In these writings we find personal accounts, at the time considered inconsequential and trivial, occupying a privileged place. In these accounts Bose sets himself free, as it were, from the objectifying demands of scientific discourse and establishes his personal authority on the texts. Here the narrator is not self-effacing, nor simply a hand that writes—as is expected in formal-scientific description. We witness in these expressive and literary writings an anthropologist who is subverting his own 'science'. I argue later (section VII) that this is particularly related to the vernacularisation of ethnography, in which Bose played a pioneering role. Before that, however, it is essential to present a general outline of Bose's anthropology.

III. CULTURE AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Bose's early anthropology was influenced by Boas and Kroeber's cross-cultural analysis. This type of analysis samples the available data within a specified region, enabling controls to be exercised for geographical, linguistic, and environmental relations. Early studies of this kind by Kroeber and his students took societies as the units of analysis, and compared inventories of traits in order to elaborate 'cultural similarity matrices'. Bose was particularly attracted to this approach because he believed that a proper understanding of Indian civilisation would require anthropologists to go beyond the study of tribal communities. In the culture area approach, and in theories of diffusion and cross-cultural comparison, the concept of the cultural

trait, which Bose discusses in great detail with numerous Indian examples, is of central importance. His early work on the spring festival of India, an important study of the diffusion of cultural traits, defines the geographical area covered by this cultural trait at any period in its history as extending from the eastern provinces of India to Europe (Bose 1927: 112–55). In this very richly illustrated essay, Bose argues that one of the festival's chief centres of dispersal lay in eastern India, where the original form of the festival was perpetuated by the Nagas, Kandhs, and Oraons, and is observed in its purest form in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and among the Gonds of the Central Provinces. Bose later applied the theory of the diffusion of cultural traits to his work on temple architecture and material culture in rural India.

André Bêteille points out that, much before Dumont and Pocock, Bose realised the importance of combining ethnology and Indology in the study of Indian society (Bêteille 1975). But for him an anthropology of tribes that merely confirmed the Indological perspective was not sufficient, since tribal society had changed following the advent of colonialism. Thus, Bose attempted to integrate history into his scheme, not only to enhance the analysis of social change but also for social reconstruction. His book on cultural anthropology begins:

The social structure which we have inherited from the past was built in answer to the challenge of certain problems of life, many of which are now out of action. A new set of problems has arisen in the course of the last twenty years, and it is no longer possible to live according to the old ways under modern conditions. A determined effort should therefore be made to adapt our cultural heritage to present day needs and requirements. In this work of reconstruction, many thinkers believe the social sciences will be of great service to humanity. (1953 [1929]: 1)

This particular idea of social science resembled in many ways the practices of applied science. Bose believed that this science could help in understanding the 'mechanics of the working of human history' in the same way as diagrams and charts help an engineer understand the structure and operations of an engine. As a science, anthropology is not capable of building up hope in man or regenerating faith where none exists; but, in a limited fashion, anthropology

can always analyse a society's present in terms of its past, draw out the factors responsible for change, and enable both scientific development and social reconstruction. This view of anthropology developed later in the post-War years as applied or development anthropology, whose practitioners accepted the need and desire for change in the developing world. In this apolitical view, focused on cultural differences, the national political structure is basically benevolent. Such a view obscures the fact that it is often structures of social and politico-economic dominance which create developmental problems. Bose's view of the role of anthropology in moulding reconstruction and development is similarly problematic, as we shall see.

Bose's central emphasis was on culture, which he understood in terms of cultural traits. Though cultural traits can be classified into a number of groups, they are intimately related to one another, and change in one produces change in all the other groups. For Bose, the outward form of culture was conditioned by human experience, and changed with time. In his analysis of culture he attempted to classify Indian culture in terms of a three-fold dharma, namely *arthadharma*, *kama-dharma*, and *moksha-dharma*. Each of these dharmas, he explained, acts in four phases, namely (i) *vastu* or material object; (ii) *kriya* or habitual action; (iii) *samhati* or social grouping; and (iv) *tattva* or knowledge. Further, *tattva* can again be sub-classified into two groups depending on whether the knowledge is *vichar-mulaka*, i.e. based on criticism, or *viswasmulaka*, based on faith. He followed a similar course in describing the religious culture of Bengal and characterised one of the principal religious cults of Bengal, namely Vaishnavism, in terms of various *bhavas* (attitudes), such as *sakhya* (friendship), *dasya* (service), *sanskara* (convention), and various *gunas* (Bose 1953 [1929]: 13–20).

Subsequently, Bose applied his cultural analysis to demarcate the cultural zones of India, attempting to show that the regions or states of India, though separated by differences of language, share many elements of material as well as high culture. He attributed this to diffusion. From a culturalist perspective, India emerges in Bose's writings as a place where a superior order of cultural unity prevails: 'Thus, in spite of the fact that languages of India are many, and there

are well marked differences between one regional culture and another, yet there is an overall unity of design which makes them all members of one family. . . . The details might vary from place to place . . . yet the sameness of traditions on which all of them have been reared cannot be overlooked' (Bose 1967: 9).

Bose summarised his thematic approach to cultural anthropology in the following manner: first, institutions are crystallised manifestations of the behaviour of communities. Second, persons adapt themselves to their 'cultural inheritance—or social structure, as some would prefer to call it' and in the process alter that structure as well. 'And it is this interplay between life and culture which maintains culture in a state of dynamic equilibrium' (Bose 1967: v). Hence, for Bose, the human element is an important operative factor in cultural evolution. It is here that Bose differed in important ways from Kroeber's influential ideas about 'the superorganic', which involved the complete subordination of the individual to his cultural milieu (Kroeber 1971: 163–213). Bose, on the other hand, believed that at certain moments in history creative and deviant individuals may be the starting point of change (Sinha 1973: 2).

Since both history and change remained two very important constituents of Bose's thinking on anthropology, he appropriated anthropological theories only after suitable modification. Bose's *Cultural anthropology* was published a few years after the functionalist ethnographies of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, but before functionalism had emerged as a coherent body of theory. Though one also finds mention in his work of the 'adaptive function of culture', Bose's understanding of function was not ahistorical in nature (Bose 1953 [1929]: 8–12). On the contrary he focused on adaptation in the context of historical change. He believed that historical developments were associated with a number of unresolved problems. If the cultural heritage was found inadequate in serving these needs, certain modifications—characterised as 'adaptive functions'—were bound to occur. It must be remembered that, within early-twentieth-century anthropology, there were two approaches: a broadly geographical approach, which was concerned with migration, cultural diffusion, and the classification of peoples and objects; and what was generally called the sociological approach, which dealt with the development

of social institutions, such as caste. The former sort of anthropologists tended to be more descriptive and particularistic, while the latter were more comparative and theoretical. Bose was an exponent of both varieties of anthropology. He continued to rely on some form of diffusionism, expressed in the careful historical-geographical analysis of the relationships between cultures and culture areas. And he employed his sociological ideas productively in one particular field within which he remains a pioneer, namely, studies of architecture.

IV. ANTHROPOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE

Even today there are relatively few explorations of the relationship between architecture and anthropology, despite the fact that this is a field of great potential interest for the anthropologist, representing as it does an interface between ideology and technology. Human dwellings and settlements reflect both the needs and constraints imposed by the environment and the mode of subsistence, and the society's concept of individual, family, and communal life. From his early days, Bose showed keen interest in the architecture of the land, especially the architectural style of tribals and peasants. Architectural design both reflects and shapes people's expectations of the environment and the use of its resources. Among people with relatively little technological development, dwellings and communities may be more impermanent than in a modern city, but they display the dynamic interplay between materials, environment, and man's ideal models of family and social life. In his early work, Bose makes this careful observation about Bengal architecture:

West Bengal has an original style of domestic architecture. The roof of the cottage is thatched with straw and the outline of the ridge-pole and eaves is convex. The shape of the thatches is also slightly spherical in appearance, and they are not flat and straight as in Orissa or East Bengal. . . . Although temples in West Bengal are not made of earth like the cottages but of bricks, yet there is a resemblance between the two in form. The temples are sometimes made more elaborate by placing two roofs side by side or by putting them one over another with a short height of wall interposing between them. A further development takes place when turrets are set at each corner of the roof. The Bengali style of architecture is thus distinct in its individuality. If we travel from

Bengal towards Chotanagpur, the Bengali type of hut becomes rarer as we proceed on our journey westward. Near Jhalda, which lies between the headquarters of Manbhum and Ranchi, the number of typical Bengali huts is evenly matched with the tiled huts of Bihar. A few stations farther west, the curved and thatched roof disappears altogether to give place to the straight and tiled type of cottages. Then again, in Chotanagpur, one rarely meets with the Bengali types of temples. (Bose 1953 [1929]: 16–17)

Though Bose's principal interest in commenting on domestic architecture was to demonstrate the distribution of cultural traits, his meticulous description also illustrates how ethnoarchitectural principles reflect important social and cultural categories and relationships, for example, the symbolism that identifies a house with a lineage, and so on. In an essay on the Birhors, Bose showed how the Birhors maintained a distinctive house-building style, with a circular ground plan and a conical roof. He related this pattern to the migratory lifestyle of the Birhors, who find it easier to build a conical hut with no separate walls. But he complicated the issue by pointing out that many low castes of Andhra Pradesh, near Waltair, had circular houses with conical roofs, while at least three castes of northern Gujarat, namely Rewari, Mer, and Waghri, built completely circular, mud-wall huts, surmounted by a pointed, conical thatched roof (Bose 1967: 172). Bose was continuously drawing attention to such details of domestic architecture and seeking explanations.

This interest in domestic architecture developed out of his interest in temple architecture. When Bose left Presidency College in 1921 in response to Gandhi's call, and began living in Puri, he became interested in the architecture and sculptures of the temples of Puri, Konarak, and Bhubaneswar and began enquiries about the basic architectural principles of these temples. He met a group of silpis, the traditional stone carvers and temple builders, and through them came across certain manuscripts which he translated with annotations in the book *Canons of Orissan architecture* (Bose 1932). He also wrote a number of articles and a book in Bengali on this theme, *Konaraker bibaran* (Bose 1960a [1926]). Bose distinguished his approach from a standard architectural one by pointing out that Western scholars and their Indian disciples were trained in European

schools of architecture and never looked at Indian buildings from the Indian craftsman's perspective. 'They did not know how buildings and temples were classified by the builders themselves, what distinctions were drawn between different varieties of temples, which were considered the finer points in building-technique and so forth' (Bose 1932: 1). This also shows Bose's unwavering interest in constructing a form of knowledge in terms of indigenous categories. He studied the categories of Oriya architecture with the help of local craftsmen and supplemented this by fieldwork in the different parts of Orissa. Thus, Bose writes: 'A workable restoration of the science of architecture in Orissa has been secured. When similar restorations are available for other provinces in India and the existing examples of architecture studied in their light, it will be possible to reconstruct the history of Indian architecture with some degree of certainty' (Bose 1932: 4).

What must have interested Bose in these canons is not simply that these texts presented the craftsmen's perspective, but also that they displayed a cultural holism by employing the same cultural categories as found in other spheres. One illustration from the text will exemplify the point. The first step for a builder is to classify the soil, and soils are classified into four groups: Brahmin soil which is white in colour, Kshatriya soil which is blood red, Vaisya soil which is yellow, and Sudra soil which is black. The text then says if a man lives on the soil of his own caste, he will be happy. But a Brahmin can live on any one of the four classes of soils, a Kshatriya can live on three, a Vaisya on two, and a Sudra on only that which belongs to his caste. 'If, through temptation, a man lives on soil which belongs to a caste higher than his own, then surely destruction shall follow him. The place where his house stands shall be converted into a waste, and jackals shall fill the place with their cries even during the daytime' (Bose 1932: 12–13). He used the insights gained from these texts and his own study of Oriya temples to formulate his theories of Indian civilisation. In *Konaraker bibaran*, Bose (1960a [1926]) refers to an expansive and confident phase of Indian civilisation. In a larger perspective, Bose considered Oriya civilisation no different from other civilisations in being made up of elements derived from many tribes and many lands. He illustrates this through the sculptures on temple walls.

Bose took up the problems of dating Indian temples in his presidential address to the Anthropology and Archaeology Section of the Indian Science Congress in 1949 (Bose 1967: 85–104). He suggested that archaeology could benefit from anthropology because anthropology also sought to arrange a huge mass of undated facts in proper order. Initially, from the time of Tylor, evolutionary theory was employed for this purpose, but it failed to devise any means of verifying its findings with the help of independent evidence. This theory was rejected by the 'Historical School of America, led by Boas, Wissler, Lowie, Goldenweiser and Kroeber', and it was later replaced on the Continent by what was termed the 'Cultural Historical Method in Ethnology' (ibid.: 85). Bose then points out:

Among these, as far as I know, Kroeber not only applied the Diffusion Method with great skill in unravelling the history of a primitive religion in aboriginal America, but also tried to corroborate the findings by means of independent evidence obtained from excavation. It is the purpose of the present paper to suggest a similar procedure with regard to the problem of dating, and suggest how future research can be planned so that the validity of the proposed method can be reliably tested. The particular field of culture from which data will be drawn will be that of Indian architecture, and we can thus hope that workers in both archaeology and anthropology can co-operate with chances of being of real service to one another. (Bose 1967: 85)

Taking his cue from anthropological research, Bose was critical of early historians who depended primarily on a unilinear theory of evolution for dating temples and therefore lacked adequate means for checking their results. He pointed out that the anthropological evidence suggests that different elements of culture do not follow the same rate of diffusion—'They, in fact, display different ranges of variability at the same point of time, and also variable rates of differentiation and of secondary elaboration in course of time' (Bose 1967: 96). He argued that in temples ornamental elements, for instance, may have followed one line of evolution, while structural elements like the height, curvature, or techniques of balancing the weight of the structure, may all have followed completely different rates of change. He did not rule out the contribution of personal genius, which may have been responsible for certain modifications.

Bose argued that if structural elements were not taken into account for the preparation of the scale, then an injustice would be done to the very object of the study. He therefore first considered the space variations suggested by Fergusson,² and then employed the Distribution Method for rearranging the elements in a time scale.

Bose maintained that a proper scientific method of dating would require employing a uniform method to analyse the structural elements for all temples. After collection of sufficient data, distribution maps of significant elements should be prepared to draw inferences about the course of evolution. He pointed out, however, that the evolutionary scale thus constructed for one state may have limited value in another; hence, in each state the dated temple should be employed to build up another local series. This would be a device to check the findings of the distribution method and, if necessary, to supplement it in the local context: 'By this effort we should also be able to raise our science to higher levels of reliability' (Bose 1967: 104).

The principal relationship between anthropology and archaeology was mediated and constituted by the paradigm of science. Bose was not particularly interested in prehistoric archaeology, but rather in the traditions of classical archaeology and its relation to the study of civilisations. Through his study of temple architecture, he attempted to demonstrate the multiple links between anthropology and archaeology both in theory and method, in order to evolve a scientific practice distinct from the received traditions of the West. As with his essays on other subjects, in this particular case, also, Bose framed his methodology on the basis of extensive observation and detailed knowledge. This is reflected in another of his consistent and enduring concerns, namely, analysis of the castes and tribes of India.

V. ANTHROPOLOGY OF CASTES AND TRIBES

In one of his Bengali essays published in 1935 and entitled '*Bharate nritattva charchar ekti adhyay*' (A chapter in the anthropology of

² James Fergusson (1808–83) was considered an authority on Indian architecture, especially temple architecture. He was Vice President of the Royal Asiatic Society, London, and wrote a number of books on the history of Indian and Eastern architecture.

India), Bose traced the history of research on the castes and tribes of India. He pointed out that in the early phase the tendency was to construct an ethnography for India as a whole. When this was found inadequate, ethnographers concentrated on individual provinces, and it was only when even this was found deficient that the focus shifted to the study of individual castes and tribes (Bose 1935: 63–5). Bose concluded his essay by stating that proper ethnography for the whole of India would require the meticulous collection of information for about twenty years through the collective efforts of various institutes and universities. A quarter century later, while writing a foreword to the book *Data on caste in Orissa*, published by the Anthropological Survey of India (of which he was then the director), Bose wrote:

It is the purpose of the present series, entitled *Data on Caste*, to supplement the current information on changes in rank as ascertained by changes in interaction by an examination of castes' own mechanism for the regulation of internal and external affairs. Data alone are presented from Orissa. These will be followed by other data from Bengal, Madras, etc. On the whole, no generalisation will be attempted; for that can profitably be undertaken when comparative material has been accumulated from all parts of India. (Bose 1960b: vii)

Though the project was never completed, the statement shows Bose's keenness to collect detailed and comprehensive information on the castes (and tribes) of India and his conviction that only once this was done could any theoretical proposition be attempted.

Nevertheless, Bose did have some definite ideas on caste in India. Caste, he believed, was mainly governed by the principles of economic organisation: 'just as capitalism is one way of organising production, caste in India is another way of organising production and distribution' (Bose 1960b: v). However, there were certain important differences as well, for instance, entry into the profession was hereditary in the caste system; caste denied freedom of enterprise; and as a system it was interlaced by reciprocal ties of duties and obligations. According to Bose, the persistence of the caste system could be attributed to the economic and cultural security provided by the non-competitive, hereditary, vocation-based productive organisation

which operated in self-sufficient village communities. He did not, however, present caste in idyllic terms, pointing out the unjustifiable legal discrimination against the Sudras and their economic exploitation within caste society. While caste assured 'employment and security, it simultaneously preserved the dominance of privileged groups, and this prevented the full and unhampered growth of those who ranked low in the hierarchy.

An interesting feature of Bose's account of caste is the way he located the system within the overall cultural and civilisational norms of Hindu society. He attempted to show that though there was restricted economic freedom under caste, there was a very large measure of cultural freedom. Cultural freedom arose out of the Hindu belief that 'each culture is suited to the particular people who profess it' (Bose 1967: 223). Bose related this attitude to the idea of the freedom of the individual, which, according to him, was held to be the supreme good. Cultural freedom ensured in many ways the growth of the individual to the fullest potential without impediment. Bose thus characterised the Indian respect for cultural autonomy in terms of Gandhi's dictum: 'There are as many religions as there are individuals.' Anticipating Louis Dumont's interpretation of renunciation, Bose argued that regimentation was necessary for the sake of collective economic and social welfare, but that simultaneously arrangements were made for releasing the individual from all forms of social obligation if he so desired. 'Thus, although, Hindu society suppressed the individual under normal conditions, yet the restriction took on a voluntary character, as he could escape from its rigours through the backdoors of the institution of Sannyasa. . . . And thus, in a way, this special arrangement for safeguarding the individual's freedom acted like a compensation against the totalitarian character of the system of caste. Each helped to render the other more stable and permanent' (Bose 1967: 225). Dumont, in exactly similar fashion, called this renouncer an 'individual-outside-the-world' who leaves his social role in order to adopt a role that is both universal and personal (Dumont 1970 [1966]: 184–8). Society and the renouncer thus made a whole, consisting of two different things, namely, a world of strict interdependence where the individual had no place, and an institution which transcended interdependence by inaugurating the individual.

A firm believer in pluralism, Bose regarded certain elements in India's social culture as contributing permanently to human civilisation, for instance, the democracy of cultures, and 'the safety valve which India created in the form of *Sannyasa*', by providing the individual with an option 'when the authoritarian character of the social structure proved too oppressive for him personally' (Bose 1967: 233). In the last part of his Bengali book *Hindu samajer garan*, Bose showed how the structure of Hindu society, which remained unaltered during several centuries of Muslim rule, was transformed by colonialism. He explained the stability of Hindu society with reference to its basic design, wherein castes remained integrated by the provisions of economic security and cultural autonomy: 'The stability of Indian civilisation was made possible only by the stability of the economic centre of gravity of the caste system. It is most important to understand this fundamental truth' (Bose 1975 [1949]: 167). This productive system was thrown into disorder, according to Bose, by the onslaught of colonialism. In the economic field, caste was seriously weakened by the intrusion of a system of production and economic relations which was foreign to it. Bose believed that, in the final analysis, the caste system was a judicious combination of social interdependence—the idea that man was subservient to society alongside a catering to the needs of the individual. While accepting that Western capitalism released economic energies among a people, Bose cautioned his readers about the damage capitalism had caused through an excess of individualism. He believed society needed a proper combination of rights and obligations, and in this there was still something to be learnt from the caste system. In the concluding pages of *Hindu samajer garan* Bose writes: 'When we encounter what is offensive in the traditional caste system, we should not spare it. But if we find something valuable in the ancient system of production and of social solidarity, or of regulating the relationship between man and society, something which we may be able to put to use, we should certainly accept it' (Bose 1975 [1949]: 170).

Bose pursued the same argument in relation to tribes and their relationship to Hindu society, claiming that just as Hindu civilisation had recognised *jati* (caste), it had also recognised *jana* (tribe), and that both had coexisted in India for several millennia. Continuing with his logic that Hindu society provided both economic security

and cultural autonomy to various groups, Bose argued for the recognition of a special kind of acculturation process, which he called the Hindu method of tribal absorption. The distinctiveness of this method was that it accommodated tribals within the Hindu fold without requiring them to abandon their cultural practices. Bêteille quite rightly points out that Bose believed that the two modes of social organisation, which may loosely be described as the 'Brahminical' and the 'tribal', had coexisted in India for a very long time (Bêteille 1975: 5–6). The first mode was more complex, much larger in scale, and had a technological base superior to the second. Marginal communities were attracted to Brahminical civilisation not because of its political power but for its technical efficiency and the rights that these communities enjoyed to practise their distinctive customs even when they were arranged in a hierarchy. In *Hindu samajer garan* (1975 [1949]) Bose demonstrated, through his analysis of various types of oil presses in India, how the technology of oil presses was associated with caste ranking and intercaste relationships.

He argued that Hindu society had built up a social organisation on the basis of hereditary, monopolistic, non-competitive guilds and guaranteed monopoly in particular occupations to tribals who came within its fold. He illustrated this with the example of the Juangs of Pal Lahara. The Juangs, who at one time had lived by hunting and collecting, gradually shifted to bamboo-based crafts and earned their living by selling articles to neighbouring people: 'Thus, instead of being economically more or less self-contained, they have now been tagged on to the larger body of Hindu society; they now form only one cog in the wheel of the advanced productive machinery of the Hindus. In the matter of this manufacture of bamboo articles, the Juangs enjoy virtual monopoly in the state of Pal Lahara, and no other caste would willingly engage in that manufacture for fear of losing its own social position' (Bose 1967: 204–5).

The history of acculturation, according to Bose, followed the model of 'sanskritisation', and in the process tribes emerged as castes or subcastes. This particular strategy of tribal absorption had two major implications for Indian society. First, the accommodation of impoverished tribals within the fold of the more successful productive organisation of Hindus had been easy; and second, this prevented the possibility of revolt by the tribes despite their being

relegated to a lowly position within Hindu society. Bose concluded his analysis of the Hindu mode of acculturation by observing that economic relations played a crucial role in the sphere of social and cultural relations, as culture flowed from a politically and economically dominant group to a subservient one: 'From this, we may venture to suggest with regard to current problems in our national life, that if we wish to set the Juang, the Munda or the so-called untouchable castes on an equal footing with ourselves in a democratically organised society, we should make sure of economic reorganisation first if we want to build the new social order on a permanent basis' (Bose 1967: 215).

VI. ANTHROPOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT

Both as a professional anthropologist and later as Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Bose deliberated quite intensely on the question of the welfare of tribals and lower castes: The 'General Review' sections of the Report by the Commissioner bear testimony to Bose's dedication. One can detect in these reviews the imprint of a nationalist social thinker, a Gandhian deeply sympathetic to the 'weakest among the weak' (Bose 1972).

In the Hindu mode of acculturation, when a tribe passed from its independent status to membership within the caste system, this transference, according to Bose, was merely from one form of 'totalitarian culture' to another. He associated the process of tribal disintegration in his times with the growth of individualism under the new economic dispensation. 'The chief point to which attention is being drawn', he writes, 'is that individualism in an exaggerated form is responsible for a rapid disintegration of tribal cultures in a way ... which [had] never before occurred in the history of India's cultural evolution' (Bose 1972: 51). He advocated toning down this enthusiasm for individualism and its substitution by a new sense of social cooperativeness in an enlarged sphere to arrest the 'corrosive action' to which tribal cultures had been subjected. Bose's prescription for the development of the tribals and lower castes basically consisted of finding ways to integrate them within the modern economic structure, so that caste-based occupational specialisations were eliminated. In the General Review section he writes:

Although a very large proportion of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are now engaged in agriculture, it is necessary either to take some of them to workshops, or to bring various forms of industries into the villages which can be practised by artisans, or farming families in their spare time. One of the suggestions made by the Commissioner's organisation has been that, as far as practicable, scheduled castes in particular should be taken away from caste-based occupations to those which have no association with caste. This will, at least, loosen the ranking system which holds in the case of caste based industries in rural India. (Bose 1972: 166)

Bose thus preferred a path of development that would eventually avoid the pitfalls of individualism engendered by economic modernisation and the vices of hierarchy in Indian society.

In his plans for action Bose repeatedly emphasised the need for better education, health, hygiene, sanitation, and consciousness of their rights among scheduled tribes and scheduled castes. These actions, however, would have to be initiated by the state, and in Bose's thinking the state and the national political structure appear as basically benevolent, devoted to the minimisation of clashes of values between different cultural elements and to the creation of a more positive relationship between the 'underdeveloped' and the 'developed'. Bose was an active participant in Gandhian politics and, as a student of Indian society, not unaware of unequal power relations within society. However, being a cultural anthropologist and focusing on cultural differences, he often tended to obscure the fact that it is the structures of social and politico-economic dominance which create development problems. If one adopts a deconstructionist approach to Bose's ideas about development, one notices that certain key constructs he used, namely equality, participation, needs, restructuring of rural social relations, poverty, etc., originated in the West, being later used and transformed in Third World development discourse. Contemporary development theory has exposed the arbitrary character of these concepts, their cultural and historical specificities, and the dangers that their use represents in the context of the Third World. Bose's anthropology also overlooked the ways in which development operated as an arena of cultural contestation

and identity construction. Though his ideas about welfare and development were Gandhian, the scientist in him also believed in certain modernist concepts which he thought had universal application. A sympathetic examination of Bose's anthropology, however, leads to the realisation that Bose was sensitive towards the idea of culture as interactive and historical, even though he was unable to work out the full implications of his conceptual scheme.

For the proper welfare of tribals, he advocated an objective, impartial, and scientific assessment of the actual state of affairs as the first necessity. In his essay on anthropology and tribal welfare, Bose began by noting that anthropology was not 'a science of curiosities', and in a place like India, where a vast amount of work in the field of tribal welfare remained to be done, 'one must make a special endeavour [to prevent] the science from being misshapen either by the spirit of curio-hunting or by an unbalanced, romantic concern for the hitherto neglected tribes inhabiting our land' (Bose 1967: 191). He warned that if anthropologists failed to do this 'there is a likelihood of social anthropology being distorted by our inner sympathies' (ibid.: 197), a failure to fulfil its duties and responsibilities. In working for the tribals 'we must be extremely cautious not to encourage separatist tendencies, and thus ultimately defeat the very purpose of an all-round freedom, such as the Government of India have resolved to attain' (ibid.). Contemporary thinking in theoretical anthropology suggests that all anthropological intervention is based implicitly or explicitly on ideological and political criteria. Bose's strategy of intervention reflects an ideology which views the state as benevolent and welfare programmes as paternalistic extensions of a benevolent state. Consequently, applied anthropology as imagined by Bose lacks sensitivity both to the political implications of the discipline and to the possible conflicts of interest which may become focused upon an anthropological intervention.

In fact, even during Bose's lifetime the scientific anthropology that he represented and which presumed the ethnographer's transcendental right to cultural objectification were being called into question, not because the tribes were dying out but because they were increasingly becoming subjects of their own history and readers of their own ethnographies. The epistemological illusions on which

classical anthropology was based, and the claims to scientific transparency (fieldwork as a simple device for recording pre-existing social data), had begun to wear. As current research shows, governmental intervention in social restructuring and cultural reconstruction, advocated by anthropologists earlier in the name of development, often resulted in subversive social and symbolic micro-processes of 'resistant adaptation'.

VII. NATIONALISM AND NATION-BUILDING

As an active member and observer of the nationalist movement, Bose believed in India as a unifying idea and concept. In an essay on the problems of Indian nationalism, he began by observing: 'Today, India is passing through a period of great strain, and there are some people who see in it the signs of complete political dismemberment of the country in future. There is one school of thought which emphasises the view that India was never a single country in the past. When others talk about the cultural unity of India, this school ridicules the idea, and says that such unity lies only in the fond imagination of nationalistically minded sentimentalists. Personally, I do not share the pessimism of this school' (Bose 1969: 1). He considered the question of national unity at three levels—the political, the economic, and the cultural—and argued that it was the economic structure, governed by the organisation of caste, that had brought about 'uniformity' in India's economic structure. As discussed earlier, Bose viewed caste as a system which reduces conflict and competition and guides economic life by a 'moral code' in which sectional demands are subordinated to the welfare of the local community. The strength of the caste system, according to Bose, was that the unit of inter-caste co-operation could be reduced to a very small territorial dimension in case of an emergency, and that was how the system had endured even during periods of acute political disturbance.

This was a typical nationalist argument—which considered caste an essential element of Indian society and which distinguished caste as an empirical-historical reality from the ideal of caste. In this context Partha Chatterjee points out:

This enormously influential nationalist argument has been addressed at different levels. Gandhi used to argue that the empirical reality of caste discrimination and even its sanction in the religious texts had 'nothing to do with religion'. The ideal fourfold varna scheme was meant to be a noncompetitive functional division of labour and did not imply a hierarchy of privilege. This idealism found a metaphysical exposition in Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who asserted that the varna scheme was a universal form of organic solidarity of the individual and social order. Since then, successive generations of Indian sociologists, working with increasingly detailed and sophisticated ethnographic materials, have propounded the idea that there is a systematic form to the institutionalised practices of caste, that this system is in some sense fundamental to a characterisation of Indian society, and that it represents a way of reconciling differences within a harmonious unity of the social order. (1995: 174)

At the political level, Bose had no doubt that India had been successful in creating an integrated nation-state thanks to the British legacy of administration. But, in spite of a common political structure, Bose was seriously concerned about the development of sectional interests putting an enormous strain on national unity. For him, the real issue was to promote integration at the economic level, which he felt had suffered corrosion with the dismantling of the caste system. The promotion of cultural unity was not so important because traditionally India had always encouraged cultural diversity so long as people strictly followed the economic organisation of caste and more or less conformed to the Brahminical code of laws and morals. '*Lokachara, desachara* and *kulachara* were preserved, encouraged and even honoured' (Bose 1969: 6). That is why he was opposed to the propagation of a national language for the whole of India as a solution to the threat of disintegration: 'This seems to be like covering by means of a clean white shroud the body of a dangerously sick patient which is full of festering sores. Such a belief in the magical powers of linguistic unity is unfortunately not likely to lead us very far in the solution of problems which our nationalism is facing today' (ibid.). He advocated objective historical analysis in some detail to diagnose the problem. In his historical analysis of social and

economic disintegration, Bose observed that social change had been unequal in the various parts of India. A growing population, rising expectations, and limited resources had exacerbated this inequality and produced new problems. One such problem, according to Bose, was Hindu–Muslim relations. He points out that, historically, both Hindu and Muslim upper or middle classes had kept away from the political movements of peasants and the tribes and were unable to reap any political benefit out of these:

If the Hindu middle classes became loyal to British rule when it offered them peace and new opportunities of advancement through a new economic order, the Moslem aristocracy shunned that order and tried to restore itself to power by unifying all the Moslems of India under the banner of a purified Islamic culture. The educated Hindu thus progressively became secularised as he tried to reform Hindu society, as in Bengal, by a re-orientation of his beliefs so as to render him fit to participate in the new order. In contrast the Moslems shed their ‘contamination’, accepted Western education only at its worldly level, and hardly permitted it to operate at the social and cultural levels, and tried to become more firmly entrenched in Islam. In other words, the Moslem became more Moslem, while the Hindu became less of a Hindu in so far as orthodoxy in rituals was concerned; and thus the distance between the two went on increasing. (Bose 1969: 17)

Bose dwelt at considerable length on the history of numerous attempted solutions to the Hindu–Muslim problem, and on how political leaders failed to realise that appeasement alone would not be able to bring about a satisfactory solution to a vexed issue. He argued that, in addition to the communal problem, which was primarily related to the question of Muslim identity and backwardness, a new notion of backwardness had emerged in pre-Independent India, based upon language and birth. This he characterised as basically communal in nature:

Ever since that fateful day (in 1939) when the Working Committee decided that representation in legislatures and services should be in proportion to the population of various ‘communities’, India has been led by progressive steps into the dreary sands of provincialism, linguism

and casteism. Of course, it all began with the communal representation of the Moslems, when representation on a territorial or functional basis gave way to communal considerations. Just as, under Gresham's law, a bad coin drives out the good from circulation, one political step which could have brought about a deeper sense of national integration was progressively replaced by another which led more and more towards weakening of the bonds of nationalism. (Bose 1969: 34)

According to Bose, the political leadership did not properly counteract these separatist tendencies in the post-Independence era. He argued for the promotion of associations based on the unities of territorial, economic, civic, and cultural interest rather than caste, language, and religious identities. In other words, he believed that the social base for reforms in democratic participation had been weak to begin with. Adult franchise, which he thought of as a reform of the right kind, coupled, however, with concessions made to communities, had led to sharpened cleavages rather than to the promotion of national solidarity.

The leading ideas of the nationalist elites at Independence can be summarised in terms of sovereignty, unity, order, secularism, democracy, economic self-sufficiency, and the need for social and cultural reforms. However, Bose believed that there was a massive contradiction between the rhetoric of Indian public discourse and the reality of political practice. Indeed, he did not conceal his antipathy for every kind of divisiveness promoted by political practice, advocating instead the development of civil-social associations based on secular identities:

One argument in favour of separatist patronage lies in the claim that the more neglected communities have to be specially looked after in order to save them from exploitation. Our contention however is that each community in India is divided into exploiters and exploited. . . . If exploitation has to be ended, which is one of the objectives set forth in our Constitution, then it would be far more desirable for all those who live within a limited territory to become combined into one for its eradication. Any sectional treatment of the disease of exploitation is likely to encourage communal separatism rather than serve the interest of national unity. (Bose 1969: 35)

This overriding concern for 'national unity' in Bose's writings reproduces the nationalist discourse of unified India, in the process neglecting the views of those situated at different locations in Indian society who have their own distinctive conceptions of the nation. The introduction of democracy in a developing country is not a 'solution' to growing power conflicts; rather, demands for more control and power by various identities are characteristic of multicultural democracies, especially developing country democracies. Bose's solution to the vexed problem of nation-building argues for unity in the economic domain and pluralism in the cultural sphere, though the cultural conditions prevailing in developing countries (local identities and attachments, hierarchical authority structure, prevalence of community norms, etc.) often forge new identities which, though identified as 'non-national', have nevertheless been able to challenge the dominant nationalist discourse.

VIII. CITY AND SOCIETY

The major cities of post-colonial India are either directly creatures of colonialism or have emerged in response to it. While cities enabled more regular contacts between elites and allowed individuals to conceive of themselves as members of a single, large community, the enumeration and classification of individuals into categories of caste and religion and the introduction of electorates divided along communal lines simultaneously solidified exclusionary identities. In the West, the city was a domain of freedom which liberated the individual from traditional ties; colonial cities, however, reinforced contrary tendencies in Indian society. Bose conducted a social survey in 1962 to investigate selected aspects of social life in Calcutta: for instance, the distribution of linguistic groups, voluntary institutions, occupations, religious divisions, and so on (Bose 1968). He characterised Calcutta as a 'premature metropolis' and summed up his findings thus:

It can be said, therefore, that the diverse ethnic groups in the population of the city have come to bear the same relation to one another as do the castes in India as a whole. Actually, the superstructure that coheres the caste under the old order seems to be re-establishing itself in a new

form. Calcutta today is far from being a melting pot on the model of cities in the US. In Calcutta the economy is an economy of scarcity. Because there are not enough jobs to go around, everyone clings as closely as possible to the occupations with which his ethnic group is identified and relies for economic support on those who speak his language, on his co-religionists, on members of his own caste and on fellow immigrants from the village or district from which he has come. By a backwash, reliance on earlier modes of group identification reinforces and perpetuates differences between ethnic groups. (Bose 1965: 102)

One of the subjects of Bose's investigation was the working of voluntary institutions belonging to various linguistic groups. Bose pointed out that these voluntary institutions were mostly community based, and there were only a few in which several communities could meet to satisfy their common civic or cultural needs. In this context he made some interesting observations on Bengali networking, observing that Bengalis had a strong sense of what he called 'local patriotism'. The range of their social networking was also small, culminating in the building up of a library, a club, or a sports or social service organisation. Since these formations did not have any deeper ideology they tended to split when differences arose: 'A Bengali seems to feel happier in the company of those with whom he closely agrees, rather than in the company of others with whom he may have points of difference. Unities are not stressed; differences are not easily tolerated. This subjects some institutions to repeated forces of fission' (1968: 79).

Bose noted that even though communities may have lived in a neighbourhood for a considerable length of time, separateness persisted, and he attributed the causes of such exclusive identities to the lack of cultural overlap, and to the inability of classes to abolish linguistic and regional ties or obliterate cultural differences. In moments of crisis, he observed, class unities did not hold and communities fell back upon their regional, linguistic, or religious identities.

Immigrants, according to Bose, tended to re-create their local, cultural and social environment in the city. Thus, in the city of Calcutta there was a situation of cultural pluralism, with different

linguistic and regional immigrant communities living in their own cultural worlds. In this context, voluntary institutions acted as adaptive mechanisms and helped create a familiar environment in an alien or strange urban situation by assuming cultural and welfare functions. Due to restricted job opportunities in Calcutta, there was little labour mobility, ensuring that a job seeker would rely on his community ties for a placement rather than compete in the open market: 'Thus social identities which ought to have dissolved if employment opportunities had been constantly on the increase, became reaffirmed. This was basically not the fault of the Indian social system, but the fault of a native capitalism which tried to thrive under the shadow of a colonial economy. It drove men into retaining even in the city some of the features of their small scale rural culture' (Bose 1968: 83). Of course, it has been argued by some that Indian cities and villages are governed by the same structural features of caste and kinship, and are parts of the same civilisation (Pocock 1960: 63–81). Thus, if caste and kinship are considered primary in society, their presence in the city is no more surprising than elsewhere. Over-hasty correlation of urban with Western values and influences seems untenable.

One of Bose's recurring interests was the future of caste in India in the context of occupational change. In *Hindu samajer garan* he dwelt at length on census figures to assess the relationship between caste and occupational change; for Orissa he did a similar exercise (discussed above), and for Bengal he compiled data from various regions of Bengal in 1942 in a book entitled *Biallisher Bangla* (Bose 1971). For the city of Calcutta, too, he investigated the structure and organisation of caste among its residents, concluding: 'There is something like caste in the residential concentration of language groups as well as in their preference for particular ways of making a living. In spite of [the] growth of classes, Calcutta has thus developed a kind of rural arrangement which is strongly reminiscent of caste in the villages' (Bose 1968: 83).

Bose related this city structure to another of his favourite themes, namely, cultural pluralism. As discussed, caste according to Bose had traditionally encouraged pluralism. He pointed out that this super-structure of cultural pluralism had persisted in the civic community of Calcutta and helped indirectly in maintaining communal

differences: precisely for this reason, he characterised the city as an imperfect metropolis.

We must remember that colonial cities like Calcutta and Bombay were different from the traditional cities of India and discontinuous with India's own rich urban life. They were imperfect to begin with, the colonial power administering the public space in accordance with its alien concepts, creating cities more as showpieces designed to display the superior rationality and power of the colonial state apparatus, but rendering them deficient in productive capacities. The grandeur of the colonial city remained external to the life of local society. In other words, the contrary tendencies that Bose portrayed in his study of Calcutta were reinforced by colonial policies, and, instead of free individuals, caste and religious groups began to emerge as collective actors in the city. Bose assumed the model of the Western city as his desired model for Calcutta and when he characterised Calcutta as an imperfect metropolis he did not conceal his expectations for the city in terms of Western standards. What he discounted in the process was the distorted origins of the colonial city and the specificities of the colonial imagination associated with it.

IX. VERNACULARISATION OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Bose, who always called himself a scientist, said science was his *swadharma*. He had a firm faith in the efficacy of scientific research, not simply for the discovery of truth but also towards formulating correct social policies. He conceived of anthropology as primarily a field science: the training of an anthropologist as a scientist was accomplished in the field. He was not particularly interested in developing any abstract conception of science but believed in the efficacy of science through practice. As B eteille points out, 'Bose was well aware that the scientific tools with which he worked were rough-hewn and home made, and he was perhaps a little proud of this. In all matters he sought to be self-reliant and he felt that if he spent all his energies in the endless refinement of his scientific tools, the wider purpose of his enquiry will be defeated' (1975: 16). In the true spirit of an empiricist, he considered himself a field scientist and believed that simple scientific truths could be elicited from the empirical world. For Bose, this science was objective, based on a disinterested analysis

of 'facts'. Knowledge consisted of the marshalling of facts, their objective analysis and presentation. He regarded fieldwork-based accounts of caste, tribe, etc., as contributing to the accumulation and expansion of factual (read true) knowledge about India.

It is well known that Bose was an indefatigable fieldworker; he called himself a *paribrajak*, a wanderer, and like a medieval wanderer he was always attempting to discover and propagate truth. He wrote extensively in Bengali to propagate the truth to non-professionals, explaining society and history. In this, he was following the nineteenth-century Bengali tradition of making knowledge available in the vernacular, to a non-specialist but interested public, an outlook that emerged partly in response to so-called colonial modernity. Many societies for the 'acquisition of knowledge' were founded in the nineteenth century, and members of these societies discussed and published in Bengali what they thought of as useful knowledge. Rajendralal Mitra (1822–91), in his journal *Bibhidhartha sangraha* (1862–74), regularly published short pieces containing descriptions of ethnic communities in India and abroad, e.g. the Todas, Santals, Tibetans, Kukis, Australian aborigines, and Polynesians—their marriage rites, customs, manners, and so on (Bose 1998). Like his predecessors, Bose believed that the fruits of knowledge should be made widely available and not restricted within narrow professional confines.

Bose had no confusion about the public role of both the discipline and its practitioners. He inherited an intellectual tradition which tried to combine professional pursuits with active involvement in the process of national transformation. He was an indefatigable fieldworker partly because of his training but also because of his Gandhian convictions, which made him believe that ideas were nothing if they were not tested through experience. As a professional he believed that his public role required him to build and develop indigenous institutions, and thus he hardly published anything abroad. Even in India, besides those in professional journals, many of his writings were published in popular and semi-popular periodicals in English and Bengali. His most influential work *Hindu samajer garan* (Bose 1975 [1949]), was first published in serial form in the popular Bengali literary magazine *Desh*.

While recent anthropological critiques have pointed to the use of various literary tropes to frame facts culled from the field even in so-called scientific ethnographies, in vernacular anthropology this is a selfconscious part of ethnographic practice, designed to produce a text that is attractive and readable for the lay person. Scientific narration or documentation takes a back seat, and the language itself imposes control over the text. After all, as Roland Barthes puts it, the text is always 'held in language', existing 'only as discourse' (Barthes 1977). Many of Bose's ethnographic accounts and fieldwork experiences were written in Bengali as personal accounts. They are not considered 'social science' in terms of formal disciplinary norms, and are often mistakenly seen as trivial and inconsequential. However, these self-reflexive personal accounts subvert the paradigm of anthropological science. As Pratt points out:

Even in the absence of a separate autobiographical volume, personal narrative is a conventional component of ethnographies. It turns up almost invariably in introduction or first chapters, where operating narratives commonly recount the writer's arrival at the field site, for instance, the initial reception by the inhabitants, the slow, agonising process of learning the language and overcoming rejection, the anguish and loss at leaving. Though they exist on the margins of the formal ethnographic description, these conventional opening narratives are not trivial. They play the crucial role of anchoring that description in the intense and authority-giving personal experience of field work. (Pratt 1986: 31–2)

Bose often made this shift to personal narrative, especially but not exclusively in his Bengali writing. In an essay on the planning of a field investigation, Bose points to the distinction between a traveller's account and proper scientific observation: 'A traveller may, of course, gather a large assortment of materials which may, in future, be of service to various classes of scientific men. But planned field investigation is different from a traveller's observation; it is comparable to experimental observation in a laboratory rather than to the varied observations of a naturalist' (Bose 1953 [1929]: 255). However, a clear continuity with travel writing is evident in the opening narrative of *Hindu samajer garan*, a popular book in which Bose attempted

to provide a scientific analysis of the structure of Hindu society by combining history, Indology, and anthropology. He began the book with a personal narrative:

In early 1928 I spent a few weeks in a village called Kantala, inhabited by Juangs and Savaras, in the state of Pal Lahara. A visit from [the] outside world is generally a cause of alarm among the Juangs. They thought at first that I had come with some sinister intention, perhaps to investigate for the Forest Department of the Government the collections they made surreptitiously of the forest produce. But when I offered worship to the presiding deity of the village and, after sacrificing two cocks, invited all the villagers to a full meal of rice, the Juangs gave up all their hesitation to accept me as a friend. (Bose 1975 [1949]: 32)

The self of the anthropologist is not effaced in this text. The anthropologist is not merely a scientist-observer, but assumes a multifaceted identity, participating, observing, and writing from multiple, constantly shifting positions.

Vernacular anthropology allowed Bose to emerge from the self-imposed restrictions of scientific anthropology. In *Paribrajakar diary*, Bose (1982 [1940]) presented an anthropology of people, culture, and tradition, but in a style that was personal, autobiographical, confessional, and anecdotal, and which also depicted his own transition and personal growth in the field. By Bose's own standards the essays fail as science, but it is difficult to exclude them from the domain of anthropology. In these essays Bose deplored urban life, celebrated nature, tribal life, the figure of the *sannyasi*, and expressed his personal joys and sorrows, using the Bengali literary style with great felicity.

X. CONCLUSION

Nirmal Kumar Bose had a universalist notion of science, believing that anthropology, like other 'scientific' disciplines, must engage in the progressive discovery of more and more objective knowledge. This was a view shared by early anthropologists in India, inscribed in the discursive practices of the discipline, and rooted in the scientific ideology and methodology of empiricism, positivism, and scientism.

In his writings on the anthropological method he repeatedly stressed the necessity for field surveys, for the gradual accumulation of facts, and for rational inferences. From the very beginning, the early Indian anthropologists were aware of a weak information base for any kind of social analysis. G.S. Ghurye, Bose's contemporary at Bombay University (see Upadhyaya, this volume) also stressed the objective and disinterested compilation of facts, and discouraged hasty theorisation (Bose 1996). The 'truth' of society was thus linked to the sovereign power of the empirical gaze that turned the obscurity of darkness into light.

The 'facts' on which Bose relied so much were produced by methods that could not be said to be specific to India. They were produced under the Enlightenment rubric of objective and 'value-free' science. This apparently detached epistemology recognised every new addition to knowledge about India as a new scientific discovery, whose veracity was attested to by the scientific standards of the day, independent of any subjective will. If we take the study of caste as an example, Bose's insistence on the collection of data on caste had close parallels with the attempts of colonial administrators to represent India. As Bernard Cohn says:

In the first instance a caste was a 'thing', an entity which was concrete and measurable; above all it had definable characteristics—endogamy, commensality rules, fixed occupation, common ritual practices. There were things which supposedly one could find out by sending assistants into the field with a questionnaire and which could be quantified for reports and surveys. . . . This way of thinking about a particular caste was useful to the administrator, because it gave the illusion of knowing the people; he did not have to differentiate too much among individual Indians—a man was a Brahmin, and a Brahmin had certain characteristics. (Cohn 1971: 154)

This was the empirical climate in which information and 'facts' about caste developed into knowledge. A new privilege was accorded to observation and classification. The new and detailed 'objective', 'scientific' scheme was prompted not simply by a desire for knowledge but also by a search for new ways of connecting things, both in the social world and in discourse: a new way of making history.

At a more concrete level, as we have seen, Bose located caste in the overall framework of the cultural and civilisational norms of Hindu society. In other words, Bose's description of caste was organised and systematised according to certain normative ideals of Hinduism which were typically Brahminical in nature. This particular idealised model of Hinduism was viewed as an 'acculturative model' for other social groups. However, though Bose, at least theoretically, believed in diffusion and acculturation, his views on caste do not imply acculturation, for acculturation implies a two-way process or reciprocity. On the contrary, Bose's depiction of Hinduism describes a process which vertically integrates various groups into a social structure administered and guided by Brahminical ideals and values. The same vision of the absorptive power of Hinduism explains his argument that tribals were successfully assimilated into the Hindu fold (Bose 1967: 203–15). In a way Bose, like early Orientalist writers, projected Indian social history as essentially the history of Hinduism, or of the assimilation of non-Hindu groups into Hindu society.

As noted above, when Bose argued that the caste system in its ideal form sought to harmonise mutually distinct units into a stable and harmonious social order, he was in fact iterating the nationalist assertion that caste in its ideal form was not oppressive, and that it was not inconsistent with the aspirations of individuality (see Chatterjee 1995: 173–99). It is this view of caste and of 'the unity of Indian society' which prompted Bose to rely on the authority of the state to restructure society after Independence. This is a view that not only failed to recognise conflict, oppression, and hegemony, but also underplayed or completely ignored the role of 'non-national' identities situated at different locations in Indian society. This presumption of a single shared sense of India—a unifying idea and concept of the Indian collective subject based on the trope of 'unity in diversity'—has now all but lost credibility.

In his written texts Bose also attempted to demonstrate the unity of various disciplinary perspectives. Though he never tired of reiterating the importance of scientific investigation, methodology, and analysis for social knowledge, he himself did not particularly follow the more rigorous scientific prescriptions for anthropology

that emphasised a limited subject focus, in-depth fieldwork, codified data accumulation, and cautiously restricted inferences. In his writings and analyses Bose preferred the earlier style of classical encyclopedism, the comparative method, intuitive hypothesising, and generic conceptualising. Thus, in spite of his scientific proclamations, Bose remained a classical scholar searching for interdependence between the various branches of knowledge. For him social analysis remained a comprehensive, totalising activity combining history, anthropology, Indology, sociology, and related subjects. His Bengali essays, which he wrote in a relatively open style, appear almost contemporary in flavour, very similar to the contemporary, humanistic mode of anthropological writing, resembling literary criticism. In writing these essays Bose perhaps anticipated that openness, rather than scientific closure, would one day become an inevitable feature of the discipline.

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Between Anthropology and Literature

The Ethnographies of Verrier Elwin*

RAMACHANDRA GUHA

The book is a comparatively light one and is not likely to please the anthropological pundits, but it might go down all the better with the public for that very reason.—Verrier Elwin to his publisher, 25 September 1947.¹

Dr Verrier Elwin's popularity with the ordinary reader has probably suffered because of his high reputation as an anthropologist; anthropology being associated with eight hundred pages of small type and smaller photographs, each duller than the last.—Reviewer in the *Illustrated weekly of India*, 31 July 1955.²

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¹ Letter in File E9, Oxford University Press (OUP) Archives, Mumbai.

² 'R.N.', reviewing Verrier Elwin's *The religion of an Indian tribe*, in *Illustrated weekly of India*, Bombay, 31 July 1955.



Fig. 9: Verrier Elwin (*Photo by Sunil Janah*)

VERRIER ELWIN IS THE J.G. FRAZER OF INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY, a man of letters who strayed into a discipline which likes to think it is something of a science. Both men are regarded by their peers as fine writers but mediocre scientists, propagating wrong or misleading ideas through arresting prose and the indiscriminate accumulation of facts. While Frazer is no more than a footnote in some histories of anthropology, *The golden bough* is one of the best-known books in the English language, continually in print since its first publication

more than a hundred years ago. Elwin too is not always taken seriously by the professors, but there continues to be a keen interest in his work in the wide world beyond, as witness the repeated republication and brisk sale of several of his books.³

The discrepancy between Frazer's popular influence and his scholarly reputation is the point of departure for Robert Ackerman's biography, an elegant and persuasive exercise in rehabilitation (Ackerman 1987). This essay, likewise, hopes to rescue Verrier Elwin from the enormous condescension of the academy. Elwin was not formally trained as an anthropologist and he never held a university position, two reasons why some disciplinary histories do not so much as mention his name (e.g. Madan 1982; Saberwal 1983). However, Elwin was quite possibly the most influential anthropologist to work in India, and certainly the most prolific (cf. Mandelbaum 1965). He was also in many ways an exemplary figure through whose work and reception we can track the shifting fashions in twentieth-century anthropology.

I. LIFE AND WORKS

Unlike Frazer, who rarely left his desk in Trinity College, Cambridge, Elwin enjoyed an extraordinarily varied life. Born in 1902, the son of the Bishop of Sierra Leone, he had a brilliant career in Oxford, taking two first-class degrees in English and Theology. In 1926 he was ordained and joined the Anglican seminary, Wycliffe Hall, as its vice principal. Offered a fellowship at his old college, Merton, he decided instead to go to India and join the Christa Seva Sangh (CSS) in Pune. The CSS was an offshoot of the Church of England which hoped to 'indigenise' Christianity. Its members wore the khadi advocated by Gandhi, ate vegetarian food, and devised a new liturgy incorporating elements of Indian music, art, and architecture.

After coming to Pune in September 1927 Elwin quickly threw in his lot with the Indian National Congress, winning Gandhi's affection and becoming a camp follower and occasional cheerleader of the

³ Books reprinted by Elwin's publishers, Oxford University Press (India), in the last decade are Elwin (1936, 1942, 1943a, 1946, 1949 and 1964). The present article, however, has relied upon and cites the original editions.

growing popular movement against British colonial rule. Seeking fuller immersion in the 'toil, the suffering, the poverty of India',⁴ the young priest resolved to make his home among the Gond tribe. In 1932 he moved with his friend Shamrao Hivale to a remote village in the forests of the Mandla district of the Central Provinces. He was to spend some twenty years in Central India, a one-man pressure group for the rights of the tribals.⁵ In January 1954, Elwin became the first foreigner to become an Indian citizen. In the same year, he was appointed anthropological adviser to the Indian government, with special reference to the hill tribes of the north-east frontier. Moving to Shillong, he served for a decade as the leading missionary of what he liked to call 'Mr Nehru's gospel for the tribes'. He died in February 1964, a greatly esteemed public figure in his adopted land, the recipient of the Padma Bhushan,⁶ and numerous other medals and awards (cf. Elwin 1964; Guha 1999; Hivale 1946; O'Connor 1993).

This Englishman, missionary, Gandhian, social worker, activist, bureaucrat, and Indian was always and pre-eminently a writer, a man whose richness of personal experience illuminates an oeuvre of truly

⁴ Elwin to Sorella Amata, 31 May 1931, Mss. Eur. D. 950/7, Elwin Papers, Oriental and India Office Collections, London (hereafter OIOC).

⁵ The concepts of 'tribe' and 'tribals', as used in contemporary India, refer to communities more or less distinct from Hindu and Muslim society. These include hunter-gatherers and swidden cultivators, as well as some communities of pastoralists and plough agriculturists, generally resident in upland and forest regions. Taken together, these groups make up approximately 8 per cent of the Indian population; they are listed, individually, in a separate Schedule of the Constitution of India. These 'Scheduled Tribes' can avail of affirmative action in government jobs and parliamentary seats, as mandated by the Constitution. Whereas the tribes of Central India have maintained closer links with mainstream, especially Hindu, civilisation, the tribes of the north-east have, until very recently, been quite distinct from this 'mainstream'. The exact nature of the distinctiveness varies from tribe to tribe and from region to region. However, the concept itself is politically uncontentious and, in common parlance, to speak of a tribe or a tribal does not have the pejorative connotations that it might have, say, in some parts of Africa.

⁶ The Padma Bhushan is India's third highest civilian honour. Elwin himself described it as roughly equivalent to a 'knighthood, but a good knighthood, a GCSI or a GCB'. Elwin to his sister, 1 February 1961, Mss. Eur. D. 950/6, OIOC.

staggering proportions. A reasonably comprehensive bibliography compiled by Fujii (1987) runs to thirty closely printed pages—it lists some forty books and four hundred articles.⁷ As impressive as the quantity is the variety, for Elwin worked in a whole range of genres. He wrote and published poetry, religious tracts, polemical pamphlets, novels, anthropological monographs, folklore collections, official reports and manuals, reviews, editorials, and travelogues. His last work was an autobiography that is generally regarded the finest of all his books.

While the trajectory of Elwin's life was marked by a series of departures, the pattern of his writing career was shaped by his time in Oxford. In his college, Merton, he came under the influence of two mentors of quite different persuasions (cf. Elwin 1964: 19–24). The first was his English teacher, H.W. Garrod, an authority on Keats and Wordsworth and a bachelor who played chess and drank with undergraduates. The second was his theology teacher, F.W. Green, who had once been a slum-priest in London's East End; he was also a radical in politics who deplored the excesses of capitalism and imperialism without going quite so far as to call himself a socialist. Elwin revered both Garrod and Green, and the influence of his teachers is manifest in the creative tension that runs through all his work, the tension between aesthetics and politics, between beauty of expression and the claims of social relevance.

While he published some poetry at Oxford, Elwin's first full-length works were written while he was with the CSS. At a time when religious traditions tended to talk past each other, he published two precocious studies exploring the parallels between Christian and Hindu mystical traditions. These works (Elwin 1930a; 1930b) celebrated what he called 'the bhakti movement in fifteenth century Europe' (Elwin 1930b: ch. 1), the example of the European mystics who carried religion to the people much as the Indian *bhakti* poets—Kabir, Mira, Tukaram, and others—had done. Elwin's books were attentively read by Indian Christians (cf. Studdert-Kennedy 1990),

⁷ These include half-a-dozen articles published in *Man* between 1937 and 1945, articles that were spun off from his larger works. See Fujii (1987) for details.

searching themselves for points of convergence between a foreign faith and spiritual traditions native to Indian soil. His next work, *Christ and satyagraha*, presented to the same audience the theological case for joining Gandhi. It argued that Christians could claim biblical sanction for offering civil disobedience to the Raj, for 'the campaign initiated by Mahatma Gandhi, both in its method and spirit, is more in accordance with the mind of Christ than any other similar campaign that the world has ever seen' (Elwin 1930c: 17).

Elwin was now completely identified with Gandhi and the Congress Party. The Congress was aware of the propaganda value of having an articulate Englishman on their side, and made full use of his rich talents as writer and speaker. The priest conducted several inquiries on their behalf into police repression of non-violent resisters (cf. Elwin 1931; 1932a). He also wrote eulogies of the Indian freedom movement, published in England and aimed at a public insufficiently convinced of the justice of Gandhi's cause (Elwin 1932b; Winslow & Elwin 1931). As in his later anthropological work, Elwin saw himself as a man poised between two worlds and well placed to interpret one to the other. Thus, the attempt to make Hindus cognizant of the other side of Christianity, and thus, too, the wish to make his fellow Englishmen recognise the illegitimacy of their rule in India.

After he went to the Gonds in 1932, Elwin moved away from politics towards social work and, in time, anthropology. The more he lived with tribals the more he came to see the world through their eyes, a process confirmed and consolidated by his marriage, in April 1940, to a Gond girl. (They were divorced in 1949, after his wife began another relationship; Elwin later married another tribal.) Going Gond led to the overthrow of older and, as it now seemed, incompatible allegiances. When his bishop refused to renew his licence unless he proselytised the tribals, Elwin resigned holy orders and later left the Church itself. But he also became disenchanted with Gandhism, whose credo of puritanical reform (asceticism, vegetarianism, and prohibition) he found too restrictive for communities who liked their liquor, their sex, and their hunting (cf. Hivale 1946: chs 5 and 6).

These shifts in loyalty are captured in *Leaves from the jungle* (1936), Elwin's diary of his early years in Mandla. The book provides revelations, through flashes of irony and wit, of his growing rejection of

Gandhi and Christ: as in a description of a khadi mosquito net which 'though utterly patriotic and highly mosquito proof, appears to admit no air whatsoever', or a confession that he spent a day of rest reading Agatha Christie 'though aware it would be more suitable for me to employ my leisure reciting the Penitential Psalms'. The protective instincts of the anthropologist had replaced the improving agenda of the social worker. 'There are many elements in the Gond ethos which should be conserved', writes Elwin, 'their simplicity and freedom, their love of children, the position of their women, their independence of spirit . . . their freedom from many of the usual oriental inhibitions.' The tribal, indeed, 'has a real message for our sophisticated modern world which is threatened with disintegration as a result of its passion for possessions and its lack of love' (Elwin 1936: 37–8, 59, 158).

Between 1936 and 1939 the London publisher John Murray brought out, each year, a book by Elwin. *Leaves* was followed by *Phulmat of the hills* (Elwin 1937), a novel about a tribal beauty stricken by leprosy and abandoned by her lover. The narrative is replete with poems, riddles, and stories from tribal folklore, interspersed with straight dialogue. This is an early 'ethnographic novel', its plot held together by the focus on the fate of its central character. In the next year Elwin published another novel, *A cloud that's dragonish* (Elwin 1938), a whodunit about tribal witches and witchcraft that is less convincing.

A generous tribute to Elwin's tribal diary and novels was offered in the journal *Man* by the first Indian anthropologist of any stature, Sarat Chandra Roy. *Leaves from the jungle* and *Phulmat of the hills*, wrote Roy, provided 'vivid glimpses of Gond life'. Written with 'intimate knowledge and deep sympathy', they showed how successfully the writer had sought 'to identify himself in spirit with the state of soul-evolution of the people he studies' (Roy 1938: 150). Something of the same spirit is also present in Elwin's first work of ethnography. This was the *The Baiga*, published in 1939, a massive monograph about a tiny tribe of swidden cultivators whose economy was being destroyed by the expropriation of their forests by the state, and who had been forced, much against their will, to take to the plough.

‘The pen is the chief weapon with which I fight for my poor’, wrote Elwin to an Italian friend in July 1938, while completing *The Baiga*.⁸ That book was the first in a series of ethnographies and essays through which Elwin fought for his poor, the voiceless tribal. While his colleague Shamrao Hivale focused on social work (cf. Elwin 1964: 105–6), Elwin conducted fieldwork in many districts of the present-day Indian states of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. Between 1940 and 1942 he lived in Bastar, a large, isolated, and heavily forested chiefdom with a predominantly tribal population. From 1943 to 1948 he spent several months each year in the uplands of the eastern province of Orissa. Anthropologist at large, roaming through the forests in search of tribes to study and to protect, Elwin accumulated a huge store of facts, poems, and stories that found their way into a series of weighty but always readable monographs.

The Agaria (1942) told a melancholy tale of the decline of a community of charcoal iron-smelters ruined by taxation, factory iron, and official apathy. *Maria murder and suicide* (1943a) explored the causes of homicide in a tribe that was the exception to the Indian aboriginal’s otherwise deserved reputation for being both kindly and pacific. *The Muria and their ghotul* (1946) presented an enchanting picture of the amorous life of a tribe tucked away in the deep recesses of the chiefdom of Bastar; it focused on the dormitory, or *ghotul*, where boys and girls first learnt the arts and poetry of sex. *Bondo highlander* (1952) studied the personality of a highland Orissa tribe and the tension between individualism and co-operation in their life. *The religion of an Indian tribe* (1955), also set in Orissa, covered all aspects of Saora ritual and belief; it was praised as ‘the most detailed account of an Indian tribal religion that ever flowed from an anthropologist’s pen’ (Fürer-Haimendorf 1957: 602–3). All these works were published by the Indian branch of the Oxford University Press, as were a pioneering study of *Tribal art in Middle India* (Elwin 1951), and five folklore collections (Elwin 1944; 1949; 1953; Elwin & Hivale 1944; Hivale & Elwin 1935) appearing under the running title, *Specimens in the oral literature of Middle India*.

⁸ Letter in Mss. Eur. D. 950/8, OIOC.

Of all these books, it was those on the Baiga and the Muria that attracted the most attention. Both studies drew on the intimacy which came from long residence with the tribe; both showcased vivid life histories borne of the novelist's interest in character over social structure; both challenged criticism with their bulk, each book running to more than 600 pages; and both were lightened by literary allusions, the author being as likely to invoke Shakespeare or Blake as Malinowski or Firth. More pertinent than any of these reasons for the books' fame (and notoriety) was their documentation and indeed joyous celebration of sex in the life of the tribes.

Ancient India was 'rich in sexological literature', remarked Elwin, but recent writers 'have generally been too much under the influence of the prevailing Puritan conventions to treat the subject freely'. Science called him to break the taboo, for the Baiga, he found, were ruled not so much by the forest guard and the police constable as by the raging fires of sexual desire. In their lives 'celibacy is unheard of, continence is never practised'. Their children were apparently born with a 'complete equipment of phallic knowledge'. Baiga knowledge of each other's bodies was extraordinarily attentive to detail: the men, for instance, could distinguish between twelve kinds of breasts, ranking them (almost) in precise order of attractiveness. Even Baiga *gali*, or abuse, was rich in sexual suggestiveness (Elwin 1939: preface, 239, 241-4, 263-7, etc.).

The book on the Muria ghotul, likewise, presented a detailed, candid, evocative account of pre-marital sex, of the role of touch and smell in arousing a partner, the use of love-charms in winning a reluctant lover. Sex was fun: the 'best of *ghotul* games . . . the dance of the genitals . . . an ecstatic swinging in the arms of the beloved'. But it was not, among the Muria, disfigured by lust or degraded by possessiveness or defiled by jealousy. More strikingly, the sexual freedom of the ghotul was followed by a stable, secure, serenely happy married life. In the process of growing up, the 'life of pre-nuptial freedom' ended in a 'longing [for] security and permanence'. In any married couple, neither was a virgin absolutely: but *both were virgins to each other*. Before and after marriage, concluded the anthropologist, 'Muria domestic life might well be a model and example for the whole world' (Elwin 1946: 614-16, 620, 633, 655-6, etc.)

In fact, Elwin was much more (and perhaps much less) than a specialist on sex. A chapter on the topic, it is true, was the centrepiece of *The Baiga*, but it was both preceded and followed by an elaborate account of how the state had impoverished the tribe by forbidding the practice of swidden cultivation. The material concerns of tribals were always a priority for the anthropologist, whose works pay close attention to the loss of tribal land, the restrictions on their previously untrammelled use of the gifts of the forest, and their exploitation by non-tribal moneylenders and petty officials. His bestselling pamphlet, *The aboriginals* (Elwin 1943b), emphasised the economic measures required to safeguard the integrity of the tribes, which, in his view, included the restoration of their forest rights, protection of their lands, and a careful regulation of contact with the world outside.

In July 1952, having just sent his study of Saora religion to press, Elwin wrote to his friend and fellow anthropologist W.G. Archer, saying he found it 'difficult to start again the whole weary business of writing another monograph'. 'The poetry field is very fully exploited', he added, 'and I am dubious now how far any more treasures are to be found. Tribal art is virtually dead.'⁹ After a decade and a half of prodigious work, Elwin had reason to be tired. *The religion of an Indian tribe* (1955) was his sixth book on a tribe, following on ethnographies of the Baiga, the Agaria, the Maria, the Muria, and the Bondo. Yet this was a man with no professional training in social anthropology whose scientific researches were continually interrupted by spells of social work and pamphleteering.

In one of those paradoxes in which the history of colonialism abounds, it was this former Oxford scholar who most effectively brought to wider attention the culture and condition of a large group of Indians neglected or despised by Hindu society. But Elwin did not regard himself merely or even primarily as a scholar: all his books were written in the hope that they might help forestall, or at least delay, the degradation and exploitation of the tribes. 'I take a utilitarian view of anthropology', he once remarked: 'The scholar's work must lead to administrative reform and an improvement in the living conditions of the people or it has failed, however technically brilliant

⁹ Elwin to Archer, 31 July 1952, Mss. Eur. F. 236/266, Archer Papers, OIOC.

it may be.¹⁰ Recalling what A.E. Housman wished for *The Shropshire lad*—that it would one day stop a bullet aimed at a soldier's heart—Elwin said his hope, for his books, was that they may help protect the aboriginal 'from some of the deadly shafts of exploitation, interference and repression that civilization so constantly launches at his heart' (Elwin 1946: preface).

This self-appointed spokesman and protector of the tribals was, however, accused by some of wishing to isolate them in their mountain fastness, backward and undeveloped, deliberately kept apart from the mainstream of Indian nationalism and from the emerging Indian nation. Through the 1940s and 1950s Elwin engaged in a series of lively polemics with critics. One debate was with Indian anthropologists who accused him of artificially separating tribals from Hindu society; he answered that despite a partially shared pantheon, tribals were marked out from Hindus through their community spirit, the absence of caste, their closeness to nature, and the equality among them of the sexes. A second debate was with social reformers who wished to bring in prohibition and forbid tribal dances; Elwin attacked them as insolent killjoys completely lacking any appreciation of cultures other than their own. This lapsed priest also quarrelled with Christian missionaries who believed that a change of religion was the swiftest way of bringing tribals into the modern world, for he held Christian reformers to be as aggressive as Hindu ones, as intolerant of tribal art, culture, and dance, and likely if successful to break up community spirit and maim new converts by making them ashamed of their traditions (cf. Elwin 1941; 1943b; and for an extended treatment of these controversies, Guha 1996; 1999).

Elwin was always controversial among Indian intellectuals and politicians. While some bitterly attacked his work, others praised it lavishly. 'Verrier Elwin and Tribal India', remarked the distinguished anthropologist S.C. Dube, 'were terms of instantaneous association: one could not be thought of without the other' (1964: 134). Among Elwin's admirers was the most important Indian of all, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. At Nehru's recommendation he was appointed, in 1954, an adviser on tribal affairs to the Government of India, his chief sphere of operation the north-east.

¹⁰ Circular letter of 4 January 1940, Mss. Eur. D. 950/4, OIOC.

In his years as an official Elwin continued to write prodigiously. Much of what he wrote was for restricted circulation, and almost all of it focused on policy, on what the state could or might do to protect the interests of the tribes. Books for public consumption included *A philosophy for NEFA* (1957) and *A new deal for tribal India* (1963), both widely read in their day. He had also been working steadily on his autobiography. But so varied had been his life and so versatile his achievements that when he asked his publisher for a title, the man came up with twenty-five alternatives.¹¹ They finally settled on *The tribal world of Verrier Elwin*, to mark his primary loyalty and identification. The book was sent to the press in 1963 and appeared in May 1964, too late for the author to see it, Elwin having died in February.

The tribal world of Verrier Elwin obtained the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award for the best book in English. The citation called it an 'outstanding contribution to contemporary Indian writing in English', written 'with sincerity, courage and charm, revealing a mind in which Western and Indian idealism were uniquely blended'.¹² The circumstances of his life made Elwin a privileged interpreter of cultures (or more accurately, perhaps, across cultures). In his autobiography, as in all his works, one can sense the passionate desire to make one adversary see the truth in the other—to show Hindus the mystical side of Christianity, for example, or the British the justice of the Indian demand for freedom, or the 'civilised' world what it might learn from the tribes, or anthropology what it might learn from literature.

II. THE METHODS OF A FREELANCE ANTHROPOLOGIST

'You cannot observe mankind from the howdah of an elephant', remarks Elwin in the preface to one of his early books, 'there is no substitute for field-work. There is no substitute for life in the village, among the people, staying in village houses, and enduring the physical distress as well as the possible misunderstandings that may arise.' He speaks here in the voice of Malinowski, the man who made intensive

¹¹ Cf. correspondence in File E10, OUP Archives, Mumbai.

¹² Citation in archives of the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.

fieldwork the *differentia specifica* of social anthropology, the research method which moved the discipline beyond the casual inquiries of the colonial official or missionary and the library-based speculations of Frazer and his ilk. Indeed, the statement just quoted is prefaced by a swipe at some younger Indian scholars, among whom Elwin noticed a 'tendency to scamp personal investigation on the spot, to make brief visits of a fortnight or less to a District and then write about it, to conduct inquiries from the veranda of a government rest house' (Elwin 1942: xxi). Ten years later, he had noticed little progress: 'There has been more shoddy and second-rate work done in [anthropology] in India than in any other country in the world. "Tip-and-run" anthropologists visit an area for two or three weeks, take hundreds of hurried and inaccurate measurements, ask a lot of leading questions, and retire to their Universities to write pompous articles about what they have failed to observe.'¹³

No one could accuse Elwin of this: he lived for long periods among the people he wrote about. His first ethnographies, on the Baiga and the Agaria, dealt with his own neighbours, so to speak, for both communities were closely linked to the Mandla Gonds with whom he made his home. While his Bastar and Orissa researches were based on careful prior planning, there too he lived for extended spells with the tribals. He wrote in his memoirs: 'For me anthropology did not mean field-work, it meant my whole life. My method was to settle down among the people, live with them, share their life as far as an outsider could and generally do several books together . . . This meant that I did not depend merely on asking questions, but knowledge of the people gradually sank in till it was part of me' (Elwin 1964: 142). However, Elwin's research methods are to be distinguished from those of his professional peers in at least two ways. Where, from Malinowski onwards, the anthropologist has laid great stress on 'speaking like a native', it was only in his early studies that Elwin could dispense with an interpreter. The Baiga and the Agaria spoke the one Indian language he himself had familiarity with, the Chattisgarhi dialect of Hindi. But elsewhere, as in Orissa, he had sometimes to use two sets of interpreters, one to translate from the tribal langu-

¹³ See *Illustrated weekly of India*, 25 November 1952.

age (e.g. Saora) to Oriya, the second to render Oriya into English or Hindi—a process in which much meaning and nuance would have been lost in translation. It is true that he ranged over a large territory and encountered dozens of different communities, but it must also be acknowledged that he was a poor linguist. Again, while studying a tribe Elwin liked to make numerous visits of a few weeks each, spread out over several years and many villages, in preference to the single-site, continuous fieldwork more typical of the professional anthropologist.

A fascinating description of Elwin's field methods is contained in an unpublished account by an officer of the Royal Air Force. In January 1946, Warrant Officer Harry Millman, along with a timber contractor H.V. Blackburn, accompanied the anthropologist on a trip to the Bondo country.¹⁴ The visit had been timed to coincide with 'Pao Parab', the Bondo's annual festival of the full moon, which had never been described before. The three Englishmen were preceded by Elwin's research assistant, Sunderlal Narmada, who prepared the ground for their arrival. From the roadhead it was a steep climb to the Bondo villages. En route, Elwin badly bruised his toe. He was climbing barefoot, as was his custom, and had what 'appeared to be his usual argument with a projecting rock'. They finally reached the village of Bodopalle, where they pitched camp. The anthropologist then played his gramophone and handed out cigarettes to the Bondos. Even the womenfolk came out to listen to the music, but then, to his fury, Elwin heard that the villagers had postponed the festival. The 'official' explanation was that the first crop of millet had not yet been gathered, but the visitors had an uncomfortable suspicion that the real reason was their own presence, as outsiders. When 'all the blandishments and bribery' they could muster 'were met with smiles and inaction', there was little they could do but move on to the next village, Bodopada.

Here, too, the English trio put on the gramophone, then chased and fought each other to amuse the villagers. Later, Elwin showed

¹⁴ The following paragraphs are based on a handwritten, untitled narrative in File 64, Elwin Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi (NMML).

photographs taken on his last visit and the Bondos excitedly identified themselves. But in the evening he was again very depressed, as 'he thought this village also was deliberately holding up the moon festival, because they had not yet made the special food known as Kirimtor', a kind of vegetarian sausage made of rice flour and boiled pulses.

Then, at nightfall, came the welcome news that the Bondo were at last making Kirimtor. Ritual fights and drinking preceded the glorious full-moon dance. Overcome with joy, the anthropologist got drunk and after one dance passed out and was carried to bed. He woke up later, 'said "Good Heavens", got up and went out to the dance, still a bit tight and full of joy. He got a great ovation, as it was now 4 a.m.'

The lack of discipline characteristic of his field methods also spills over into his books, for Elwin was a marvellously evocative but undisciplined writer, quite unable to subedit himself. Perhaps the essay or pamphlet was the genre best suited to his skills, bringing out, as it did, his gift for vivid metaphors and comparisons and his polemical edge, while masking a lack of ability to sustain or structure an argument over the length of a monograph. Considered strictly as literary products, his two most satisfactory books are *Leaves from the jungle* (1936) and *The tribal world of Verrier Elwin* (1964). Both these books are primarily about himself, and he was a special character. By contrast, his ethnographic works, about other people and other contexts, all contain a huge store of original information, not always presented in the most coherent or convincing manner.

Behind these rich but unwieldy books lie the contending claims of literature and science. On the one side, his monographs are enlivened by the sharp characterisations of a novelist, exemplified in the evocative life histories and the abundance of songs, riddles, and poems. His use of literary allusions, which is as frequent as his citation of anthropological studies, makes for the most arresting comparisons—as when Bhimsen, the mighty warrior of legend, is called the 'Falstaff of Baiga mythology', or when Muria life is described as having 'in its pre-nuptial period many of the features of Huxley's *Brave New World*, but in its post-nuptial period the atmosphere of the poems of Tennyson' (Elwin 1939: 59, 1946: ix).

More often, though, gaiety and irreverence are subordinated to the claims of exactitude and comprehensiveness. Elwin's ethnographies reveal an uncommon interest in material culture; they contain thorough descriptions of dress, housing, agricultural implements, food and food materials, and hunting and fishing techniques—this as a counterpoint, perhaps, to the prevailing tendency of representing tribal life as all ritual and religion. Less understandable are the extended parallels he likes to draw between an institution he is studying and similar institutions or practices reported by other ethnographers. The book on the Muria, for instance, surveys at length and in a special chapter the evidence on village dormitories from all parts of the world, an exercise here bereft of any systematic or sustained comparison.

Where other anthropologists emphasised the functional inter-relatedness of all parts of a social system, Elwin liked to highlight one key trait or institution which for him defined the essence of a culture—be it *bewar* or swidden cultivation for the Baiga or the ghotul for the Muria. A recurrent theme in his writing is the destruction of tribal integrity by the violation, at the hands of outsiders or outside forces, of this defining institution: the enforced lacerating of Mother Earth among the Baiga, the ban on human sacrifice among the Konds (cf. also Padel 1995), the puritan attack on the Muria ghotul, the tax on their furnace for the Agaria. Here functionalism was imaginatively allied with polemic, providing a theoretical justification for the defence of the aboriginal against the shafts of civilisation.

Elwin once called himself a 'devoted disciple' of the Malinowski school of functionalism, but his own applications of that theoretical approach betray the inclinations of the novelist.¹⁵ He was a published novelist (and privately published poet) before he turned to anthropology, and returned to literature after he had finished with anthropology. On finishing his last major study, on the Saora, he turned with relief to an essay on Charles Lamb. As he told his mother, 'I greatly prefer writing about literature to anthropology.'¹⁶

¹⁵ In a circular letter of 25 June 1936, Mss. Eur. D. 950/3, OIOC.

¹⁶ Letter of 13 July 1952, Mss. Eur. D. 950/4, OIOC.

In the papers Elwin left behind for posterity are two unpublished murder mysteries written under the pseudonym Adrian Brent, as well as notes for a third, unwritten novel centred on the life of expatriate Englishmen and their Brown Sahib friends in Calcutta.¹⁷ These themes are far removed from the tribal novels he had once published and provide further evidence of his lingering, if largely unfulfilled, literary ambitions. We might therefore have no quarrel with an Indian newspaper's description of Elwin as 'not an anthropologist in the academic sense of the term' but a 'man of letters who is fundamentally interested in human beings' (Dutta 1956); or indeed with a British weekly's observation that Elwin was an anthropologist 'by grace' rather than 'by profession', and 'primarily a lover rather than a student of mankind'.¹⁸

Elwin's uncertain location between literature and science is pinpointed in an exchange of letters with W.G. Archer, another poet and man of letters drawn willy-nilly into anthropology. In response to criticisms of his earlier books, in the *Bondo highlander* Elwin had stuck in figures and genealogies so as to give his personal impressions 'rather more of a scientific air'. Reading the manuscript in August 1951, Archer dismissed the new techniques as 'just a piece of bluff and phoney science' and foreign to Elwin's more usual method of basing himself on the widest possible personal inquiries and impressions, which could not (and need not) be validated by statistics.¹⁹

The criticisms went home. Weeks later, Elwin was writing disparagingly of the anthropological books reaching him from England which, like the work of Tommy Tupper, were 'distinguished mainly for their rectitude, exactitude and appalling dullness.' The day when an anthropologist could inspire a 'Waste Land' was far behind, for 'the thrill of Tylor, Frazer and Jane Harrison has departed: there was life there, poetry, drama, loveliness, turns of phrase like a flashing of a sword, chapters with stars at elbow and foot'. The field had now passed into the hands of the 'serologist, genealogist, the utterly dreary folk', men (and one woman) for whom Elwin proposed this

¹⁷ See Files 70 and 148, Elwin Papers, NMML.

¹⁸ *Times Literary Supplement*, 9/12/1939 (anonymous review of *The Baiga*).

¹⁹ Archer to Elwin, 4 August 1951, Mss. Eur. F. 236/266, OIOC.

anthropo-Dunciad, naming the most famous British anthropologists of his generation:

Where Evans-Pritchard, Fortes and the rest
 Suck social facts from Audrey Richards' breast,
 And should you ever see me really bored
 I'm trying to read a book by Daryll Forde
 Though, I confess, of thousands who get me down,
 There's no one to compare with Radcliffe-Brown,
 There's only one good thing to say for Marret
 And that is, he's as dead as Browning (Barrett)
 If from pre-history you'd me deter
 Just show me moribund Professor Fleure.²⁰

III. A BRIEF RECEPTION HISTORY

In a report on the manuscript of Elwin's study of the Baiga, a referee for the publishing house of John Murray called it: 'a curious mixture—on the one hand a piece of very valuable, thorough and apparently reliable research, and on the other a collection of weird, amusing and bawdy stories. The author frequently changes his style to suit the subject; at one time he writes in the cold and technical jargon of science, and at another in plain (and almost cheerful) English, and in the latter instance the book is always entertaining, though often unsavoury, reading.' Presented as an anthropological monograph, 'this was beneath the surface . . . [a] most human and delightful book. The author does not regard the Baiga tribes as laboratory specimens; it is quite evident that he loves and respects them, and often succeeds in making the reader share his feelings.' Thus the work's 'scientific thoroughness is enhanced, as it were, mellowed by a thoroughly human and sympathetic approach to the subject.'²¹

²⁰ Elwin to Archer, 29 August 1951, *ibid.* This poem was not, of course, written for public consumption. The historian can take the liberty of printing it so many years after it was composed, safe in the knowledge that the poet and all his subjects are dead.

²¹ Reported by Alan Watts, dated 12 May 1938, File DG 40, John Murray Archives, London.

The referee was Alan Watts, not himself an anthropologist but a philosopher and mystic, an enthusiast for Zen and writer of books on the wisdom of the East. But contrast this appreciation of Elwin's first major monograph with the review of his last, which appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* in December 1955. *The religion of an Indian tribe*, wrote the critic, fell short of the 'standards [of] professional social anthropology'. While the texture of tribal life was conveyed with sympathy, Elwin's analysis, or rather lack of it, made it 'difficult to arrive at a more objective understanding of the fundamental facts of Saora society.'²²

Although the *TLS* review was by custom anonymous, its criticisms found echoes in reviews written of the same book by two of the rising stars of British anthropology. In the Manchester *Guardian* the Africanist Victor Turner acknowledged the author's 'vivid and elegant prose', the 'aesthetic fastidiousness of his photography and illustrations', while regretting the 'omission of a prior analysis of the social and political structure'—that is, of the rules of property and inheritance, as well as the rights and obligations of different segments of Saora society (Turner 1955). Writing in *Man*, F.G. Bailey, himself an ethnographer of Orissa, deplored the fact that Elwin was 'resolutely uninterested in the sociological aspects of religion'. Bailey's review ended with this distinctly two-edged compliment: 'The book is written with a flowing pen. The style is discursive and the Saora people, their way of life and their beliefs are portrayed with a skill found more often in a novel than in a work of analysis. But the easy style and the full reporting descend at times to sentimentality' (Bailey 1957).

In an unpublished reader's report for the Oxford University Press, Meyer Fortes likewise felt that Elwin's ethnography worked as literature, not always as science. Fortes was commenting on the manuscript of *Bondo highlander*: he found here that the genealogies were casually done, the myths and legends not related to the culture, the account of love and marriage an 'effusive personal interpretation' which one would consider 'to be good journalism, but inadequate ethnography'. Here and there 'Mr Elwin is carried away a bit by his imagination',

²² *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 December 1955 (emphasis supplied).

remarked Fortes, whereas 'better acquaintance with modern anthropological theory would have led to more satisfactory analyses'. The book, concluded the Oxford anthropologist, 'can be regarded as a *very graphic* but in some parts superficial description of Bondo culture from a *rather personal angle* of observation. [It is] vividly written and has an attractive gusto. It must be added, though, that there is a *great deal of Mr Elwin himself* in the book. He does not conceal his *prejudices*, in particular *his distaste* for the *advance of a higher culture* among the Bondo.'²³

British anthropologists found fault with Elwin's ignorance of the latest trends, and with the fact that he would not remove himself from his books. To adapt the terms of Clifford Geertz, the problem was that at a time when science mandated that ethnographies be 'author-evacuated', Elwin's books were 'author-saturated', and occasionally even 'author-supersaturated' (Geertz 1988). On the other side of the Channel, however, sentimentality and authorial presence are both allowed their place. It is thus not surprising that a distinguished Parisian anthropologist found Elwin's romanticism 'a small price to pay for his deep identification with the people being studied, to which we owe so many perceptive descriptions, autobiographies and confessions'. But the French are also more theory-conscious; the same reviewer (Louis Dumont) characterised Elwin's book on the Saora as 'exhaustive but not complete'—lacking a 'systematic attempt to relate religion to social organization', or a structural perspective which might link individuals and individual deities to the matrix of human relations. In the end, the French scholar concurred with the assessment of his British colleagues—this was good reading but bad science (Dumont 1959).

The years between 1939 (when *The Baiga* was published) and 1955 (when *The religion of an Indian tribe* appeared) precisely mark the period when professional social anthropology came of age in Britain. With decolonisation the university-trained ethnographer was rapidly replacing the colonial civil servant or missionary as the source of authentic information about 'other cultures'. Oxford and Cambridge

²³ Report on 'Verrier Elwin: The Bondo highlander', in File 534, OUP Archives, Mumbai (emphases supplied).

expanded their departments of anthropology, while new and influential centres came up at Manchester and Edinburgh. (The London School of Economics, where Malinowski had been based, was a pioneer in this regard, an established leader in anthropological research and training by the 1930s.) Dozens of students flocked to these centres of learning to acquaint themselves with the latest theoretical trends before going out into the field.

In this climate, the British reviews of Elwin's Saora book reflected a more general distrust of the gifted amateur within a profession rapidly gaining in power, prestige, and—or so it liked to believe—precision of analysis. The shifting contours of the discipline might even be mapped by the reviews of Elwin's books that appeared in *Man*. Some of the early reviews were written by Elwin's friends, such as the anthropologist-administrators J.H. Hutton and W.V. Grigson. Yet it was not friendship alone which led them to single out, in their praise, the meticulousness of detail and the passion for aboriginal rights that were the hallmarks of his work. By the late 1940s, though, the professionals were firmly in control of the journal. For them, an excess of detail was no substitute for rigour of analysis, and the defence of tribal culture an exercise in sentimentality not science—attitudes reflected in the reviews of Elwin's later books which appeared in *Man*.²⁴

In the eyes of the professional anthropologist Elwin was a diligent fieldworker and a writer of exceptional sensitivity whose theories, alas, were both inadequate and hopelessly out of date. A decade after his review of *The religion of an Indian tribe*, Turner returned to the book in a long essay commissioned for a research primer on *The craft of social anthropology*. He complained that Elwin 'does not write as a social anthropologist but as an eclectic ethnographer, and where he interprets, he uses the language of a theologian'. In an essay addressed to the aspiring anthropologist, Turner provides pointers to the

²⁴ This shift can be traced by comparing the following reviews in *Man*: of *The Baiga* by W.V. Grigson (March–April 1941, pp. 38–40); of *The Agaria* by C. von Fürer Haimendorf (November–December, 1943, pp. 140–1); of *The Muria and their ghotul* by Edmund Leach (November 1949, p. 130); of the *Bondo highlander* by Barbara Lawson (February 1952, pp. 27–8); of *Maria murder and suicide* (second edition) by Irawati Karve (February 1952, p. 27); of *The religion of an Indian tribe* by F.G. Bailey (May 1957).

kind of 'sociological analysis of the structural relationships within and between Saora villages' that could have provided 'an indispensable introduction to Elwin's study of Saora ritual'. Elwin's study lacked, in Turner's view, a careful delineation of the modes of succession and inheritance, the magnitude and mobility of villages, the forms of conflict, the social composition of households and hamlets, and the links between kinship, residence, and marriage. Instead of 'the systematic collection of this kind of data', all Elwin had provided were bare 'morsels of sociological information' interpolated in descriptions of religious customs (Turner 1967: 181–204).

The criticisms have a sharp sting, for the scientific social anthropologist makes an example of the eclectic ethnographer. In Turner's presentation, Elwin's study stands out as a paradigm of how not to collect data in the field, how not to write up your material. The amateur had admittedly an eye for the interesting problem, but not, it appeared, the nerve or the technique to work towards its successful resolution.²⁵ In contrast to their colleagues across the Atlantic, American anthropologists were, by and large, less judgmental. In light perhaps of the extinction of aboriginal cultures in their own land, they particularly welcomed Elwin's collections of tribal myth and folklore, 'a landmark in the exploration of the intellectual history of mankind' (Smith 1950: 535; see also Smith 1948). Oscar Lewis, like Elwin a writer disparaged by scientific anthropologists, was unequivocal in his praise of *The religion of an Indian tribe*, for him a 'scholarly and well-written book', 'a valuable contribution to the ethnography of tribal India' and 'of special worth to students of comparative religion' (Lewis 1956: 753–4). But the verdict of the British professionals was resoundingly confirmed, in a review of *The Agaria* in the *American*

²⁵ A younger anthropologist, inspired by both Turner and Elwin, has since carried out a re-study of the practice of shamanism among the Saora (Vitebsky 1993). This is but one of a series of recent re-studies of Elwin's tribes and themes by professional anthropologists (cf. Gell 1992; Nanda 1994; Srivastava 1991). In each case, the scholar has been inspired by Elwin to do fieldwork among a tribe he studied, to provide a fuller and more scientific account of the community and its institutions. By revisiting sites studied by Elwin in the hope of proving him wrong, such professionals are paying rich tribute to the amateur. Cf. also Padel 1995 and Sundar 1997, two works of historical anthropology which make extensive reference to and abundant use of Elwin.

anthropologist by a younger scholar, George Devereux. He allowed that the data were 'rich, detailed, authoritative'; what was lacking was systematic conceptual analysis. With Elwin flitting back and forth between 'the card-index pattern, Frazerian comparisons, functionalism [and] psychiatry', the book had 'neither internal or external order'. But behind these symptoms lay a deeper cause: quite evidently Elwin had spent 'too much time in the field'. What he needed 'most at this juncture is a refresher, a plunge in the Pieran spring of the London School of Economics, or one of the progressive departments of anthropology in the United States'. Devereux hoped that 'in the interests of science some foundation [would] stake this most distinguished field-worker and scholar to such a venture' (Devereux 1946: 110–11).

If someone like J.G. Frazer was derided for never having left the academy, Elwin was criticised for never having entered it: one had done no fieldwork, the other apparently too much of it. Devereux's comment brings to mind M.N. Srinivas's later formulation of the 'three births' of an anthropologist. For Srinivas, an anthropologist is 'once born' when he goes to the field for the first time, thrust abruptly into an unfamiliar world. He is 'twice born' when, on living for some time among the community, he is able to see things from their perspective—a second birth akin to a Buddhist surge of consciousness, for which years of study or mere linguistic facility do not prepare you. But an anthropologist is truly 'thrice born' only when he moves back to the university, his fieldwork completed. Here he reflects on his material and situates it in a theoretical context, while being alerted to competing subjectivities by colleagues returning from their field sites and communities. The allegiance to one tribe can never be entirely abandoned, but with the third incarnation the anthropologist can hope to achieve a least a partial objectivity: the mark of a scholar, as distinct from propagandist (Srinivas 1987).

In his own way Elwin anticipated this formulation, for in one of his books he beautifully describes the second birth of an anthropologist. 'In every investigation of a civilization not one's own', he writes, 'there comes—usually only after months or years of routine investigation, tedious checking and the patient accumulation of facts—a moment of sudden glory when one sees everything fall into place,

when the colours of the pattern are revealed, and one finds oneself no longer an alien and an outsider, but within' (Elwin 1946: viii–ix).

Could one say, then, that Elwin remained forever in this stage of twice-bornness, always and invariably seeing things only from the perspective of the community he studied and identified with? A third birth would have required a move to the London School of Economics or equivalent institution, a move he was not willing to make. It was not so much that no foundation would have been willing to sponsor him, but rather that in contrast to the professional anthropologist Elwin had come to the field without a return ticket to the Senior Common Room. Eighteen years after urging Elwin to leave the forest for the graduate seminar, George Devereux wrote him a letter that, in effect, completely withdrew his earlier remarks. 'I think you are a very enviable person', wrote Devereux,

who has laid out for himself a much wiser and much more gratifying course in life than most of us. Perhaps you do not have a grand piano in your sitting room, nor a Cadillac or a Rolls Royce in your garage—instead, you have chosen to live with people and to work among and with them. I rather think that your human horizons are wider than those of most of us.

I speak of this with some feeling since, in 1935, when I could choose between staying forever among the mountain people of Indochina—who, as you know, are very much like your Gonds and your Nagas—and going back to the hurly-burly of so-called civilization, I underwent a very real inner struggle—and probably chose the wrong solution.²⁶

IV. PREMODERN AND POSTMODERN

The high noon of professional social anthropology has now passed. In the emerging, 'postmodern' anthropology, the founders of the discipline are being roundly condemned for their scientific pretensions, their insensitivity to the power-laden context of their research and their indifference to the fate of the people they studied (cf. Clifford & Marcus 1986; Geertz 1988; Mangarro 1990; Marcus & Fisher 1986).

²⁶ Devereux to Elwin, 3 July 1959, Elwin Papers, NMML.

Elwin can, with little difficulty, be extricated from such strictures. Take, for instance, his acknowledgment of the unequal relationship between the ethnographer and the community. The Saora, he noted in an ironic aside, were unsure of where precisely to place him in the hierarchy of those who wielded power over them. Was he bigger than the Deputy Commissioner or the Forest Officer, they asked, or was he but a little higher than the lowly Sub-Inspector of Police? (Elwin 1955: 84). Or take his awareness of the unavoidably intrusive nature of anthropological research, to which he draws our attention by a characteristic inversion. On a field trip to the Juangs, he found them 'full of interest about my way of life, invading the tent at all times, and even peeping into my bathroom to study my technique of ablution! I often felt that I was a museum specimen and the Juangs members of an ethnological committee investigating a creature of the absurdest habits' (Elwin 1950b).

So in fact it turns out that Elwin can be seen as both a premodern and a postmodern anthropologist, a scholar simultaneously out of date as well as before his time. The strengths and weakness of Elwin's brand of ethnography are signalled in two assessments offered shortly after his death by the two pre-eminent Indian anthropologists of their generation. M.N. Srinivas, writing anonymously, was emphatic in his praise of the individual—'a gifted, sensitive and dedicated man, in [whose] death India and Britain have lost a bridge-builder'—but rather more ambivalent about his scholarship. He allowed that 'Elwin wrote so well that he made anthropology popular among the general public', but added that 'this popularity was also partly due to a focussing of attention on marriage, sex and art, and to the neglect of subjects of serious professional concern such as kinship, economics, law and politics.' With the increasing professionalisation of the discipline, wrote Srinivas in conclusion, Elwin would rank as 'one of the last and most distinguished amateur-anthropologists' (Anon. 1964).²⁷ A bridge-builder in cultural terms, but very much a transition figure intellectually: there is a faint note of condescension in this appreciation, the 'last' and 'amateur' serving to cancel out the 'most distinguished'.

²⁷ M.N. Srinivas identified himself as the author of this notice in a letter to me.

In the heyday of scientific social anthropology, Elwin's work was indeed regarded as slightly suspect, and on several counts. There was his lack of interest in theory, his reluctance to interpret or speculate, and his way of broadening the discussion—this usually done by invoking some other author writing about a vaguely similar rite in an altogether different social situation. When he moved from description to analysis, Elwin worked like an encyclopaedist rather than a theorist, content to pile fact upon fact rather than uncover relationships between different social phenomena. There were also his haphazard field methods: rather than live round the year and round the clock with a community or in a single village, he relied on visits of a few weeks or a few months at a time, these interspersed with his other commitments as social worker and polemicist. Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, there were his linguistic deficiencies: the fact that in all but his earliest fieldwork he was very heavily reliant on other people's understanding of the context and language.

That, so to say, is one side of the balance sheet. Now contrast Srinivas's highly qualified judgment with that offered by his close contemporary S.C. Dube:

Elwin was not a dry-as-dust technician; he was a poet, an artist, and a philosopher. . . . His love, his human sympathy, and his sense of wonder sometimes detract from objectivity and neutrality required in scientific writing, but no one ever seriously questioned the facts. . . . His critics may have made a few valid points here and there in showing the drawbacks in Elwin's type of anthropology, but they themselves rarely produced work which could have been said to have matched Elwin's contribution. By his individual efforts, Elwin has produced more and better research work than many of the expensively staffed and large research organisations in the country. (Dube 1964: 135–6)

With Dube we may also underline the volume of Elwin's corpus, his massive empirical contributions to the anthropology of India. He wrote, too, in accessible and often eloquent prose, treating the subjects of his research as individuals and not as mere components of a social structure, successfully reaching out to a wider public otherwise little interested in anthropology and ignorant about the culture and predicament of the tribes. And while he may have neglected some subjects of 'serious professional concern', Elwin broke new

ground in other areas, alerting the profession of which he was never wholly part to themes and topics it had ignored. Thus, his sensitivity to the lives of women, as witness his descriptions of their dreams, dresses, and menstrual practices in *The Muria and their ghotul*, and the very full account of the Saora woman as shaman in *The religion of an Indian tribe*. From both scientific and sentimental motives, Elwin made women visible for the first time in Indian anthropology. Then again his alertness to nature and the place of the natural world in tribal life (especially marked in his books on the Baiga and the Agaria) distinguish him from other anthropologists of India, so conspicuously indifferent to their ecological contexts (cf. Guha 1994). In both these respects Elwin was to anticipate future trends and concerns in anthropology. And alongside women and nature, Elwin helped focus attention on crime, disease, and art, all previously neglected subjects of research in Indian anthropology.

The range of his work, its sheer bulk, the manifest sympathy with his subjects, and the grace with which this was communicated—all these make Elwin a figure of rather more than antiquarian interest, a scholar who cannot easily be slotted into the ‘prehistory of the discipline’. At this point, perhaps, the analogy with J.G. Frazer breaks down, for the Trinity man can more fairly be regarded in that light. In the academy and outside it Elwin will be read, indeed is being read, not just because he is closer to our time than Frazer, but also because he has left these vivid and deeply empathetic accounts of cultures being rolled over by the wave of ‘progress’. If, as Needham (quoted in Haimendorf 1985: 12) has said, the ‘prime business of an anthropologist is to record the varieties of social life’, this was a business Elwin made emphatically his own.

The last word on Elwin the anthropologist can be that of his fellow student of tribal life in India, von Fürer Haimendorf:

Elwin contributed more to our knowledge of India’s aboriginal populations than any other scholar, living or dead, and his monographs on such tribes as Baigas, Muria Gonds, Bondos and Saoras will be valued as documents of a vanished pattern of life when many theoretical works by professional anthropologists will be long forgotten. (Haimendorf 1965: 647–4)

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In the Cause of Anthropology

The Life and Work of Irawati Karve¹

NANDINI SUNDAR

‘I will pay my debt to society through research in my subject. And beyond this, I owe no other debt to society.’ Having resolved this, she took the road of research and traveled it to the very end. However tired, she went on.—Vidyadhar Pundalik (1970)

IRAWATI KARVE WAS INDIA'S FIRST WOMAN ANTHROPOLOGIST at a time when anthropology and sociology were still developing as

¹ I am grateful to several people without whom this essay could not have been written. Narendra Bokhare generously shared with me his extensive collection of writings by and on Irawati Karve. Jai Nimbkar, A.D. Karve, Y.B. Damle, K.C. Malhotra, U.B. Bhoite, S.M. Dahiwale, and T.K. Oommen gave me extended interviews. K.C. Malhotra's bibliography of Irawati Karve's work was an invaluable resource in locating her writings, and I am grateful to Sujata Patel for sending me this. Anand Kapoor, Anil Awachat, B.S. Baviskar, Carol Upadhyia, Leela Dube, Patricia Uberoi, Shashi Shankar, Sujata Patel, Veena Naregal, and Vidyut Bhagwat helped in various ways, by providing contacts, references, and hospitality in Pune. Pushpa Sundar helped me with translations and reading Marathi. I am grateful to Patricia Uberoi, Carol Upadhyia, Satish Deshpande, Sujata Patel, Ramachandra Guha, Anjan Ghosh, K.C. Malhotra, B.S. Baviskar, Jai Nimbkar, A.D. Karve, and Narendra Bokhare for their comments and suggestions on the first draft. The remaining mistakes are my sole responsibility.



Fig. 10: Irawati Karve: Family Portrait c. 1960. *Front row, seated:* D.D. Karve (husband); Maharshi D.K. Karve (father in law); Irawati Karve's mother, Mrs Karmakar; Irawati Karve; *Back row, standing:* Bon Nimbkar; Jai Nimbkar, and Gauri Deshpande (daughters).

(Photograph courtesy Jai Nimbkar)

university disciplines.² She was also the founder of anthropology at Poona (now Pune) University, an Indologist who mined Sanskrit texts for sociological features, an anthropometrist, serologist, and palaeontologist, a collector of folk songs, a translator of feminist poems, and a Marathi writer and essayist of no mean repute whose book *Yuganta* transformed our understanding of the *Mahabharata*. Her career (1928–70) spanned both the early period of institutionalisation of the disciplines of sociology and anthropology in colonial India and their professionalisation in the post-Independence period.³

Yet, although Karve was very well known in her time,⁴ especially in her native Maharashtra, and gets an honourable mention in standard histories of sociology/anthropology (see Mukherjee 1979; Vidyarthi 1978), she does not seem to have had a lasting effect on the disciplines in the way of some of her contemporaries, such as Bose, Ghurye, Elwin, and Dumont. In part, perhaps, this is because fashions in social anthropology were changing even as she began her career—from diffusionism and a four-field approach to functionalism and specialisation—and the shift seemed to have escaped her almost completely. Throughout her life, she retained classical anthropology's preoccupation with the question of human origins, as applied to the Indian social context, asking 'What are we as Indians, and why are we what we are' (Malhotra 1971: 26). In part, too, this is due to the imbalances in academic prestige between regional centres like Pune and metropolises like Delhi and Bombay within the country, and between Indian academics and scholars of India abroad (see also Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 27). There may also have been other

² I will use the terms sociology and anthropology interchangeably, except when a point needs to be made regarding their differences, because the bulk of Indian sociology tended to be anthropological, and Karve herself used the terms interchangeably (see her article, *Manavshastra va samajshastra* (Anthropology and sociology) (Karve n.d.).

³ I have selected the year when she got her MA degree as the start of her career in sociology. Her career was brought to an end only with her death in 1970.

⁴ For instance, she gave the Presidential Address to the section of anthropology and archaeology at the Indian Science Congress in 1947 (Karve 1947b).

reasons, such as her choice of publishers,⁵ or the fact that few of her approximately twenty-five PhD students were able to establish themselves in the university teaching of social anthropology and take her work forward.⁶

Of late there has been something of a revival of interest in her work.⁷ However, the range of subjects covered and the variety of methods used is often forgotten—Karve's work stretched from mapping kinship and caste (underpinned by anachronistic anthropometric and linguistic surveys) to surprisingly contemporary surveys of the status of women using census data, urbanisation, weekly markets, dam-displaced people, and pastoralists. Equally, perhaps, it is her life as an unconventional woman of letters and her dedication to scholarship, her cosmopolitanism as well as immersion in a particular regional context, that will continue to be of interest. This is particularly so in a context where almost all histories of the discipline begin and end with the 'Western metropole', as if the places that anthropologists studied had no traditions of scholarship or

⁵ Her first two major books, *Kinship organisation in India* (1953b) and *Hindu society—An interpretation* (1968a/[1961]), were both published by the Deccan College, where she worked, rather than by leading commercial publishers like Oxford University Press and Routledge/Kegan Paul (who had published Elwin, Srinivas, and Dube). However, this was probably Deccan College policy, especially given the passionate interest the director, S.M. Katre, took in its publication series (Sankalia 1978: 36).

⁶ Compare this to Ghurye, whose approach to sociology was similar to Karve's, but several of whose students became well known and headed departments of anthropology/sociology all over India (see Upadhyaya, this volume). It is possible that Karve is more widely read in departments of physical anthropology in India.

⁷ This is so particularly in the study of kinship (see Trautmann 1995; Uberoi 1993), but also in the study of Maharashtrian culture and society (Zelliot and Berntsen 1988), and ecology (see Gadgil and Guha 1992, which is dedicated to the memory of Verrier Elwin, Irawati Karve, D.D. Kosambi, and Radhakamal Mukherjee). A conference and exhibition organized by Narendra Bokhare, at the Museum of the Department of Anthropology, Pune, 14–15 March 1991, generated considerable interest. Bokhare planned at the time to bring out a critical annotated edition of her collected works in Marathi and English. A Karve birth centenary seminar was organised at Deccan College in 2005, titled 'Anthropology for archaeology'.

scholars of their own, and where the history of women anthropologists is conspicuous by its relative absence.⁸

There are other reasons, however, for examining Karve's life rather than merely trying to redress an imbalance which time and location have created. While historians of the discipline in India calibrate its chronology differently, most seem to agree that Irawati Karve belonged to the period when anthropology had taken root in the university, and needed nurturing; or, in other words, the phase of consolidation.⁹ Examining Karve's oeuvre not just as an abstract product of her intellect or the concerns of the discipline, but as the product of a particular institutional context and social constellation, will perhaps help us understand the manner in which sociology and anthropology were established as professional research fields within the university. In this essay, the term 'professionalisation' is used loosely to refer to the manner in which the disciplines came to acquire a distinct identity and membership, and be seen as a potential career. We need to understand what this professionalisation meant for the discipline in terms of subject matter and research practice, and how this affected the relations between sociology and society at large in the Indian context.

The fragile professionalism—in terms of research standards—of social science disciplines in India today gives this question contemporary resonance. On the one hand it is important to assert the need for 'science as a vocation' or to maintain the neutrality of social science research in the face of growing political partisanship in scholarship (cf. Weber 1970 [1918]). The demands of a professional discipline, including criticism from one's peers, can often modify the

⁸ See, for instance, the absence in the *History of Anthropology* volumes edited by George Stocking (University of Wisconsin Press) of female ancestors other than Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead.

⁹ Vidyarthi (1978) divides the development of the discipline into three phases: the formative period (1774–1919), the constructive (1920–49), and the analytical (1950 onwards), while Mukherjee (1979) prefers to use the terms 'pioneers, modernizers, pace-makers and nonconformists'—though roughly in the same time frame. While Vidyarthi places Karve among the constructivists, Mukherjee places her as part of the 'perennial stream' of Indian anthropology/sociology which flowed from pioneers like Ghurye, Chattopadhyay, and D.P. Mukerji, rather than among modernisers like M.N. Srinivas and S.C. Dube.

more extreme views that develop through one's personal political or social inclinations. This is evident, for example, in the changes that Karve's views underwent—from a strident Hindu nationalism to an emphasis on diversity and tolerance. On the other hand, faced with the perceived irrelevance of much university-taught or professional sociology and anthropology in India—with its focus on the origins of the caste system, kinship, and village studies—to contemporary social problems,¹⁰ many would argue that the way sociology has been institutionalised in the country (the demarcation of disciplines and subject matter) is fundamentally flawed. In addition, most of the scholar-pedagogues have been upper caste and upper class and the manner in which they have approached subjects like caste has reflected this bias. The linguistic conditions for professionalism—writing in English, publishing in professional journals—also tend to exclude a large majority. 'Neutrality', in this context, can be a way of suppressing social contradictions, and internalizing 'disciplinary concerns'—a way of excluding lived experience. Perhaps, then, by uncovering some of these social origins and understanding how certain subjects came to be the staple subject of anthropological enquiry, we can begin to address the warp in the sociological profession.¹¹

I. THE PRAXIS OF RESEARCH

FROM PUNERI BRAHMAN TO PROFESSIONAL ANTHROPOLOGIST

Recent histories of the introduction of 'Anglo' education in western India note that, rather than representing the greater universalisation of access to education, colonial educational policies in fact helped to consolidate a small group of upper castes, particularly Brahmans, in new professions like the civil services, law, journalism and teaching

¹⁰ Unlike, say, economics in post-Independence India, which has been seen as having immediate practical relevance, or sociology in Europe and America (see Hawthorne 1976).

¹¹ See Bourdieu (1996) for the way in which the emphasis on certain kinds of knowledge and 'academic manners'—academic *habitus*—enables scholars to performatively recreate structures of class even while, as individuals, they simply uphold 'standards' in scholarship.

(Chakravarti 1998: 60–2; Naregal 2001).¹² Prominent among these upper castes were the Chitpavan Brahmans who had dominated social and political life under the Peshwas and now moved to restore their position from the relative decline they had suffered after the initial establishment of British rule (Chakravarti 1998: 64; Masselos 1974: 25).

Access to English education also structured other social divisions, such as that between ‘reformers’ and the ‘orthodox’. The former, who advocated social reforms like widow remarriage and the abolition of child marriages, were mostly drawn from Bombay colleges such as Elphinstone, but exercised considerable influence through their spread as primary schoolteachers and college lecturers. ‘Social reform’ was the major issue in Pune—unlike industrialised Bombay, which was developing a radical working-class politics. However, as Masselos shows, the gap between the reformers and the orthodox was considerably overplayed since both were generally upper caste, and the former tended to work through caste and community structures in order to gain acceptability, thereby often strengthening the hold of caste (Masselos 1974: 30; see also Zavos 2000: 39–44). Gender, as Chakravarti points out, was critical to both the reformists and the orthodox, each of whom identified the ‘real’ Hindu tradition with their particular stance on gender and quoted from the *shastras* to prove this. While the orthodox upheld Brahmanical patriarchy, the reformers merely sought to moderate it with ‘paternalist humanism’, among other things, in order to make women into suitable helpmates for the new class of educated men (Chakravarti 1994: 6). Gender was also critical in marking off upper-caste reform activity from lower-caste protest—while lower caste reformers emphasised caste as the major source of oppression, upper-caste reformers took up gender-based oppression, with some convergences as in the person of Jyotiba

¹² While lower castes did attempt to access this education through missionary schools, or by exploiting the space between different fractions of the upper-caste elite (reformers *vs.* modernizers) to demand access to government education, the new professions were predominantly upper caste. In fact, as late as the 1930s, Brahmans continued to be prominent in educational institutions in Maharashtra, particularly Poona (see Chakravarti 1998: 110, fn 53).

Phule.¹³ Correspondingly, women's education received more grants from the colonial government than schools for the lower castes (Naregal 2001: 96).

In this general atmosphere of reform and women's education, and coming from a professional Chitpavan family, neither getting a education nor going into a profession like teaching would for someone like Irawati Karve have been particularly novel. The bitterest battles in this field had been fought a generation earlier. Yet merely possessing this social and cultural capital does not by itself account for the course that Karve charted; even for her, pursuing a career in anthropology was not easy. She was born in 1905 and named after the Irawaddy river in Burma where her father, Ganesh Hari Karmarkar, worked in the Burma Cotton Company. At seven she was sent to the Huzur Paga boarding school for girls in Pune. One of her classmates at the school was Shakuntala Paranjapye, daughter of R.P. Paranjapye, Principal of Fergusson College. Shakuntala's mother, so the family story goes, saw Irawati at the school and wanted to bring her home as a second child.¹⁴ Photos of the time show two neatly dressed girls in long white frocks and white bows in their hair standing demurely behind R.P. Paranjapye and his wife.¹⁵ At the intellectual and atheist 'Wrangler' Paranjapye's house, Irawati was introduced to a variety of books as well as to visitors like Judge Balakram, whose own interest in anthropology rubbed off on her.

Irawati studied philosophy at Fergusson College, graduating in 1926. She then got the Dakshina Fellowship to work under G.S. Ghurye, head of the Department of Sociology at Bombay University.¹⁶ In the mean time, she married the chemist Dinakar Dhondo

¹³ Kosambi (2000a), Naregal (2001: 96). See also Naregal (2001: 227) for how this move to social reform followed a distancing from egalitarian principles after 1857.

¹⁴ This account of her life relies on Kalelkar (1973) and an interview with her daughter Jai Nimbkar at her home in Phaltan, 26 April 2001.

¹⁵ Reproduced in Paranjapye (1995). The Paranjapyes and Karves, both well-known and progressive Brahman families in Pune, have been close relations and friends over several generations.

¹⁶ The Dakshina awards were instituted by the Peshwas to promote Sanskrit learning and support pandits. While the awards were continued under the

Karve, a friend and tennis companion of her brothers, apparently much to the disappointment of her wealthy father, who was unimpressed by the social distinction of the Karve family and who had wanted her to marry a *sansthanik* (ruler of a princely state) rather than a mere college teacher.¹⁷

D.D. Karve was the second son of Dhondo Keshav Karve, one of the pioneers of widow remarriage and women's education in Maharashtra. Unlike Justice M.G. Ranade, who campaigned for widow remarriage but married a young girl of 11 as his second wife, Maharshi Karve (as D.K. Karve later came to be known), had himself married a widow, Godubai, a remarkable woman in her own right who was Pandita Ramabai's first student at the Sharada Sadan.¹⁸ When the Sharada Sadan became 'notorious' as a 'breeding ground for Christian conversion', Maharshi Karve, working very much within the upper-caste reformist mode, started the Hindu Widows' Home at Hingne, outside Pune (D.K. Karve 1963; Chandavarkar 1958). He later set up the Women's University in Bombay (with public contributions on the lines of the Japanese Women's University), which was renamed the SNTD Women's University after a substantial donation from the industrialist Sir Vithaldas Thackersay. While the Karves initially suffered much social opprobrium from orthodox Brahmans, the family eventually became well known and fêted in nationalist and reformist circles. While Godubai, Karve's wife, and her sister, Parvati Athavale, were involved in collecting contributions for the Widows' Home, Maharshi Karve's eldest son Raghunath extended the family tradition by giving up a job as a maths lecturer in Wilson College, Bombay, to campaign for birth control.

British, they were vastly reduced and eventually directed towards the cultivation of the vernacular and native education (see Naregal 2001: 80–9 on the Dakshina funds). By the late 1920s, the new colonial intelligentsia had obviously surpassed the traditional intellectuals, as evident from the award of the Dakshina Fellowship to study a modern discipline such as sociology.

¹⁷ Interview, Jai Nimbkar, 26 April 2001.

¹⁸ For the importance of Pandita Ramabai as a feminist and campaigner for widow remarriage, see Chakravarti (1998); see also Kosambi (2000b).

Being married into such a family brought some advantages to Irawati Karve,¹⁹ yet Maharshi Karve's liberal encouragement of women in public did not necessarily extend into an equal recognition of or support for women in his own family. A sense of this comes through in her essay, 'Grandfather', about Maharshi Karve, where she describes his opposition to her studying in Germany:

After I received my M.A., Dinu (my husband) decided to send me to Germany for further studies. He informed Grandfather about the plan, but Grandfather did not approve. What was the point in further studies! It would be very expensive; I could easily get a job in the Women's University without it. But Dinu would not hear of it. He was confident of getting the necessary finances. After that Grandfather left Poona and we went ahead with our preparations. When the date of my departure was fixed, Dinu wrote a letter to his father telling him the date of departure and asking for his blessings. Grandfather promptly sent a reply saying that he had already stated that he was not in favour of the plan. No blessings—nothing more. For a long time after that, I was rather bitter about this episode, especially as he had enthusiastically sponsored further education in foreign countries for some other women who were not particularly good at their studies in India. (Karve 1963d: 93–4)

Irawati Karve goes on to describe how she reconciled herself to his attitude, realising that '(h)is heart, which is insulated against humans, is given unstintingly to his institutions' (Karve 1963d: 94). The idea that reformers and revolutionaries are often hardest on those closest to them comes through again in her conclusion to the essay, 'How fortunate I am that I am the daughter-in-law of such a man! And how still more fortunate that I am not his wife' (ibid.: 104; see also Anandibai Karve 1963).²⁰

¹⁹ In Karve's essay *Paripurti*, where she describes, albeit ironically, the way she was introduced at a public function, one gets a glimpse of the importance of such family connections (Karve 1949). See also *infra*, fn. 50.

²⁰ Another example of stricter standards for Maharshi Karve's own family that seems to have rankled for a long time is the fine Karve was made to pay when she broke her contract with SNDT to join Deccan College. Only a short while earlier, someone else in a similar position had been let off. Karve had to

As for Karve herself, she decided early on that the sacrifices involved in social reform were not for her and her only debt to society was her research (Pundalik 1970). Upadhyaya (this volume) argues that the nineteenth-century social reformers had already cast society as an object of study—perhaps a further distantiation from social reform, even if not purposely undertaken for this reason, was necessary in order to ‘professionalise’ the discipline.²¹ At any rate her husband, Dinakar Karve, too, appears to have shared her views, confining himself to teaching chemistry. He later became Principal of Fergusson College.

While Dinakar Karve may not have been a public proponent of social reform or women’s rights like his father, his daughters argue that he was the perfect supportive husband, recognising his wife’s exceptional intellectual abilities and doing his best to encourage her.²² Having done his own PhD in organic chemistry in Germany just after World War I, Dinakar Karve persuaded his wife to go there as well. They borrowed money from the Gujarati Congressman Jivraj Mehta, and Irawati Karve left alone for Germany in November 1928, at the age of 23, returning two years later after finishing her PhD. Gauri Deshpande, her daughter, describes coming across a diary, years after her father’s death, in which he described his married life with Irawati much in the meticulous way he kept his accounts: every major event, every success or failure in her life was noted, whereas there was very little on his own life. He took on several household responsibilities so that she would have time for research—always ensuring there was petrol in her scooter and some money in her purse.²³ Irawati and Dinakar Karve shared a somewhat unconventional relationship for the times in other ways too. It was common

sell her gold bangles—the only jewellery she inherited from her mother when she married—to pay the fine (Jai Nimbkar, letter to me, 4 February 2002).

²¹ On the other hand, there were anthropologists like N.K. Bose and K.P. Chattopadhyay who were involved in the freedom struggle, and others who came later, like A.R. Desai, whose research was a part of radical politics.

²² Jai Nimbkar, letter to me, 4 February 2002; Deshpande 2001.

²³ Deshpande 2001. It is worth noting that accounts about successful women must dwell at length on the role played by their husbands, while in the case of successful men the wife’s support is simply assumed.

in Maharashtra for a wife to avoid using her husband's name and address him in the plural. Not only did Irawati and Dinakar call each other 'Iru' and 'Dinu', their children called them by those names as well. This was often a source of amusement or surprise to the children's friends, as was Irawati Karve's refusal to wear any of the signs of a married Hindu woman, such as the *kumkum* or the *mangal-sutra*.²⁴ She was also the first woman in Pune to ride a scooter.²⁵ Her appearance was evidently an important factor in the overall myth of her persona—almost everyone who wrote about her or who described her to me emphasised how imposing she was—'tall, fair and well-built' (Dube 2000: 4041). By all accounts she seems also to have been both an exciting and difficult person—taking instant likes and dislikes to people, often rude or so frank as to appear rude, with a tendency to shout at students who disturbed or angered her, etc. However, she was also warmly hospitable to those she liked and took a keen interest in people's lives.²⁶ She made a deep impression on the sociologist Leela Dube: 'What was truly infectious was her intense curiosity about diverse customs, her readiness to admit of her lack of information about some of them, and a "could not care less" attitude about "impression management" in scholarly circles' (ibid.).

Despite her disregard of convention, Irawati Karve's was essentially a middle-class Hindu life, her interests and scholarship made possible by a particular Hindu reform mindset. Reformist Pune Brahmans retained a sense of 'tradition', a way of introducing a Maharashtrian audience to the wider world through a middle-class sensibility. Despite Dinakar Karve's ardent atheism and her children's teasing about her 'boyfriend', Irawati Karve portrayed her frequent visits to the shrine of Vitthoba at Pandharpur as part of a secular upholding of tradition, of doing what many had done before her, and being part of 'the spirit of Maharashtra'.²⁷ This 'spirit of Maharashtra' was, however, understood in purely Hindu terms. While she had learnt Sanskrit at school, as all educated children did in those days, she

²⁴ Interviews, Jai Nimbkar, 26 April 2001 and Anand Karve, 27 April 2001; A.D. Karve (1970); Deshpande (1970).

²⁵ Interview, B.S. Baviskar, April 2001.

²⁶ Desai (1970); Nimbkar (1970); interview, K.C. Malhotra, 17 April 2001.

²⁷ See her essays, 'On the road', and 'Boyfriend', in Zelliott and Berntsen (1988).

used it not just for research but also for leisure-time reading. One of her prized possessions in later life, a gift from her father, was the 18-volume critical edition of the *Mahabharata* in Sanskrit, brought out by the Bhandarkar Oriental Insitute. Her book *Yuganta*, which won the important Sahitya Akademi literary prize for the best book in Marathi in 1967, and is based on the *Mahabharata*, concludes: 'I am indeed fortunate that I can read today a story called Jaya, which was sung three thousand years ago and discover myself in it' (1969b: 217). On the other hand, her feminist and critical humanist reading of characters, noted one obituarist, 'hurt the sentiments of many lovers of *Mahabharata* . . . some have even resented giving awards to this book which subjected the superhumans in this epic, whom the Indians have venerated for ages, to devastating scrutiny' (Kavadi 1970: 27).

While Sanskrit epics like the *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana* or the poems of the Marathi bhakti poets Tukaram and Dnyaneshwar figured large in her reading,²⁸ Karve's tastes were eclectic, and included Sartre, Camus, and the pulp thriller writer Alistair Maclean. In her obituary on her mother, Jai Nimbkar says 'she read Heidegger's "Being" with as much interest as a recipe in the women's magazine, *Femina*' (Nimbkar 1970: 25, 28). But that she read most prodigiously as an anthropologist is evident from her personal library (which now occupies three shelves of the Deccan College library). This contains the usual anthropological suspects—Hooton, Lowie, Kroeber, Firth, Vidyarthi, A.R. Desai, Dumont (in French), Baur, Fischer, and Lenz (in German)—Hindu texts like the Vedas and Upanishads, as well as books on juvenile delinquency, tropical childhood, ancient Judaism, and Aristotle's *Politics*.

Would Irawati Karve's work have been different if she had been a male anthropologist? I shall discuss her 'feminism' later, but certainly her life would have been less full—while men like K.P. Chattopadhyay and N.K. Bose combined a life of activism with research (see Bose, this volume), and others like Elwin and Srinivas have written novels and short stories (Guha 1999; Madan 2000), the mundane tasks of

²⁸ A radio talk she gave on the books and authors that had influenced her includes Oliver Goldsmith, Jane Austen, Kalidas, and above all the *Mahabharata* (Karve 1953c).

home that take up so much of a woman's daily life rarely figure in male biographies or autobiographies.²⁹ By contrast, several descriptions of Irawati—by her daughter Jai, her son Anand, her student Pundalik, and her colleague Damle—focus on the passion with which she engaged the people around her and their problems, her enthusiasm for baking, knitting, smocking, gardening, or just plain conversation. In her case these were joys and not the constraints that have silenced many others; she had servants, a caring husband, and an office away from home where she did all her work. Yet, as Tille Olsen notes of women who write: 'We who write are survivors, "onlys". One-out-of-twelve' (Olsen 1994: 39). Whatever the feminisation of sociology and anthropology today (see B eteille 1995 *vs.* John 2001 and Rege 2000), over the time she worked Irawati Karve was one of the few survivors.

THE GURU-SHISHYA TRADITION IN ANTHROPOLOGY

Tracing the intellectual antecedents of a scholar can be a hard and somewhat speculative task. In Karve's case there appear to be at least four major influences on her work. The first was an Indological tradition to which both her MA supervisor, G.S. Ghurye and she subscribed. The second was an ethnological tradition which manifested itself in surveys of castes and tribes within India, and had broad affinities with what later came to be called diffusionism (Vincent 1990: 83). The third influence was that of a German physical anthropology tradition which attempted to provide a genetic basis for the existence of a variety of groups, which she imbibed during her PhD in Germany (1928–30): in her case, fortunately, this was shorn of its racist implications. Finally, her own curiosity and passion for fieldwork led her to take up new areas of research like socio-economic surveys, or archaeological explorations with Sankalia.

In an article written in Marathi, Karve provides her own version of the genealogy of sociology and anthropology in and on Maharashtra (and presumably thereby the influences on her work or the work

²⁹ See, for instance, the differences between Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in Catherine Bateson's (1984) perceptive and moving account of her parents; and Dube's (2000) delicate account of how she negotiated her professional interests within the home.

she thought important). This starts with the social writings of the nationalists Ranade, Tilak, and Gokhale, followed by Enthoven's *Tribes and castes of Bombay* and Russell and Hiralal's *Tribes and castes of the Central Provinces*. She advises readers to look at three Marathi works in particular: Atre's *Gaongada*, Gole's *Hindu religion and reform*, and N.G. Chapekar's *Badlapur* (Our village). Gole's book looks at the effect of English education on Brahman society, and the manner in which the old society was giving way to the new. Atre's and Chapekar's books are on changes in rural life. The bulk of Karve's essay is devoted to Ghurye, followed by a para on Ambedkar's writings on caste. Sociology in Maharashtra is brought up to date with a mention of Durga Bhagwat,³⁰ as well as her own ongoing work in Deccan College with her colleague Y.B. Damle (Karve n.d.).

Ghurye's influence is apparent in much of Karve's work—they shared a common belief in the importance of family, kinship, caste, and religion as the basis of Indian society, a broad equation of Indian society with Hindu society, and an emphasis on collecting empirical facts which would speak for themselves (see Upadhyia this volume; Uberoi 2000a: 50, fn4). Many of these concerns, e.g. with the family or caste, stemmed from the upper-caste social reform tradition exemplified by people like Ranade, Tilak, and Maharshi Karve and were common currency, as was the emphasis on knowledge of Sanskrit (or Persian) as the hallmark of good scholarship (Dandekar 1999; see also the autobiographies of Ghurye [1973] and Sankalia [1978]).

The Indological tradition that Karve subscribed to was of a very different order from Dumont's in that there was no attempt at building or eliciting an underlying model of social relations. Instead, she was an Indologist in the classical Orientalist sense of looking to ancient Sanskrit texts for insights into contemporary practice (Cohn

³⁰ Durga Bhagwat was a PhD student of Ghurye's but later dropped out. However, she continued to do research in philology, philosophy, and folklore. She and Irawati Karve were seen as the two major intellectual Marathi women of their time. Her essay on Irawati Karve (in *Athavle Thase/As I remember it*), written towards the end of Bhagwat's life, and after Karve had died, contains a number of accusations against the latter, including charges of plagiarism, careerism, manipulation of persons, suppressing the work of others, etc. (Bhagwat n.d.). Whatever the truth of these charges, the essay does Bhagwat little credit.

1990: 143). In the post-Independence nationalist version of this Indology there was also an emphasis on the unity-in-diversity aspect: the notion that while physical and cultural differences between castes represented diversity, India's unity lay in overarching Sanskrit texts.

This kind of Indology had clear affinities with ethnology and diffusionism, and, though tracing all the details is outside the scope of this essay (see instead Chakrabarti 1997; Trautmann 1997), the common substratum was the European discovery of Sanskrit as part of an Indo-European language stream and the influence of the Aryan invasion theory on the classification of Indian populations (Trautmann 1997: 131–5). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ethnological surveys were being conducted in both Britain and India to map the distribution of races. In Britain this took the form of the British Association for the Advancement of Science's Ethnographic Survey of the British Isles (Urry 1984), conducted mostly through local and amateur natural history, archaeological, and folklore societies. The association's desire for an Imperial Bureau of Ethnology for Greater Britain was never met (*ibid.*: 97), though a similar organisation was set up in its colony—this being the Anthropological Survey of India. In India, gazetteers and censuses recorded the cultural and physical traits of the multiple castes and tribes of India. A major push towards equating caste with race came with Risley, Census Commissioner in 1901, who introduced anthropometric measurements, particularly nasal indices, to the study of caste.

The ethnological enterprise of mapping racial variations helped support diffusionism. In what is a standard, if somewhat linear, history of British anthropology (Kuklick 1991: 121–2), nineteenth-century evolutionism (the idea that all cultures originated independently and must pass through the same stages) gave way in the early-twentieth century to diffusionism, with its emphasis on migration and conquest in the spread of culture. One of the most well known exponents of this school was W.H.R. Rivers. After the First World War diffusionism was in turn replaced by functionalism under the impetus of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown.

As against the independent invention of culture by different races, diffusionists believed that culture originated only under certain favourable conditions and was then spread. In its more extreme forms, as practiced by Elliot Smith and W.J. Perry, all civilization

was thought to have originated in Egypt.³¹ The diffusionists, who were primarily medical men, understood Mendelian genetics to imply that cultural traits were a product of biological traits, and these in turn were transmitted in stable fashion through generations. One of the political implications of this was that 'cultural diversity within an area was prima facie evidence that its inhabitants were a racially diverse collection of migrant settlers' (Kuklick 1991: 261). The diffusionist belief that cultural progress occurred as a result of inferior races copying the superior upon contact or conquest also fitted well with the Orientalist theory of an Aryan conquest of Dravidians (ibid.: 263).

Through Ghurye, who was a student of Rivers at Cambridge, Karve internalised the understanding of cultural variation in society as a result of the migration of different ethnic groups, and a 'historical' approach. Her book *Hindu society* begins by noting 'the bewildering variety of behavioural patterns found in it' (Karve 1968a [1961]: 1) and goes on to attribute it to the endogamous kin group which she called caste and which, through her anthropometric and blood group surveys, she showed to be often distinct from each other: 'it is the caste which is mainly responsible for the variety in behavioural patterns found in India' (ibid.: 10). The basic character of Hindu society is seen as agglomerative: 'a loose coming together of many separate cultural entities' (ibid.: 127).

Two other instances of the Rivers influence are Karve's emphasis on kinship terminology as a marker of cultural regions, and her style of fieldwork. For Rivers, 'the elemental social structure of any group would be systematically revealed in its kinship terminology' (Stocking 1992: 34). This in turn is derived from Morgan (1871). Much like the kind of fieldwork Rivers propagated (Kuklick 1991: 139), Karve carried out intensive surveys of different groups within particular regions.

The MA degree in sociology at Bombay University could be gained either through regular papers or through a research thesis. In those days MA theses were expected to be substantial and original pieces

³¹ For a while even Ghurye seems to have been interested in the Egyptian connection (see Srinivas 1997).

of work.³² Karve's thesis, on her own caste, 'The Chitpavan Brahmins—An ethnic study', is a classic example of physical anthropology (eye colour measurements) combined with an Indological discussion of caste origins in the form of the Parasurama myth drawn from popular versions and the Puranas, written in the speculative style of gazetteers (Karve 1928). Curiously, however, one finds glimmers of an emerging ecological reading in her discussion of the Parasurama myth (later published: Karve 1932), and an ability to bring together diverse facts and sources, from local accounts to geological texts, to the Puranas and the *Mahabharata* (see Karve 1933a, 1933b). According to one version of the myth, Parasurama, a Brahman who had sworn to destroy all Ksatriyas, came to the Western Ghats, where he begged the sea to retreat and make some room for him. He needed Brahmins to help him with his religious rites, so he made Brahmins out of fourteen men who were washed ashore. In a close discussion of the myth, Karve concludes that it contains both a semi-historical tradition and an explanation for the recedence of the sea, which was geologically known to be true (Karve 1932: 118). Chapter 3 of the thesis presents the data derived from examining eye pigmentation of 3097 individuals from four towns—Poona, Nasik, Satara, and Wai. She describes the use of eye colour as a mark of differentiation used by Ripley for classifying European communities as a 'new technique in India', since Risley's Ethnographic Survey had hitherto used only facial and head measurements.³³

The thesis also demonstrates the lenses through which she viewed Indian society—as a patchwork of castes, physically and culturally differentiated—a view she was later to develop somewhat differently

³² The copy of her MA thesis in Bombay University contains examiners' queries in the margins on the meaning of particular Sanskrit terms and the use of primary sources. There are notes in two different handwritings, and in a couple of instances one reader (presumably Ghurye) seems almost as absorbed with scoring points off the other as correcting the student's thesis, judging by the caustic comments addressed to 'Comrade Thoothi', the only other sociologist in the department at the time. Thoothi seemed somewhat uncomfortable with the speculative portions of the thesis.

³³ In fact, eye and hair colour data had been used by Beddoe in his survey of British races as early as 1885 (Urry 1984: 85).

in *Hindu society* (1968a [1961]), but never fundamentally change. See for instance, her views in her MA thesis: 'Separating and living in isolation seems to be the genius of India. It is easier for communities to split and live apart for centuries than to unite, but in the present instance the cause of holding off from each other seems to be rooted in the temperament of the two people (Deshastha and Chitpavan Brahmans). . . . In addition to these temperamental peculiarities, popular opinion recognizes some physical differences between these two communities' (Karve 1928: 3) and the similarity of these views to those expressed in *Kinship organisation in India* on the segmentary structure of India: 'If one may draw an analogy, the Hindu society with its autonomous semi-independent structures like the family, the caste and the polythesistic religion has an organisation comparable to that of worms, where each segment, though linked to the others, is yet semi-independent and possessed of or capable of creating organs needed for survival' (Karve 1953b: 299). Fortunately, the naïve references to temperamental differences were dropped.

To decipher society as a congeries of different castes, Karve added a genetic approach derived from her German training. Apart from the fact that Dinakar Karve went to Germany to study, that country was at the time a choice as naturally equal as the US or UK for anyone bent on a scientific career, as also for one with a background in Sanskrit. Pollock notes that in terms of the 'size of investment on the part of the German State in Indological studies throughout the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries . . . and the volume of the production of German Orientalist knowledge . . . Germany almost certainly surpassed all the rest of Europe and America combined' (Pollock 1993: 82; see also Mukherjee 1979: 30; Trautmann 1997: 189). In terms of physical anthropology, human heredity, and race science, too, Germany was a leading player, and several German institutes, such as the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Eugenics and Human Heredity, where Karve studied (1928–30), were funded by American foundations like the Rockefeller Foundation (Kuhl 1994; see also Proctor 1988, fn 157 and Barkan 1988 on the international legitimacy of German physical anthropology).

German anthropology at the time was dominated by a 'physicalist tradition' owing to the fact that anthropology was generally studied

as a branch of medicine (Proctor 1988).³⁴ Rudolph Martin's three-volume *Lehrbuch der Anthropologie*, published in 1914, was widely regarded as state of the art in physical anthropology. Its goal was 'to differentiate, to characterize and to investigate the geographical distribution of all recent and extinct forms of hominids with respect to their physical characteristics' (cited in Proctor 1988: 142). For Martin, race was distinct from culture, and indeed the latter was for him not the subject of anthropology. By the mid-1920s, however, this anthropometric tradition in physical anthropology had given way to a geneticist approach, and there was an attempt to redefine anthropology as the 'science of human genetic differences.'³⁵ Along with this, there was a reorientation of German anthropology towards racial hygiene (*rassenhygiene*) or the improvement of the human race.

One of the leading figures in the *rassenhygiene* or eugenics movement was Karve's German supervisor, Eugen Fischer, who founded the *Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene* in Freiburg in 1910. Bolstered by Mendelian genetics (as was diffusionism), the movement argued for the heritability not just of physical characteristics but of 'a broad range of human diseases and dispositions' (Proctor 1988: 147). In other words, now both physical and cultural characteristics were believed to be biologically inherited. As 'Director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Eugenics and Human Heredity in Berlin, as head of Germany's two leading anthropological societies, and as editor of several of Germany's foremost anthropological journals', Fischer was 'universally acknowledged as Germany's premier anthropologist' (ibid.: 139). Some of this support waned when, in 1933, he declared his support for the Nazis. The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute trained SS physicians in 'genetic and racial care' and Fischer personally served as a judge in Berlin's Appellate Genetic Health Court, the purpose of which was to determine who would be sterilized (ibid.: 157, 160; see also Kuhl 1994).

³⁴ For this section, I am drawing almost entirely on Proctor (1988).

³⁵ Lenz 1914, cited in Proctor (1988: 147). The Bauer, Lenz and Fischer book, *Human heredity (Grundriss der menschlichen Erblchkeitslehre und Rassenhygiene, 1921)* was the leading book on the subject at the time, and Karve also owned a copy.

Although she studied zoology, Sanskrit, and philosophy as allied subjects in Berlin, Karve's PhD thesis was on 'The normal asymmetry of the human skull'. She examined the skulls of different racial groups to see if there were differences in the asymmetries found between the left and right side of the body. This was seen as a question of great importance to physical anthropologists because their conclusions about racial differences depended on physical measurements, and, if there were major differences, the measurements would have to be taken on different sides of the body (Karve 1937: 68–9). Her thesis proved that there were 'no such racial differences in asymmetries' (ibid.: 73). Fortunately, although Karve evidently imbibed some eugenicist inclinations from Fischer,³⁶ she escaped any stronger racist influence. Perhaps one safety net was provided by her location as a colonized Indian. Written years later, a footnote in a chapter on caste-like formations in other societies reads: 'The author remembers vividly how Germans and Englishmen refused to see any comparison between the institutions of the primitive people and their own institutions. Every time the author, then a student or a much younger teacher suggested such a comparison it was brushed aside. After this experience one learnt to keep one's thought to oneself' (Karve 1968a/[1961]: 179).

However, as late as 1968 she retained a belief in the importance of mapping social groups like subcastes on the basis of anthropometric and what was then called 'genetic' data (blood group, colour vision, hand-clasping, and hypertrichosis) (Karve and Malhotra 1968). To summarise, through the combined effect of diffusionism, colonial gazetteer style ethnology, and German 'human genetics', it was inevitable for Karve to come to understand her task primarily as one of mapping social and biological variations in society.

BUILDING ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

After returning from Germany, Karve worked for a while as Registrar at the SNDT Women's University in Bombay (1931–6), where she

³⁶ As suggested by the title of her unpublished paper, 'The need for eugenical studies in India'. Unfortunately, I have not been able to get this paper. According to K.C. Malhotra (17 April 2001), anthropology courses in India upto the 1970s retained a fairly strong eugenicist slant.

was apparently an indifferent administrator (Pundalik 1970: 36). She also did some postgraduate teaching in Bombay. In 1939 she joined the newly revived Deccan College as Reader in Sociology, and this proved to be a congenial intellectual home for the rest of her life.³⁷ According to her colleague, the archaeologist H.D. Sankalia: 'Non-interference in the work of others, faith in the competence of the individual as well as complete freedom to plan and execute one's scheme of research within the means at our disposal were mainly responsible for the rapid development of the Deccan College' (Sankalia 1978: 35).

For a while, she was the only sociologist at Deccan College, which evidently meant a heavy burden since she had to teach all the papers in the subject.³⁸ Sankalia notes that his study of prehistory started when she gave him G.G. MacCurdy's *Human origins* so that he could teach prehistory for her (Sankalia 1978: 41). In 1953 she was joined by Y.B. Damle, another PhD student of Ghurye, and they were colleagues till she died in 1970. They worked together on a monograph (Karve and Damle 1963), but soon went their own ways, since their conception of anthropology/sociology was quite different. Irawati's work was more Indological, drawing on ancient texts to explain the present, and using anthropometric data to supplement her interpretations with 'hard facts', while Damle, by his own testimony, was more concerned with contemporary social surveys, and issues of power and authority. While Damle wanted to analyse their survey in terms of contemporary theory, Karve insisted merely on presenting

³⁷ The Deccan college began its life as the Poona College to teach Sanskrit and English. The buildings, funded by Sir Jamshedji Jeejeebhoy, were initiated at their present site in 1864, and the college began functioning in 1868 under the new name of Deccan College. In 1933, the Government of Bombay decided to shut the college down, but it was revived as a research and postgraduate teaching institute in 1938 after a court case by the Past Students Association. It specialised in history/archaeology, sociology/anthropology, linguistics and Vedic Sanskrit (Panja 2002; Taraporewala 1940).

³⁸ Sankalia says this amounted to a load of 'four or eight papers' (Sankalia 1978: 41). Upadhyaya (this volume, fns 48–50) lists four papers in the syllabus of Bombay University which was later (1940s) revised to eight papers. According to T.K. Oommen, Pune University followed the same pattern as Bombay University.

the 'facts' and letting people do their own interpretation.³⁹ She consciously eschewed contact with any new sociological theory. For instance, there was some consternation when Damle began to teach Talcott Parsons.⁴⁰ Throughout, Karve remained head of the department—according to her student Pundalik (1970), she was reluctant to cede power.⁴¹

Both in her research and in her teaching, thus, Karve remained an old-fashioned anthropologist, combining the four-field approach: archaeology, physical anthropology, linguistics, and cultural anthropology. While this may have kept her from being at the cutting edge of sociology or social anthropology, it brought her closer to some of her colleagues in other disciplines, such as S.M. Katre and C.R. Sankaran (see acknowledgements in Karve 1953b: xi). Sankalia describes the origins of the second and third Langhnaj expeditions which they undertook together (for reports of these excavations, see Karve and Kurulkar 1945, Sankalia and Karve 1945, 1949):

On my table at the Jeejeebhoy Castle lay trays of assorted bones from the Langhnaj excavation. The late Dr. Karve who took a keen interest in my work would often step into my room to see these bones. Sometime in 1943, while cursorily examining these assorted bones—which I thought were all of animals—she picked up a fragment of a bone and said that the fragment must be of a human skull. Trained as she was by a famous human palaeontologist, she got excited. For here was a chance, she said, of finding the Stone Age Man—may be microlithic or mesolithic—but certainly the earliest man in India. (Sankalia 1978: 50)

The first skeleton was found on 28 February 1944, and, symbolic of the frugality of the time, Irawati Karve offered Sankalia a glass of lemon juice to celebrate (Sankalia 1978: 51).

In an attempt to model Pune University on the Oxbridge system, the vice chancellor had decided that all lectures would be held in the

³⁹ Interview, Y.B. Damle, 22 April 2001.

⁴⁰ Interviews, U.B. Bhoite, 24 April 2001, Leela Dube, 10 August 2001.

⁴¹ In 1973 the department shifted from Deccan College to its present site in Pune University, and four years later it split into separate anthropology and sociology departments. I am grateful to Dr Bokhare for this information from the Anthropology Department's 'Departmental Information' file.

university and not in individual colleges or postgraduate research institutes like Deccan College. Every morning a taxi would be sent to Deccan College and off the teachers would go to teach their MA classes in the university. Never mind if in some subjects like Urdu there was only one lecturer and one student and they both lived in Deccan College—they would still have to make the long trek to the university and sit in a classroom facing each other.⁴² But visitors would come to Deccan College—to set papers, for PhD vivas, or to give talks—D.N. Majumdar, N.K. Bose, I.P. Desai, M.N. Srinivas, and later, Americans like Milton Singer, Robert Redfield, and McKim Marriott. There were others, however—notably the innovative historian, D.D. Kosambi—with whom Karve was not on speaking terms, perhaps because their sources were similar but their approaches and conclusions about society so different. In later years there was also a falling out with Ghurye.⁴³ Pune, which has always been the intellectual capital of Maharashtra, had other sites for discussion as well—e.g. the Pune Teachers Forum, a discussion group for people from different academic disciplines, which ran from approximately 1953/54 to 1970. While Karve was not a part of this forum, she occasionally gave talks at it (see also her radio talks published as Karve 1953c, 1962c).

In those days Pune University drew students from various parts of India, particularly Kerala, where there were no sociology courses. Karve's MA courses on 'Social biology' ('The biological basis of human society') and 'Indian sociology' tended to be based on whatever she happened to be working on at the moment or was interested in, rather than a basic course which had to be covered, and would combine anthropometric observations with examples drawn from Hindu epics, all transmitted conversationally, while she walked around the classroom or sat at her table.⁴⁴

⁴² Interviews, Y.B. Damle, 22 April 2001, U.B. Bhoite, 24 April 2001.

⁴³ Interviews, Y.B. Damle, 22 April 2001, K.C. Malhotra, 17 April 2001, and Jai Nimbkar, 26 April 2001.

⁴⁴ Interview, T.K. Oommen, 19 October 2002. Oommen recalls her 'Social Biology' course as being divided into three sections: the first was on genetics, focused on the heredity *vs* environment controversy and explained the genetic origins of various defects; the second was on race and racism based on the 1951 UNESCO publication; and the third was on population movements.

Like science subjects today, where PhD students often work on aspects of a larger project initiated by their supervisor, Irawati Karve's physical anthropology PhD students were usually assigned subjects that would reinforce her larger thesis about the independent origins of jatis or castes. Thus, K.C. Malhotra compared the physical measurements and heritable traits of eight Brahman castes, while R.K. Gulati studied nine potter castes (Karve 1968a/[1961]: 132. Malhotra's study was published as Karve and Malhotra 1968).⁴⁵ While PhD supervisors did a lot for their students—got them research assistantships, jobs, and often rewrote parts of their thesis (especially because of problems with an alien language like English), PhD students in turn were often expected to take on the roles of scribe and research assistant.⁴⁶ Some, like K.C. Malhotra, to whom Karve dictated *Hindu society* and *Yuganta* (her eyes closed, her spectacles off, and her feet on the table), felt honoured. In the process of checking out references for a senior scholar, there was often a great deal of learning for the junior one. Others, however, like Srinivas, who was then on a Bombay University Research Assistantship, and from whom Ghurye tried to extract similar services, resented the time this took away from their own work (Srinivas 1997: 6). The dependence of the student on the supervisor for fellowships could also be misused as a source of patronage and power over the student.⁴⁷

K.C. Malhotra (hereon KC), one of Karve's best students and later colleague on the Dhangar project, provides a positive view of the supervisor–student relationship.⁴⁸ Recalling the sense of intellectual enthusiasm Karve generated and her reputation at the time, he described how he first went to Pune. He was registered at Delhi University for a PhD when Karve wrote to his supervisor, P.C. Biswas,

⁴⁵ See also Franz Boas's relationship with his students: he commissioned independent pieces on Native American linguistics as part of his larger project (Stocking 1992: 73).

⁴⁶ See also T.N. Madan (1994) on D.P. Mukerji.

⁴⁷ Durga Bhagwat claims that Karve and Ghurye conspired to make her (Bhagwat) hold back some of her own work so that Karve's paper could be published first, using her fellowship as a card (Bhagwat n.d.). See also Bhatkal on Ghurye, quoted in Upadhyaya (this volume).

⁴⁸ Interview, K.C. Malhotra, 17 April 2001.

asking for a research assistant to work on a biological survey of the people of Tamil Nadu. KC and his family debated whether he should go but others in the department told him that he would be foolish to pass up the chance to work with someone as famous and multi-disciplinary as Karve. Just two days before he finished that project and was to come back to Delhi, Karve called him in some excitement. Skeletons had been discovered at an excavation forty miles out of Pune at Chandoli, and Karve asked him whether he would like to work on Sankalia's excavation, since Delhi University students had been taught to lift and reconstruct skeletons. This led from one thing to another—Karve arranged a stipend of Rs 100 for him, and although the money was meagre and not very regular, KC decided to stay on. As late as 1967, after her two heart attacks, Karve was still thinking of new projects—or projects that she had always wanted to do but never managed, like work on pastoralists and Mundari speakers. So she and KC, who was by then a lecturer in the department, got money from the University Grants Commission, and KC took on the main responsibility for research on Dhangars and Nandiwalas, two nomadic groups. This research, which later turned into a study in human ecology, was to occupy him for much of his life.

The university, at this time, was ostensibly a progressive arena where the practice of untouchability was clearly rejected. In his autobiography, Sankalia recalled an incident from the early 1940s when he and Karve were doing fieldwork at Hirpura. Nobody from the village would feed them since one of their workers was a 'semi-untouchable' and Karve ended up cooking at the end of a long day's work (Sankalia 1978: 111). Yet this did not mean that caste had no role in interpersonal relations, even if invoked in jest: U.B. Bhoite, later vice-chancellor of the Bharati Vidyapeeth in Pune, recalled Karve advising him not to go for a job interview saying: 'You Marathas always want government jobs. Stay with me and I'll make a scholar out of you.'⁴⁹ The circle of intellectuals and university scholars was still very small in caste and religious terms, and self-consciously so.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Interview, U.B. Bhoite, 24 April 2001.

⁵⁰ See the self-description in Karve 1962a: 'Originating in a distinguished Chitpavan Brahman family, she is the wife of Dinakar Dhondo Karve, long

WAYS OF APPREHENDING THE WORLD: 'FIELDWORK'

The best introduction to Karve's fieldwork methods comes from the first chapter of *Kinship organisation in India*. Research started in Maharashtra in 1938–9 and extended to other places over a number of years, before the book was finally published in 1953.

I moved from region to region taking measurements, blood samples and collecting information about kinship practices and terminology. The contacts were established through friends, students and Government officials. Supposing I had an acquaintance in Dharwar (in Karnataka), I would make that my first station and then get introduced to the friends or relations of these acquaintances who, in their turn, would take me to their homes and villages and so I travelled from place to place never knowing where my next step was to be nor where my next meal was to come from. . . . Rest pauses between work, meal times, travel in buses full of people and in third class railway compartments filled with men and women gave me the opportunities I sought for collecting kinship material. A small beginning would suffice to set the ball rolling and each would come out with his or her stories. I had naturally to tell also all about myself, my husband and children and the parents-in-law and the others would tell about their kin. At such times it was not always possible or advisable to take notes. Kinship terms and situations involving personal narratives or family usages, scraps of song and proverbs were, however, taken down. The working day meant over twelve hours of work. When there was not material for measurement the time was spent in canvassing contacts and there were never enough funds or time to do this type of work for more than two months a year. After coming back to Poona the data would be looked into and verified linguistically by referring to some good dictionary and then a study of some literature would be undertaken to find out how far the literature reflected the kinship attitudes. These studies were very rewarding. They

Professor of Chemistry and Principal of Fergusson College, Poona, headquarters of the Deccan Education Society; her father-in-law is the centenarian Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve, pioneer in the education of Indian women and leader in the emancipation of Brahman widows.' It would be difficult to find a similar author's description by caste and lineage in any journal today.

revealed the intimate connection between literature and social, especially the kinship organisation and helped to interpret certain facts which had seemed obscure to me. Such studies also gave a feeling of sureness while dealing with people. (Karve 1953b: 18)

This account is corroborated by her children, who described their mother as spending most vacations travelling while they awaited her eagerly at home, to see the latest curiosity she brought with her and hear her latest stories. From Gujarat she got the *pise* of a Saras bird, from Orissa bamboo *phanya*, and *ranphul kandh* from the Himlayas. Sometimes they accompanied her on her anthropometric measurement trips—Jai to Malabar, Bihar, and Orissa, and her son, Anand, to Coorg, to measure Beta Kurubas and Jena Kurubas. Jai remembers going to a village where people were losing blood all the time to leeches and were covered with sores but were still scared of giving blood from their fingers as blood samples. But here Karve's first aid came in handy—she would dab the sores with spirit, which she always carried with her, and Jai would then put tincture iodine. In the more remote parts of the country they would contact the district administration and ask for a jeep and officer to accompany them, but stray references in her work also indicate that she walked long distances and spent the night in tribal homes (see Karve 1957b: 88, 89).

Another glimpse of her ability to undertake arduous fieldwork comes through in Sankalia's accounts of their joint expeditions—how they walked for hours up and down the Mula-Mutha river in Pune searching for stone age tools, or how on a certain expedition they had to sleep in a truck because they could get no rooms (Sankalia 1978: 57, 111–12). A single woman doing fieldwork, even if part of an expedition, must have seemed unusual at the time, and at one place the headman turned them away, thinking they were part of a cinema or circus company (*ibid.*: 88).

In the 1950s, this kind of extensive fieldwork had lost its attraction. Year-long intensive studies of a village or a tribe in a restricted region were in fashion and contemporary anthropological criticism of her kinship work focused on the fact that the linguistic terminology she collected was not ethnographically grounded in the life of particular

castes (Dumont 1957). However, ethnographic fieldwork of the Malinowskian sort is no longer seen as the only 'natural' mode of doing anthropology, involving a rediscovery of some older alternatives or different national traditions (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

It is important also to remember that going to the field for a year at a stretch was not perhaps an option for a married woman with children at the time. There were no munificent foundations, and research in those days was conducted on funds that would be laughable now. The study of the Nandiwalas, for instance, a group that Karve discovered on her way back from Phaltan to Pune one day in 1969, was started on Rs 500, begged from H.D. Sankalia, then Director of Deccan College. KC, with eleven students, was sent off to the field to work and live on this amount for two months!⁵¹

As she grew older, and after two heart attacks, Karve stopped doing fieldwork altogether. All her later survey work was carried out by her coauthors,⁵² while Karve helped with designing the questionnaire and analysis.

Ironically, while her 'scholarly' work was not 'ethnographic', her literary writings in Marathi were exemplars of a delicate balance between involved and detached 'participant observation' (see Karve 1949, 1972). Her daily immersion in the social life of Maharashtra was transformed with a sociologist's and writer's eye into flashes of rare insight and vivid portraits of 'culture' in some very nuanced passages. One famous example is her essay on the Pandharpur pilgrimage, translated into English as 'On the road' (Karve 1962a). As Deshpande and Rajadhyaksha note in their history of Marathi literature, she was one of those responsible for reviving the genre of 'personal essays', along with her fellow anthropologist Durga Bhagwat, the scholar-poet G.V. Karandikar, and the architect-critic Madhav Achwal. 'The "personal" in the new essay was authentically and richly so. The richness came from a fine intellect that probed for the complex, impatient with the superficialities the "old" essayist was happy to play with' (Deshpande and Rajadhyaksha 1988: 202).

It is perhaps the tragedy of colonised India that 'scholarship' and 'sociology' is what is done in English, often with outdated theoretical

⁵¹ Interview, K.C. Malhotra, 17 April 2001.

⁵² Interviews, Jai Nimbkar, 25 April 2001, and Y.B. Damle, 22 April 2001.

tools, while much that is relevant and contemporary in society and which should be incorporated by sociology is written in other forms, notably literature.⁵³ Naregal (2001: 124) argues that the use of English for scholarly or analytical writing and of the vernacular for creative literary work was a product of the colonial legacy of bilingualism, whereby the vernaculars were subordinated to English.

II. APPRAISING KARVE'S WORK: CELEBRATING THE DIVERSITY OF (HINDU) INDIA

A comprehensive bibliography of all Karve's work prepared by K.C. Malhotra in 1970–1, just after her death, lists 102 articles and books in English, eight books in Marathi, several unpublished papers, and several ongoing projects (Malhotra 1973). Her anthropological output in English can be grouped under four different heads, though her most important contribution was really the way in which one field fed into another.⁵⁴ Not only is the range remarkable, but it is quite unique among her contemporaries:

1. Physical anthropology and archaeology—anthropometric and blood group investigations and the excavation of stone-age skeletons.
2. Cultural anthropology—kinship, caste, folk songs, epics, oral traditions.
3. Socio-economic surveys—weekly markets, dam displaced, urbanisation, pastoralists, spatial organisation.
4. Contemporary social comment—women, language, race.

⁵³ Thus, for example, Anil Awachat, writing about ecological problems in Marathi, or writers on the Dalit experience, often bring out contemporary social issues more sharply than sociological debates about caste or ecology. Yet there is little effort to incorporate them into syllabi or, even more importantly, to revise our notion of what sociology or anthropology should be about in countries like India. It is also significant perhaps in terms of the traditions that Karve perpetuated, that while she left almost no significant cultural anthropologists as students, both her daughters, Jai Nimbkar and Gauri Deshpande, became writers.

⁵⁴ Malhotra (1971: 26) provides a different ordering of her contributions to sociology: palaeo-anthropology, Indological studies, physical anthropological investigations, cultural anthropological investigations, building up an infrastructure of trained personnel.

These categories are also, roughly, chronologically arranged. Although she continued to do physical anthropological studies (with her PhD students)—in her later career called genetic studies—it is possible to discern a move towards engagement less with Indological and more with contemporary concerns, as well as with work that fed into policy, especially from the late 1950s. Some of this later work was funded by the Planning Commission.

What follows is not so much an assessment of what her work meant in the field of kinship or caste or social ecology in Indian anthropology or anthropology in general—this has been done by others for kinship, particularly (Dube 1974; Trautmann 1995; Uberoi 1993, 2000a). It is, rather, an attempt to understand how this diverse body of work cohered within a single *Weltanschauung* and whether and how this changed over time. Karve's main concern was with the variations within India, which she valued positively, and her frequent diatribes against attempts to impose uniformity (for instance in personal law), or against monotheistic religions, are all couched in terms of a defence of diversity.

The present day cultural problems before India also largely revolve around these three entities, viz. region, caste and family. . . . The tendency is to minimize the differences and establish uniformities . . . (by having a common language, a common civil code and abolishing caste). . . . Welding of the Indian sub-continent into a nation is a great cultural task, but very often the urge for uniformity destroys so much, which from an ethical and cultural point of view, can be allowed to remain. The need for uniformity is an administrative need, not a cultural one. (Karve 1953b: 16)

The old segmental life failed to bring up a strong nation and so one thinks of giving it up. But the old way of life had also certain valuable cultural traits which we must preserve. (Karve 1953b: 302)

These valuable cultural traits are described as tolerance and an awareness of diversity. While castes and joint families may have been oppressive for specific individuals, they also provided security (Karve 1953b: 301–2). However, this diversity and tolerance are seen as largely Hindu attributes, and ultimately it is the high Brahmanical culture

that provides direction and unity. In this, Karve was not very different from Ghurye (see Upadhyaya 2001), or indeed most other Indian sociologists to the present, who have followed a path of benign neglect towards minorities—when not actively excluding them from definitions of ‘Indian culture’. Indeed, Indian sociology has by and large been unable to free itself from the standard Hindu ‘consensus’—its Hindu character often concealed through the rhetoric of nationalism and social universality—about the great tolerance of Hinduism: ‘The unity of India has always been a cultural unity based on an uninterrupted literary and religious tradition of thousands of years. The learned Brahmin, to whatever region he belonged, reads the Vedas, Brahmanas, Smritis. . . . Whether it was drama, or poetry or grammar or politics or logics or philosophy, whatever of excellence or mediocrity was created upto the threshold of this century owed its form or matter to classical or Vedic literature . . .’ (Karve 1947c: 17–18).

Islam and Christianity, by contrast, are seen as unassimilated forces in Indian society. Some of the hostility towards them is represented in anti-colonial terms—against a European colonizing Christianity (Karve 1947c: 10–14) and a fundamentalism that fails to see that ‘different societies express their sense of beauty and sanctity, and the goodwill in their hearts, in different ways’ (Karve 1962a: 23). These feelings were perhaps inevitable in a Brahmin, and in a region, Maharashtra, which constructed its history predominantly as one of resistance against a Muslim empire; which had witnessed concerted challenges by Christian missionaries; and which was the bastion of a ‘Hindu reform’ movement that saw itself as countering inroads made by other religions (O’Hanlon 1985). No doubt, also, Karve had little personal experience of religious syncretism in practice, nor of the intimate economic, cultural, administrative, and political ties that bind people regardless of religion, such as are available to people in areas with larger Muslim populations, for example, Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.

However, there is no attempt even at a sociological understanding of how differently Christianity and Islam might operate in the Indian context. Equally importantly, because of the sociological tendency to see religion as a social glue—as the fetishised equivalent of society

itself—sociologists have been unable to escape the warp of colonial historiography even when attempting supposedly historical readings of ‘culture’.⁵⁵ While Karve concedes that linguistic regions crosscut religious unity, here again Muslims and Christians are seen as deviant elements, and the blame for Partition laid solely at the door of the Muslim League. Addressing the Asian Relations Conference in March–April 1947, on the eve of Independence, Karve argues:

The Mohammedans have been in India for about a thousand years. They created the first breach in the cultural unity of India. Though they have become an indigenous element, their religious centre is outside India and their co-religionists have spread all over the world. . . . This consciousness of solidarity with outside Muslims, the peculiar regional distribution which makes it possible for the extreme north and northwest to form a majority province, and religious fanaticism which sets at nought all human values arising out of a thousand years of association, make it almost impossible to arrive at cultural compromise with this element in the Indian population. They neither respect nor understand the religious, ethical or aesthetic creations of other people. . . . There was a time when in some linguistic areas, for example Bengal, the Muslims kept to their dress, language and customs of pre-conversion days and it seemed as if the Bengal culture of future would be a common creation of its Muslim and Hindu inhabitants. But the process has been cut short by recent orientation in Muslim policy in India which wants to stress its differences from the other communities rather than the adjustments which have arisen out of a common life in the same land. This racial conflict has got to be solved not by cultural compromises or by paying too big a price for presenting a united front to the world. (Karve 1947c: 19–20)

⁵⁵ James W. Laine has commented on how Karve’s reading of Maharashtrian history as a basis for a Maharashtrian identity is in fact ahistorical: ‘Irawati Karve might claim that in making the pilgrimage to Pandharpur she found a new definition of Maharashtra: “the land whose people go to Pandharpur for pilgrimage”, but I see no evidence that such a statement would have made sense to Shivaji, or even to his contemporaries who did make such a pilgrimage.’ The claimed close link ‘between Shivaji and Vaishnava saints and the political fortunes of the Varkaris, may well be the invention of a tradition whose roots lie more in the 19th than in the 17th century’ (Laine 2000: 61).

While her definition of 'racial conflict', under which she subsumes caste, language, and religious conflict, remained vague,⁵⁶ the need to maintain India as a multi-cultural, multi-religious society becomes paramount in her later writings. While she never accepted Islam or Christianity as integral to the fabric of Indian society and persisted in equating religion with culture, few secular people today would quarrel with the views expressed in another paper, 'The racial factor in Indian social life', written for a summer school in Indian history:

Many Hindus dream that if the government were wiser it could rid India both of Muslims and Christians so that one has an entirely Hindu India. It is foolish to think one can establish a uniformity and keep it as such through ages. Without the Muslims and Christians there were bitter wars between Buddhists and non-Buddhists, between Jains and Hindus in the South and between Shaivas and Vaishnavas. The rational humanitarian's aim cannot be the establishment of one religion but to bring about conditions by which people of different cultures can live together in mutual understanding and respect. . . . Another argument put forward is about how long one has lived anywhere. This does not mean one's own stay but one's ancestry. This [is] altogether a dangerous and also an extremely silly argument. . . . It is a fascinating subject for study to try to find out what we are—Indians as a whole, but it is entirely wrong to imagine ancestries and base claims on territories as somehow one's own. All those who are in India today, who feel it is their homeland are Indians. (Karve 1963c: 8–9)

Even more presciently, she notes the need for governments to investigate riots and be transparent about such events if they want to prevent future violence (Karve 1963c: 7).

This need to acknowledge pluralism is also evident in her views on social issues like language and schooling. She retained a strong Marathi nationalism, which was probably enhanced by the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement,⁵⁷ and refused to concede Hindi superior

⁵⁶ Probably exasperatingly so to more exact scholars like D.N. Majumdar, who also gave a paper at the same Asian Relations Conference.

⁵⁷ On the Samyukta Maharashtra movement, see Stern (1970). Karve's close colleague and neighbour, the well-known economist D.R. Gadgil, was, in Stern's words, the Samyukta Maharashtra Congress Jan Parishad's 'major theoretician

status as a national language, or allow English to dominate access to the civil services. All primary education, she insisted, must be in one of the regional languages, and there should be no English-medium schools at all. At the same time, she was too pragmatic to deny the need for a link language, or the advantages conferred by English, and she would have made English compulsory from secondary school onwards (Karve 1960b, 1968b).

While preserving the cultural diversity of India from threats—whether by Christian missionaries or Hindu chauvinists—and understanding the relation between the present and the past (defined in terms of the Hindu epics) remained central to Karve's concerns, she was equally aware of the problems and importance of nation-building in a multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual state. It is this worldview—Indology tempered by rationalist humanism—that Karve's work later comes to encapsulate.

MAPPING BROAD PATTERNS

Kinship organisation in India (1953b), Karve's first major book, and for which she was perhaps best known,⁵⁸ was preceded by a number of articles examining kinship terminology and usages in different parts of India—Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu (Karve 1940a, 1940b, 1942, 1950, 1953a), and comparing them to terms and practices found in the Vedas (1938, 1939a, 1939b, 1939d), the *Mahabharata* (1943), and in folk traditions (1941b, 1947a). *Kinship organisation* begins with a bald statement about Indian culture: 'Three things are absolutely necessary for the understanding of any cultural phenomenon in India. These are the configuration of the linguistic regions, the institution of caste and the family organisation. Each of these three factors is intimately bound up with the other

and publicist' (ibid.: 33). While Karve was definitely in favour of Samyukta Maharashtra, she was not an active member of the movement (interview, Y.B. Damle, 22 April 2001).

⁵⁸ T.N. Madan, for instance, writes that the books he carried to his fieldwork among Pandits in Kashmir in 1957–8 included Evans-Pritchard and Fortes on Nuer and Tallensi kinship, respectively, and Karve's *Kinship organisation* (Madan 1994: 53).

two and the three together give meaning and supply basis to all other aspects of Indian culture' (Karve 1953b: 1). Although this was seen as reiterating the functionalist thesis of interrelation between all aspects of a culture by 'demonstrating the exact connection between at least a few aspects of it' (Karve 1953b: 1), in fact the book has a very different approach. Kinship patterns are mapped on to linguistic zones to come up with the following variations: 1. Indo-European or Sanskritic organisation in the Northern zone; 2. Dravidian kinship in the southern zone; 3. a central zone of mixed patterns (e.g. found in Maharashtra); and 4. 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. There is a direct jump from the joint family systems of ancient India to twentieth-century India, a jump which recent historical work on the family has shown is completely unwarranted (see for instance Chatterjee and Guha 1999, Singha 1998). The kinship practices of Muslim, Christian, and other communities do not find a mention at all in this kinship organisation of India.

North Indian patri-clan exogamy is compared to Dravidian cross-cousin marriage for its effects on women—in the north they 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 own relatives even after marriage. The kinship organisation of the central zone, 'a region of transition from north to south', 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. There is also a greater practice of hypergamy (Karve 1953b: 139). The bulk of the book is a listing of kinship terms, with occasional flashes of insight, such as when she discusses what contemporary legal and economic changes meant for the Nayar

matrilineal system (ibid.: 261–5), or when she discusses the concealment of divorce and conjugal relations with widows through the use of linguistic devices which deny widow remarriages the status of ‘marriage’ (ibid.: 295).

Kinship organisation received favourable reviews in some quarters. Hutton described it as a ‘notable advance in our understanding of the structure of Indian society; it has not been superceded by any other general comparative treatment of Hindu kinship in India as a whole’ (Hutton 1954), while John Useem in *American anthropologist* (1957: 737–8) described it as a ‘valuable contribution on at least three scores: first, as an addition to the newer literature on Indian culture; second, for its exploration of the relationship between the modalities and range of social arrangements within the context of a complex culture; and third, for its delineation of the characteristic forms of social behaviour that stem from various kinds of kinship structures.’ However, the reputation of the book never quite recovered from the demolition job performed by Dumont and Pocock in the first issue of *Contributions to Indian sociology*, which charges Karve with a lack of conceptual precision, insufficient localisation of the kinship terms (so that for instance northern kinship is equated with upper-caste kinship), a haphazard clubbing of terms which makes it difficult to say which term for father goes with which term for uncle and also makes a structural analysis impossible, and an absence of attention to what these kinship terms mean to people in practice. ‘It is an example of how valuable information can be sterilized for the use of future research by an imprecise formulation’; and again, ‘(o)nce features are torn out of their particular sociological context and lumped together within one cultural or linguistic “zone” the culturologist may feel at ease but the sociologist is at a loss’ (Dumont and Pocock 1957: 50). Ironically, too, for someone who was willing to subsume the whole of India under *Homo hierarchicus* and compare it to *Homo equalis* in the West, Dumont accuses Karve of supposing, by virtue of her ‘self-assurance rooted in birthright and intellectual training’ and ‘her knowledge of one region’, that ‘it would be sufficient for her to make elsewhere brief enquiries or soundings to get a basis for comparison.’

True, ‘conceptions of more easy-going times in anthropology, when Rivers, for instance, collected within one day a terminology in

a Melanesian island society' (Dumont and Pocock 1957: 44), had changed. Yet to compare Karve's synoptic research conducted over several years, to the earlier hit-and-run approach, or trash the understanding of similarities which a knowledge of ancient texts brings (however problematic the Indological equation of the present with the past, of Indian society with Hindu society) betrays in the reviewers not just a deeply patronising attitude but a refusal to allow problems to be defined in diverse ways.⁵⁹ Fortunately, while recognising these problems in Karve's work (such as the confusion of lexical and semantic issues [Trautmann 1995: 115]), there has been something of a rescue operation in recent years. While Trautmann (1995: 114) claims that his work was an extension of her historicist approach, Uberoi regards Karve as

a pioneer of an indigenous 'feminist' perspective on the Indian family. Her central contrast of north and south Indian kinship revolved around difference in marital arrangements as seen from the viewpoint of women: marriage with kin versus marriage with strangers; marriage close by versus marriage at a distance. . . . Similarly, she evaluated modern changes in family life—for instance the modification of Dravidian marriage practices in the direction of the northern model—from the viewpoint of their possible effects on women's life. (Uberoi 1993: 40)

There is much in Karve to support this reading of incipient feminism, apart from her own life and unorthodox defence of customs like polygamy and polyandry (Kavadi 1970: 26). There is, for instance, her reading of what women like Kunti and Draupadi must have felt in the *Mahabharata* (Karve 1969b), her essays on everyday gender relations like *Gaurai* (in Karve 1949), and her essay on her father-in-law which emphasises the costs of his sacrifices to his wife (Karve 1963d). Much was written from a women's perspective, and in her everyday dealings she seems to have had a special empathy for her female students,⁶⁰ or for the women she encountered on trains and on pilgrimage (see Karve 1962a). Her essay on the projected status

⁵⁹ For instance, the differentiation of 'tribes' and 'castes' by colonial anthropologists definitely suffered from a lack of acquaintance with cultural practices in non-tribal areas.

⁶⁰ Interview, K.C. Malhotra, 17 April 2001.

of Indian women in 1975, which looks at long-term trends in women's employment or education, was one of the first of its kind (Karve 1966). Indeed, one might even conclude that before Women's Studies became formulated as a field in the 1970s, and the term patriarchy entered everyday discourse, studies of kinship and the family were the major arenas where scholarship on women was possible (see Dube 2000: 4041, 4045). Yet Karve was certainly no radical, and doesn't seem to have wanted to identify as a feminist.⁶¹ The 'joint family', for instance, was seen as an essential part of *life*, with all its problems and joys (Karve 1953b:14),⁶² and questions about patriarchy and oppression do not figure.⁶³

There are other aspects of Karve's work on kinship and the family which have been taken up more widely—sometimes without sufficient acknowledgement of her pioneering role in these—such as the use of folk songs to illuminate kinship practices (Karve 1939c),⁶⁴ or her careful genealogical work to show how the joint family changed over time, and the period in people's lives when they were most likely to live in a joint family (Karve 1960a, 1963a, 1963b, 1964, 1967a).⁶⁵

Karve's work on caste is collected in *Hindu society—an interpretation* (Karve 1968a/[1961]), though this book too was preceded by several articles on what caste means culturally (Karve 1955, 1958b, 1958c, 1958d, 1959) and anthropometrically (1933a, 1933b, 1941a, 1948, 1954). Caste must be the most written-on subject in Indian anthropology/sociology—with considerable debate on the origins

⁶¹ Nimbkar (1970). According to her student Pundalik she also disliked being identified as a woman anthropologist (Pundalik 1970).

⁶² See Uberoi (1993: 33) on the nostalgia that marked Karve's views on the joint family, ignoring its seamier side.

⁶³ Even if not in sociology, there were other Maharashtrian women writing in her time or even before, e.g. Tarabai Shinde, Vibhavari Shirurkar, Mama Warerkar or Gita Sane, who were more centrally concerned with women's oppression. (I am grateful to Leela Dube for these names.)

⁶⁴ For instance, Raheja and Gold's (1994) study of kinship and gender based on oral traditions mentions Karve only in two footnotes, and both times as cited by Goody.

⁶⁵ For evidence on how this became a burgeoning field, see Uberoi's (2000a:17) review of work on the 'developmental cycle of the domestic group'.

of the caste system (race, occupation, cultural-ecological explanations); the defining characteristics of castes (e.g. endogamy, restrictions on commensality); the effective unit of caste (subcaste, caste cluster, varna); the principles underlying caste ranking (purity-pollution, interactional); mobility within and against the caste system (the concepts of Sanskritisation, dominant-caste emulation, Westernisation, affirming Indic values, etc.); whether caste is specific to India or whether it is a limited form of stratification; and whether resistance to caste can only take place within its own categories or against the caste system as a whole (for a discussion of some of these issues, see Klass 1980; Bayly 1999).

Karve's work addresses in the main only two themes within this galaxy—the origin of caste and the unit of analysis, and differentiates itself by challenging two arguments developed by Ghurye: first, that caste in India is a Brahminical product of Indo-Aryan culture, spread by diffusion to other parts of India; and second, that the smallest endogamous unit or *jati*, was a product of fission in a larger group caused by occupational diversification and migration (see Pramanick 1994: 30–2). Against these, Karve follows Hutton, Ketkar, and other theorists of caste in arguing that while the varna system may have been an Aryan import, it was superimposed on a *jati* system which pre-dated the Aryans, and which allowed different endogamous groups to live separately. In course of time, the varna and *jati* systems were interwoven into an elaborate ranking system (Karve 1968a/[1961]: 45). More importantly—and this is a thesis which she backs with anthropometric measurements and evidence from blood samples, eye colour, etc.—Karve argued that it was the subcaste, such as the Chitpavan Brahman, which should be treated as the 'caste', while the overall category, Maharashtrian Brahman, should be treated as a 'caste cluster', since not only did Chitpavans, Karhadas, Saraswats, Deshastha Rgvedi, and Madhyandin Brahmans not intermarry, they even had different marriage regulations and were ethnically different from each other. Indeed, there were often 'ethnic' variations even within a subcaste. The Madhyandin Brahmans, according to Karve, came closer to the Marathas in their region in terms of anthropometric measurements than they did to other Brahman subcastes (Karve 1958b: 130–1, 1941a). Other caste clusters, such as the Kunbis and

Marathas and potters, revealed similar findings (1941a: 25–30). For Karve, ‘a caste is a group which practices endogamy, has a particular area (generally within one linguistic region) of spread or dispersion, 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’ (ibid.: 8–9). Ghurye (1969), in turn, found problems with this formulation, among other things because of the fact that it was the context which determined the unit a person identified with (in relation to non-Brahmans, all subcastes would identify their caste as Brahman). However, this is not the place to debate the respective merits of their positions on caste (for a contemporary review, see Bose 1962). Indeed, both Karve’s and Ghurye’s work suffers from an Indological approach to caste which precluded them from analysing caste centrally as a form of living discrimination (despite their token references to this). Rather, it is to point to the ways in which Karve’s theory of caste fitted her larger enterprise of understanding how Indian society came to be the way it is.⁶⁶

While the notion of a caste as an extended kin group has received support from historical studies (for instance, Leonard 1978), for Karve its historical importance lay in enabling an understanding of migration in Indian society. Castes as endogamous kin groups were seen as closer to tribal groups (seen as perhaps the original unit in India) (Karve 1961b: 166):

For all sociological and anthropometric investigations one must start with the sub-caste as the smallest social unit because the sub-castes are historical entities, preserving in their exclusiveness the memory of some socio-historical event. The generic terms like Brahmans and Marathas

⁶⁶ Caste, according to Karve is even more fundamental than religion; or rather, Islam and Christianity are so alien that they could never defeat the basic pattern of Hindu society: ‘Mohammedanism with its ideas of forcible conversion was so strange and repulsive to the general Hindu mind that the whole population drew further back into its caste shell, and converts to Mohammedanism soon adopted the caste system. The same fate met Christianity . . . Mohammedanism and Christianity, by dividing people into believers and unbelievers, have created new divisions without in any way obliterating the older ones’ (Karve 1962b: 551, 556).

are of almost no value for historical investigations. The Marathi speaking Brahmins are anything but homogeneous. They represent various cultural and racial groups, colonizing Maharashtra at widely different times and places. The term Maratha is applied loosely to numerically the strongest element in Maharashtra and even a superficial investigation shows that it is a conglomerate of different elements. One must therefore investigate separately the endogamous sub-groups of these bigger divisions in order to get a clear idea of the social and cultural hybridization and the historical process of assimilation which has been going on for centuries. (Karve 1941a: 1–2)

A similar, classically diffusionist, idea is reiterated under the heading of 'Research needed' in *Current anthropology* (1965), where she emphasises the importance of taking blood groups of subcastes to determine population movements: 'One of the tasks of cultural and physical anthropologists is to work together to determine whether more detailed cultural and physical configurations can be established in terms of historical and proto-historical movements. In this attempt blood groups with their definiteness and characteristics of heritability might prove a good instrument of analysis. . . . India, with its many endogamous groups and its variety of mating practices provides rare opportunities for the study of human genetics' (Karve, 1965: 332–3). While much of this seems dated to cultural anthropologists, the idea of tracing population movements through the mitochondrial DNA and Y chromosome (inherited through maternal and paternal lines, respectively) has had a major revival (see for example Roychoudhary *et al.* 2000; Kivisild *et al.* 1999; Watkins *et al.* 1999). While the political and social implications of such studies may be debated,⁶⁷ 'anthropological science' in the post-Independence, post-World War

⁶⁷ One controversial study by Michael Bamshad and researchers at Andhra University, published in *Genome research*, claims that while upper-caste men have European genes, upper-caste women are carriers of indigenous Asian genes (Ramachandran 2001). Such studies have spawned both Hindu chauvinist readings intent on proving that caste is rooted in biology and Dalit readings intent on proving Aryan genocide and rape of an indigenous Indian population (see also Romila Thapar's foreword to Trautmann 1997). The problem with most of these physical anthropology or genetic studies is that they assume the timelessness of sociological practices like caste, hypergamy, patrilocality, etc.

II phase was a useful counter to popular opinion on racial differences. Like B.S. Guha, Majumdar, and others, Karve's take on her findings was anti-racist and anti-caste: 'That is what we are—Mongrels. The castes also show race mixture to such an extent that at least in Maharashtra if people of different castes ranging from Brahmins to the scheduled castes are put in military uniform no anthropologist can pick people belonging to different castes. In these facts of similarity of appearance and mongrality lie a hope of breaking the caste society once economic equality of some sort and legal equality are reached' (Karve 1963c: 4–5).

SOCIO-ECONOMIC SURVEYS: RECONCILING DIVERSITY WITH PLANNED CHANGE

A significant part of Karve's output is in the form of socio-economic surveys, or what today would be seen as applied anthropology or policy studies. While the relationship between sociology and policy has always been contested (see Uberoi 2000b: 17), the dominance of the Delhi School style of sociology over the regions, and of ethnography over statistical surveys in the received 'national history', has often tended to conceal the links that did exist.⁶⁸ In part, sociologists must themselves be held to blame for the fact that sociological survey research did not have much of an impact on both sociology/anthropology as disciplines or policy. As Mukherjee (1979: 68) perceptively remarked, while Karve was preoccupied with the 'why' of social relations in her Indological work on caste and kinship, this question did not inform her large-scale surveys, which are largely descriptive and packed with (sometimes meaningless) tables.

Karve's first such survey was on the Bhils of West Khandesh, done at the instance of the chairman of the Bombay Anthropological

⁶⁸ I am grateful to D. Sheth for this point, seminar at IEG on the history of sociology/anthropology, 19–21 April 2000. See also Mukherjee's (1979) distinction between 'conceptually oriented modernisers' like Srinivas and Dube, who took social change as a given, and 'methodologically oriented modernisers' who used statistical techniques to understand and plot social change (Karve, A.R. Desai, I.P. Desai, and Y.B. Damle, to name just a few). How successful they were at this is, however, doubtful.

Society, P.G. Shah (Karve 1958a). The work is slight, as are her writings on tribals in general (1957a, 1969a), where she argues that tribals are no different really from other parts of the Indian population, and that it would 'be wrong to create an entirely new entity by fostering a consciousness of primitivity. This author has opposed the yearly gatherings of primitive people on this same principle' (Karve 1957a: 169). While they must be helped to 'advance' and assimilate, there should be no attempt to impose outside sexual codes or dietary practices on them, such as preventing them from eating ox meat. However, they should be educated in the language of their region (initially in their own mother tongue but in the regional script, and then make the transition to the regional language), so that they can take part in the regional ecumene, and 'a day will dawn when these once-primitive scholars will cast new light on our cultural traditions, correct the one-sided views we have cherished and tell us with convincing proofs that the great Jagannath of Puri and the Vithoba of Pandharpur are a gift of the primitives to the spiritual capital of India' (ibid.: 169). However, Karve never asks why Marathi should be a regional language, as against Gondi or Bhili, despite the large number of Gondi or Bhili speakers—her Maharashtrian nationalism is too strong, and, while she is willing to celebrate diversity or pluralism, this pluralism must stay within the limits of the recognised states and the regional cultures they officially embody.

Her other surveys are backed by extended questionnaires and result in detailed tables. For instance, *Group relations in village community* (Karve and Damle 1963), a study of group (caste) relations in four villages around Poona, has 75 pages of analysis (explication of tables) and 400 pages of tables! They come to the earth-shattering conclusion that caste continued to exercise a strong hold on social relations. Fortunately, some of her later surveys partially remedy this by providing several interesting insights into what planned change could do, although even here the balance between analysis and tables remains skewed in favour of the latter. *Social dynamics of a growing town and its surrounding area* (Karve and Ranadive 1965), done on behalf of the Research Programme Committee of the Planning Commission, is a study of Phaltan, a small sugar town in Satara district, and its relation to the hinterland. The study came up with some

interesting results—such as the fact that towns had a greater diversity of castes because many artisanal castes were migrating to towns, and villages were no longer self-sufficient or had a full complement of castes; that more educated people in the town were taking to agriculture than uneducated because, with new cash crops like sugar and cotton, farming had become more profitable than leasing land out; and that the biggest change that urbanisation had brought about was sartorial. But more important is the vision the authors provide of a small town as an intermediary and channel of communication between a village and a big city:

What we have seen in Phaltan and the surrounding villages suggested a model for building up communities to which maximum cultural amenities can be provided by the government. This is necessary as the village is becoming a mere agricultural settlement. The classical village community is dead. . . . Keeping the distinction between rural and urban or emphasizing it further hinders the real progress of the rural areas. It might be an experiment worth trying in a few selected places to connect up the urban and the rural, the town and the villages, into an interconnected unity in such a way that the town becomes the heart of lively social intercourse made easy through well placed roads and well placed villages. In such townships, then, one can spend money for providing facilities. (Karve and Ranadive 1965: 117–19)

The role of weekly markets in the tribal, rural and urban setting (Karve and Acharya 1970) looks at weekly markets in the very different setting of Baglan Taluka of Nasik district. Whereas Phaltan was part of a prosperous irrigated area which included several agro-industries and on its way to becoming further urbanised, Baglan was more rural and tribal. But here, too, the market villages played a similar role—‘of providing an active communication centre to the surrounding villages’ (Karve and Acharya 1970: 111). Annual fairs particularly, ‘sociologically and anthropologically interpreted . . . had an integrative dynamic role. Integrative because, it brings together people of the region and the people (some traders are from outside the region) from the other regions. Dynamic, because indirectly the traders introduce new wants among the tribals’ (ibid.: 82). The monograph provides details of which villages attend which market, how

far people travel, whether they come singly or in groups, what they transact, etc. In different hands, this material could have yielded rich insights and almost seems to cry out for a restudy, thirty years later (see for instance Gell 1982).

While Karve may not have drawn out all the implications of her own study, she was evidently groping towards an understanding of how spatial organisation reflected and influenced social relations, a subject which has only now become truly fashionable. This is evident not just from the *Weekly markets* and Phaltan studies (which map transactions between villages, towns, etc.), but more centrally from her article titled 'The Indian village', which examines how villages in different parts of India are organised spatially and how the objective boundaries affect the subjective understanding or *gestalt* of a village (Karve 1957b). A short article, 'Location and the organisation of space' (Karve 1961a), is again, fascinatingly suggestive in its attempt to provide a spatial basis or 'location' to social institutions like the family.

A survey of the people displaced through the Koyna Dam (Karve and Nimbkar 1969) is in its own way a model for studies of the dam-displaced people, a subject which has received fresh attention in the 1980s and 1990s (see Drèze, Samson and Singh 1997), but often without any awareness of what went before.⁶⁹ The rehabilitation of people from the Koyna valley was supposed to be a planned process, as against some of the earlier displacements where they were left entirely to their own devices. Yet some of the problems faced by people whose lands were submerged by the Koyna dam continue to be sadly familiar to people today—hurried moves despite the possibility of planning, because people were not warned of what would happen during submergence time; paying people cash compensation for their houses (which they are unused to) instead of participating in a house construction process; not giving people alternative land in the command area and instead sending them to distant places; expecting

⁶⁹ This study was really initiated by Jai Nimbkar, who started talking to some of the dam displaced people while holidaying at the Koyna dam guesthouse. When Nimbkar talked about it to her mother, Irawati Karve suggested doing a survey, got the funds for it and assigned two research assistants to help Nimbkar with the fieldwork. Interview, Jai Nimbkar, 26 April 2001.

people to split into smaller groups to make finding land easier, etc. Some of the conclusions are worth reproducing here:

Adjusting to a new life is especially difficult for ignorant and illiterate people. The adjustment could have been made easier by making the simplest amenities of life available to these people. The government has not been able to do this. . . . A large number of displaced people still do not feel settled. There is an atmosphere of anxiety and fear, of a certain amount of bitterness among the people we visited. The only thing that gives them emotional security is the sticking together of the old village or a large part of it . . . the government claims that it intended to give the dam affected people an equivalent in value for what they had lost, and that their aim was not the general betterment of these people. We feel that this is not a fair attitude. Even supposing the people receive an equivalent of what they have lost in terms of material belongings, nobody can compensate them for the loss of their ancestral homes, friends, marriage connections etc. For the loss of these they must be given something more than the cash equivalent of what they have lost by way of tangible belongings. Especially when they see the rest of the state benefiting from the electricity provided by the dam, they are bound to be dissatisfied with what they have got . . . the problem needs to be approached with more foresight and imagination. (Karve and Nimbkar 1969: 107–8)

Whatever her shortcomings in analysing her own data, the subjects Karve took up for study were often far ahead of her time: and in such work she generated insights that will perhaps outlive even her work on caste and kinship.⁷⁰

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that Irawati Karve saw 'science as her vocation' (cf. Weber 1970), almost the equivalent of social service in the university arena. In concluding, it might be useful to summarise what

⁷⁰ I have not discussed here her work on pastoralists with K.C. Malhotra because I could not locate the essays, but that again is a reflection of an ecological concern that has only begun to make itself felt in sociology/anthropology in the 1990s.

this vocation meant in the Indian context in the critical middle decades of the last century.

To begin with, the idea that sociology and anthropology were sciences was common to most anthropologists of the period (see Bose, Ram, this volume). When Karve did fieldwork—involving anthropometry, serology, archaeology, or the collection of kinship terminology—it is this broad science that she believed herself to be engaged in. India, with its diversity of castes and customs, was seen as one large scientific laboratory. By the same light, she did not see her Marathi literary writings (with a few exceptions, e.g. Karve 1962a) as anthropology.

Secondly, following Weber (1970: 129), it is worth re-examining or reiterating the material conditions that made science as a vocation possible for someone like Karve. One factor, of course, was her caste and family background. The base of recruitment to university teaching was even narrower then than it is now, and for all the minor drawbacks of a father-in-law who was stricter with his own family than with others, belonging to the Karve family was no doubt a particular advantage in Maharashtra.

There were few Indian university departments in sociology and anthropology when Irawati Karve started her work, with the result that those who founded such departments or worked in them were often self-consciously pioneers. Sticking to her own Indological and four-field style when fashions in sociology had changed, and even taking up new topics for survey work, was perhaps possible in part because of the prestige attached to these early departments. In part, too, it had to do with Irawati Karve's standing in Maharashtra and her attempt to provide an independent academic perspective on the problems of contemporary citizenship, e.g. language or the status of women.

In India, scholars are often sustained by the immediacy of social problems and easy access to ethnographic riches, despite the lack of library resources or a critical mass of sociologists to insulate oneself and one's students from the pull of the civil services or other professions. On the other hand, this may compel scholars into a collectors' mode, at the expense of keeping up with the latest theoretical developments in their field. For instance, there is very little reference

in Karve's work to ongoing work by others on similar themes, and, although she spent a year in the USA, this does not seem to have changed her theoretical approach much. Yet scholarship in 'peripheries' like India is invariably affected by the dependency syndrome—the notion that only the West can certify true worth, and Karve too seems to have suffered on this count.⁷¹

With all this, however, science was her vocation because she had that 'inward calling' (Weber 1970: 134)—an enthusiasm and curiosity with which she engaged the world, and a passion that still shines bright for us these many decades after.

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⁷¹ Pundalik (1970) recounts her craving for recognition as an anthropologist, including the desire to go abroad for conferences and her inability to understand how he could be satisfied without this.

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Towards a Praxiological Understanding of Indian Society

The Sociology of A.R. Desai¹

SUJATA PATEL

The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however is to *change* it.—Karl Marx, XI Theses on Feuerbach, 1845

AKSHAY RAMANLAL DESAI (1915–94), WAS FIRST AND FOREMOST a Marxist, and then a sociologist and teacher. It was his interpretation of Marxism—as a perspective that understands and explains the specific Indian context in relation to a general Marxist theory of classes—that defined the contours of his sociology and pedagogic practices. Desai's project of Marxist sociology was envisioned at a very important juncture in the history of the subject and thus

¹ This essay has benefited from discussions with friends, comrades, colleagues, and students of A.R. Desai. I am particularly grateful to Neeraben Desai for spending time to answer detailed questions despite her ill health. Interviews were conducted with Jairus Banaji, Praful Bidwai, Bhagwan Singh Josh, Uday Mehta, Indra Munshi, D. Narain, Vinayak Purohit, Manorama Savur, Ghan-shyam Shah, and Sonal Shukla over the period between January 2002 and June 2002. Biographic references are also taken from Gorman (1986), Savur and Munshi (1995), and Shah (1990)

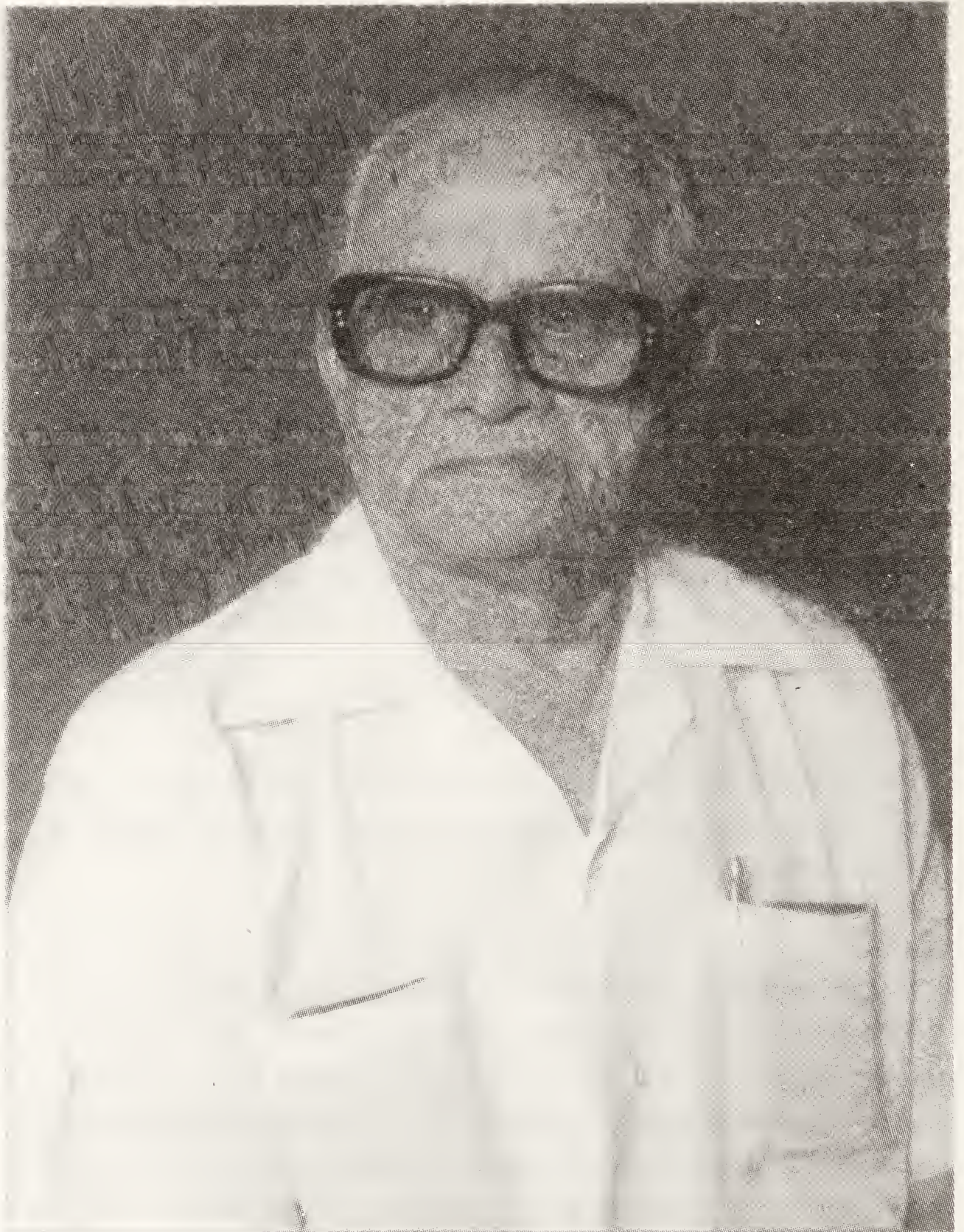


Fig. 11: Portrait of A.R. Desai (*Photograph courtesy Neera Desai*)

influenced its many contradictory receptions. He became a teacher in the Department of Sociology in 1951, when the influence of the 'Bombay School of Sociology' under G.S.Ghurye was declining. By the time he became Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology in the University of Bombay in 1969, the centre of academic power had shifted from Bombay to Delhi and the subject had become

institutionalised in the context of post-Independence developments in higher education. This shift coincided with the emergence of a specifically social anthropological perspective in understanding and explaining Indian society—an empiricist, structural-functional perspective premised on the distinction between value and fact.

It was at this historical juncture that Desai's Marxist sociology was conceived, and it took the contrary position of affirming the relationship of value to fact. It also envisaged a role for itself as an alternative to a growing and institutionalised conservative sociology. It is no wonder, then, that Desai's sociological vision stands out for its differences with Indian social anthropology of the 1960s and 1970s rather than its affinities with it. When the latter was concentrating on analysing the micro (the village), Desai's sociology studied the macro and the meso (capitalism, nationalism, classes, agrarian structure, the state, and peasant movements, among other things). And while the dominant effort of social anthropologists was to create a space for the 'social' unmarked by discourses relating to history, economics, and politics, Desai framed an interdisciplinary sociology in which there was very little difference between sociology and social science. Third, when mainstream sociology/social anthropology perfected the methods of participant observation and fieldwork to understand Indian social structure and capture the processes of change, Desai's Marxist sociology used the historical method to give specific meaning to the Marxist notion of structure and the various elements in its constitution in India, such as feudalism, capitalism, the relationship between class and nation, peasants and working class, the post-colonial state, and the rights of the deprived. And last, unlike mainstream sociologists whose audiences consisted only of students and researchers in university departments and research institutes, Desai's readers were, in addition, the literate population of the country.

Desai's bibliography is extensive and his work and his ideas are accessible in a variety of publications that range from books and edited works to pamphlets, some of these also in the Indian regional languages. In these publications he explores the relationship between nationalism and the growth of classes in India; the nature of the post-Independence Indian state and its role in fashioning capitalism;

changes in agrarian society during colonialism and the post-Independence period; the nature and growth of the workers' movement; new forms of urbanisation with special reference to slums; new developments in Indian politics, including the political use of caste and religion by communalism; and lastly, the growth of the Rights movement in India—in effect an entire range of issues and questions dealing with the transition from feudalism to capitalism in the country.

I map out the main tenets of Desai's Marxist sociology through a discussion of three early texts written in the period between 1948 and 1961. These set out his assessments of the processes of change in India. The first two texts, *Social background of Indian nationalism* (1948) and *Recent trends in Indian nationalism* (1960), analyse nationalism, class formation, and the nature of the state in pre- and post-colonial India, while the third examines the character of rural transition. In the following sections, I draw out some of the salient points of Desai's theories on the troubled binary of nation/class and its relationship with pre-capitalist formations and the post-Independence state. Later, I discuss his assessments of the nature of Indian capitalism and the changes taking place in rural India, as reflected in his book *Rural transition in India* (1961). In the course of this discussion I also examine the extension of some of his earlier ideas on state–civil society relationships as incorporated in two sets of edited books published on social movements in India, *Peasant struggles in India* (1979) and *Agrarian struggles in India after Independence* (1986a); and his next set of books on the Human Rights movement, titled *Violation of democratic rights in India* (1986b) and *Repression and resistance in India* (1990). I also explore some of the contradictory influences (especially those of his family and his father, as also those of leftist student groups) that shaped his ideas and ideologies and thus his sociology. Finally, I assess the implications of his ideas for social science (and not only sociological) knowledge in India.

Though it has not been debated at length in the context of the growth of sociology in India, commentators have highlighted the nationalist roots of modern social theory. It has been argued that nation and nationalism have loomed large and helped to ask questions, identified issues and problems for discussion, and oriented

the perspectives of modern social theory in India. Even where it has not helped to identify issues, problems, theories, and perspectives—as in Indian social anthropology of the 1960s and 1970s—the nation has framed the intellectual location of the same.² Desai's sociology is distinct from Indian social anthropology in this regard. His sociology is embedded in the questions and issues that dominated nationalism, and his concepts, categories, and theoretical approach are organically connected with the Left perspectives that theorised nationalism. Desai was emphatic that sociology must assess the characteristics and features of Indian capitalism. In this essay I ask: what kinds of strengths did Desai's sociology inherit from its organic relationship with nationalist and Marxist perspectives? While elaborating on his contributions to the making of specialisations such as political sociology, sociology of the agrarian system, sociology of social movements, urban sociology, and sociology of communalism (among other areas), I also discuss some of the limitations that his sociology exhibited. I ask whether these limitations are due to Desai's specific interpretation of the Marxist concept of 'praxis' in which the balance between theory/knowledge and intervention is tilted towards the latter rather than the former. Did his commitment to 'change the world' and not merely 'interpret it' affect the content of his sociology?

I. THE MAKING OF A MARXIST

Interviews with Neeraben Desai (his wife), and with his friends and colleagues suggest that two sets of ideologies and cultural practices had a critical influence on Desai and helped to frame the perspective that he adopted on the nation and the nature of nationalism in *Social background to Indian nationalism*. The first set was related to his involvement in radical groups within the student movement in Baroda, where he first registered as an undergraduate student, and later his involvement as a student with other leftist and Marxist groups participating in the nationalist movement in Surat and Bombay, where he pursued further studies. The second set was due to the influence of his father, Ramanlal Desai, a civil servant, novelist, committed

² See Patel (1998, 2002, 2005) for an assessment of Srinivas and the growth of sociology in India.

nationalist, and Fabian socialist with an admiration for Gandhi.³ The first set of influences was instrumental in training Desai to theorise issues of nation and class, committing him to a revolutionary intervention in society and to using historical materialist methods to examine nationalism; the influence of the second set was significant in leading him to a reiteration of nationalism as the *only* ideology that could confront colonialism. In *Social background to Indian nationalism*, Desai combines these two perspectives and argues that nationalism is an all-class movement that plays a positive role in confronting colonialism.

Having lost their mother early in life, Desai and his younger sister spent their lives travelling and living in various homes set up by their father as the latter was transferred to towns and district headquarters in Baroda State. Over these travels Desai developed an interest in the world around him. Discussions at home with family and friends on nationalism and the role played by it in changing the nature of rural society created a milieu in which he came to believe in the necessity of social and political commitments and goals outside his immediate family and career. Though Ramanlal Desai did not leave the civil service to join the national movement, these issues find reflection in his novels. For instance, the most popular of them, *Gram Lakshmi*, documents in four volumes the changes taking place in rural Gujarat after the arrival of the British, the exploitation suffered by peasants via excessive rent, and the possibility of a Gandhian revolution. The critique of colonialism, the positive role of nationalism, and the importance of citizens relating to the making of a new India were ideas that ran through almost all the novels written by Ramanlal Desai. In these he exhorted his readers to relate to the world around them and to understand it in order to change it. These precepts had an influence on Desai as he grew up in this Nagar Brahman household in early-twentieth-century Baroda State.⁴

As soon as he joined college Desai was introduced to radical and communist ideas. Baroda was then a base for intellectuals of radical

³ A biographical snapshot of Desai is available in the *festschrift* in his honour. (see Shah 1990: 1–3).

⁴ Desai was trained to be a *tabalchi* in childhood and learnt this skill from one of Baroda's most famous schools of music which had Fayaz Khan as its Principal.

persuasions and activists of the growing Communist Party. By the early 1930s a *kisan* movement had already started in Gujarat. Desai gravitated towards the student and later peasant movements after he entered college in Baroda, where there was a family home. He became a member of the Communist Party from 1934, for five years.⁵ However, it seems that he was not very comfortable with the doctrinaire positions taken by the communists. His rustication from the college in Baroda because of his political activities led him to Surat, and later to Bombay for his studies. In Bombay he met C.G. Shah, a communist who has been described as 'one of the most well read intellectuals of the city'. Shah was critical of the strategy advocated by Stalin and the Comintern. He had just formed a study group of young communist comrades (Shah 1990: 2). Desai became part of this group and was introduced for the first time to Trotskyite positions. During these years he found work in a library of radical and communist literature set up by Lokhandwala, a Gujarati trader. Together with other radicals and communists he was employed to work in this library and comment on this literature. Here Desai wrote his first monograph: *Gandhi X-rayed*, and made an assessment of the complexities of revolution in the Indian feudal states.⁶ At this time he was also on the fringes of the Bolshevik-Leninist party, organised by a group of Trotskyites from Sri Lanka, which included many Indians.⁷ It is in this political and intellectual background that Desai penned *Social background of Indian nationalism*.

II. NATION AND CLASS IN INDIA'S TRANSITION TO CAPITALISM

Social background of Indian nationalism was submitted as a doctoral thesis in 1946 and was first published in 1948 by the Bombay University Press as part of the Sociology Series under the general

⁵ Interview with Neeraben Desai, 31 January 2002.

⁶ Neither of these monographs is mentioned in the bibliography, these being mainly polemical and political texts written before Desai wrote his sociological works.

⁷ On the Sri Lankan initiative to build a joint Indian-Sri Lankan Trotskyite party, see Amarsinghe 2000: esp. 56–65. A.R. Desai's name does not find mention in this text, though Vinayak Purohit (interview) suggests that Desai was part of the group.

editorship of G.S. Ghurye. Since then it has been reprinted almost every alternate year and has gone through six editions. This text has now become a textbook, referred to by undergraduate and postgraduate students not only in sociology but also in history and political science. There is irony in the fact that Desai was able to write a social history of Indian nationalism much before this topic became popular among Indian historians. The book attempted to simultaneously argue and organically connect three discrete positions. It tried (i) to explain the role played by colonialism in the transition from feudalism to capitalism in India; (ii) to evaluate the specificity of the nature of Indian pre-capitalist formations, specially the caste system; and (iii) to examine the role played by nationalism in confronting colonial capitalism. *Social background of Indian nationalism* was received extremely well.

The book is a historical work and its arguments are based mainly on interpretations of primary historical sources. Desai understands nationalism as a historical category that emerges at a certain stage of evolution of the social structure when both objective and subjective socio-historical conditions mature. He lays out the distinctive stages of this development by first examining the nature of the pre-capitalist structure in India, discussing ideas regarding 'self sufficiency of community' as well as the nature of the agrarian system in pre-British India that made the village its key unit. He then proceeds to analyse the British conquest and evaluate the nature of the transformation that it inaugurated in the agrarian society.⁸

Through this book Desai introduced new interpretations that were being discussed within communist groups regarding the specificity of the Indian case in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Against some received interpretations of Marx,⁹ wherein it was

⁸ Some critics have suggested that this text borrows heavily from R.P. Dutt's *India today*. Many of Desai's arguments also resonate with Barrington Moore's *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy: Lord and peasant in the making of the modern world* (1966), who also borrows from R.P. Dutt, though he does not refer to Desai.

⁹ In an introduction to the writings of Marx and Engels on national and colonial questions, Aijaz Ahmad argues that Marx lost 'faith in the industrializing mission of colonial capitalism in India' and characterised British colonialism as 'a bleeding process' (Ahmad 2001: 7).

suggested that Marx had argued that capitalism would and could play a revolutionary role in changing the nature of productive forces in traditional Indian society dominated by the caste system, Desai—borrowing from nationalist ideology—suggested that colonialism did not play a revolutionary role. Rather, it had a flip side to it, for it destroyed the institutions that could have made possible the growth of capitalism in India, namely the factories that had emerged to mass-produce goods during the pre-capitalist period. However, colonialism had a positive effect in that it made possible the growth of nationalism through a contradictory process. It aided the growth of new classes through the new education system, helped to create the conditions for the emergence of social reform movements, and ultimately influenced the growth of the nationalist movement. His book maps out the contradictory nature of colonialism.

Desai's arguments on Indian nationalism are also sensitive to the specificities of its character and content. Indian nationalism heralded India into the modern world. However it was also extremely complex and remained peculiarly Indian because it incorporated features specific to the making of Indian society. Framed in the context of social and religious diversities and territorial vastness, Indian nationalism incorporated powerful indigenous traditions and institutions, making it distinct and different. Lastly, and most significantly, the book argued that the nation was not class, though it was intimately connected to it. Nationalism was a movement of various classes and groups comprising a nation, attempting to remove all economic, political, social, and cultural obstacles that impeded the realisation of their aspirations; the nationalist movement was multi-class. However, the movement was internally divided, because different classes contested within it to mark it with their own interests. Ultimately, the class at the helm of the movement attempts to impose its own class interests on the movement, filling it with the content of its own class needs and aspirations and subordinating those of other classes to its own.

The specificities of the Indian experience are explained in the following manner:

- Indian feudalism is characterised by lack of private ownership of land, where the village community is the *de facto* owner of

the village land, the monarch receives a definite proportion of produce as revenue and the revenue collector is the representative of the monarch in the village.

- The development of occupational organisations and new forms of consciousness that were growing slowly diminished the importance of caste organisations and weakened caste consciousness.
- British rule destroyed pre-capitalist forms of production relations and introduced modern capitalist property relationships. The caste system was the 'steel frame of Hinduism' and had thrived in the pre-capitalist economy. The economic foundations of caste were now shattered by the new economic forces and forms introduced by colonial capitalism.
- The advanced British nation radically changed the economic structure of Indian society for its own purpose, established a centralised state, and introduced modern education, modern means of communication, and other institutions. This resulted in the growth of new social forces unique in themselves.
- Because their very nature came into conflict with British imperialism, these social forces provided the motive power for the rise and development of Indian nationalism.
- The nationalist movement in India was led and dominated by the capitalist class. It accomplished this through its classical party, the Indian National Congress, which launched, shaped, and provided ideological, political, and programmatic content to the nationalist movement.

III. STATE AND CAPITALISM IN POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA

In 1960 Desai published a sequel to *Social background of Indian nationalism*, titled *Recent trends in Indian nationalism*. While *Social background of Indian nationalism* remains structured within the questions raised by Marxist perspectives on nationalism, the sequel, and his next book of essays, *Rural India in transition*, address the debates among communists regarding the transition to socialism, and also provide for a general sociological perspective. In these books we see Desai combining the agenda of Marxist theory with that of a

general theory of sociology, for by then Desai had joined the Department of Sociology at the University of Bombay and was interacting with colleagues in the professional world of sociology. He was eager to provide a Marxist sociology for India in a context wherein there were competing schools offering varied interpretations of Indian society.

According to Desai, a critical sociology of India has to undertake the study of the capitalist system as its main focus. Capitalist developments in India cannot be understood without using the historical method. Such a sociology has to examine the history of nationalism, the growth of classes that nationalism encouraged, and the relationship between these classes and the modern Indian state. The state's role in promoting capitalism, especially in the rural areas, needs to be assessed, as well as the contradictions that emerge from these processes, such as the growth of new forms of inequalities through the formation of new classes in rural areas or the lack of access to housing in urban areas, increasing inequalities—with the rich getting richer—and finally the escalation in the use of the state's powers as it employs them to extend capitalist growth.

The theoretical basis of these arguments lies in the evolution of Desai's ideas regarding the specificity of India's path of capitalist development. Against the positions taken by Communist parties of the time, he became convinced that India had commenced capitalist development under British rule. In this he was following the precepts fashioned by Trotskyite groups who rejected the theory of 'two-stage revolution' advanced by the Communist Party and supported later by its two offshoots, the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist). These parties argued that India must pass through a 'national democratic', 'people's democratic' or 'new democratic revolution' before it can inaugurate a socialist revolution. Instead, Desai suggests India had already started on a capitalist path of development through colonialism. Today, the capitalist system is being institutionalised through the agency of the modern Indian state, which has had to take a dominant role in the context of the weakness of the bourgeoisie in India.

These arguments are now elaborated in Desai's books and presented for the consideration of sociologists. Drawing from C. Wright Mills' critique of structural functionalism, Desai argues that the

project of sociology is to delineate 'historical social structures'.¹⁰ Arguing that post-Independence social science has 'taken to expedient apologetics in place of scientific inquiry', Desai suggests that sociologists accept the relevance of the Marxist approach (Desai 1973 [1960]: xii). He sees Marxist sociology as providing an alternative historical-materialist perspective against the conservatism running through contemporary Indian sociology. Both his books are significant because they help him build this alternative perspective and lead him to clarify the elements that constitute his Marxist sociology. The arguments in *Recent trends in Indian nationalism* and the essays in *Rural India in transition* reflect the new intellectual context that Desai is addressing.

Recent trends in Indian nationalism was written initially as a post-script to *Social background of Indian nationalism*. This small monograph has not been discussed by contemporary commentators but remains significant for its critical and incisive theorisation of the nature of the post-colonial state in India. It extends the arguments elaborated in the earlier book to examine the nature of contemporary capitalism, defines and elaborates the new class structure that emerged as a consequence of nationalism, and assesses the relationship between these classes and the state in India.

Desai's arguments may be summarised as follows:

- India saw the uneven development of new classes as a result of the economic transformation initiated by colonialism, specifically the penetration of Indian society by commercial forces that established modern industries in India for their own

¹⁰ The new orientation of Desai's work emerged with his increasing interaction with other professional sociologists from India and abroad. From the early 1950s Desai had also started doing empirical research sponsored by various government and international agencies on themes such as: Literacy and Productivity among Industrial Workers, Non-Wage Benefits in Manufacturing, Slums and Slum Dwellers in Bombay, Potters in Dharavi, and lastly the magnum opus, the 25-volume source book of the Labour Movement in India. From the early 1960s, his contacts with international sociologists also widened with his increasing participation in international workshops, seminars, and conferences.

- interests. As a result, capitalism in India was characterised by the following: (a) a weak technical base; (b) monopolistic organisation; and (c) speculative rather than productive processes.
- Uneven development of capitalism was a function of two features: (a) the differential integration of the new economy in time; and (b) the differential integration of pre-capitalist communities with the new economy. In the new environment, the Banias, who were traders in the pre-British period, were the first to take to modern capitalist commerce and banking and grew to become the commercial and financial bourgeoisie, while the Brahmins were the first participants in the modern education system, in the process becoming the intelligentsia and growing into a middle class.
 - The Indian bourgeoisie is largely composed of certain castes and communities belonging to land-owning classes of certain geographical regions of India. Desai disputes the application to India of the classic Marxist contradiction between town and country and suggests instead that the interests of the bourgeoisie in India are not distinguishable from those of the semi-feudal landowning class. This characteristic affects the style, content, and nature of the political programme of the Indian bourgeoisie. This class cannot complete the tasks of bourgeois democratic revolution—such as a complete liquidation of feudalism, organisation of a prosperous national economy, solution of the nationality problem, democratisation of social institutions, and creation of a modern rationalist culture. Given these characteristics, it cannot evolve genuine bourgeois political programmes. It thus uses negotiations between the ruling classes as a political style to deflect criticism.
 - In this it is helped by the nature of the administrative structure inherited through the state. The state after independence reflected almost all aspects of the colonial state. Two processes helped this development: (a) the nature of transfer of power, which took place through negotiation rather than revolution; and (b) the mass support for the Congress Party. The Congress utilised it to strengthen its negotiating capacity with the colonial authorities. Thus, in the end, the constitution of India was a bourgeois

constitution that guaranteed rights to the bourgeoisie rather than to the proletariat.

The weakness of the bourgeoisie, its institutionalised relationship with the feudal landowning class, and the received colonial state apparatus, according to Desai, put into place the play of certain specific contradictory features of Indian capitalism. The first characteristic relates to the dominance of the state over the ruling classes and the use of its welfare orientation not in the interest of the exploited but in the interest of Indian capitalism. He evaluates the ideologies and practices of development and planning, including the role played by the public sector in these processes, as well as legal instruments of a similar kind put into place by the post-Independence state, to examine how these help the development of capitalism in India. According to Desai, planning plays a critical role in preserving the capitalist system in the epoch of monopoly capitalism, in two ways. First, it transfers the main burden for financing the various Plans on to the common people. This leads to the decline of purchasing power of taxpayers and a drain of the very sources of financial capital. Second, it aids the growth of concentration and centralisation of capital. This centralisation is reinforced by the control of industry, trade, and finance by a few families belonging to certain castes and certain nationalities. Thus the programme of mixed economy pays lip service to its 'socialist' aspects, but instead develops capitalism. Additionally, it also makes possible a close liaison and fusion between big business, the government, and institutions that shape the ideological and cultural life of the Indian people. It is no wonder that the national economy is characterised by lopsided and asymmetrical development and is in the grip of structural disequilibria.

Because the modern state is a strong state that intervenes, participates, and initiates policies and programmes that are necessary to sustain an economically weak bourgeoisie, it assumes enormous powers for itself. These powers are now used against the democratic assertions of the people, thereby contradicting the civil rights that it has assured the people of India. Over the decades the Indian state has attempted to curb civil rights and liberties rather than enhance

them. Desai suggests that in order to protect and preserve the capitalist foundations of society, the state has to sacrifice democracy.

Third, through an analysis of changing agrarian and industrial structures, Desai signals the need to analyse the implications of programmes and policies introduced in rural India together with an assessment of new inequalities emerging in the urban arena. He argues that the critical issue in rural India is unemployment. This theme is discussed once again in the essays incorporated in *Rural India in transition*.¹¹ The book assesses the changes taking place in the countryside as a result of land reform through the introduction of legislation for tenancy reform and the land ceiling, and through new programmes and policy interventions such as the Community Development Programme and Panchayati Raj. It also evaluates the limitations of the new movements in rural India, such as the *bhoodan* movement which emerged to help the state to implement land ceiling legislation.

Desai argues that while land reforms have helped, their impact has been limited to a few. It has led to the growth of a class of rich peasants instead of benefiting the underprivileged sections for which it was framed. By eliminating parasitical landlordism, the Indian state has created new classes which are directly dependent on the state, but, due to its capitalist outlook, has abstained from transferring land to the actual tillers of the soil. Desai believes that the focus of the agrarian policy was to create a class of agricultural capitalists, rich farmers, and viable middle peasant proprietors directly linked to the state. Desai argues that these policy measures of the government strengthen—economically, socially, and politically—only the rich sections of agrarian society. On the other hand, in the urban arena an urban upper class has emerged which is predominantly hybrid, isolated from the masses, and combines the authoritarian upper-class and upper-caste values of both capitalist and feudal India, respectively. Ironically, the principle of equality of citizens laid down

¹¹ Desai had already written a long monograph on the nature of the agrarian question in India, published by the Indian Society of Agriculture Economics in 1949. It was later published as *Rural sociology in India* (1961).

in the constitution is contrarily giving rise to a new ruling class imbued with a feudal culture.

Thus, if colonialism and nationalism were key concepts to understand the processes of change in the pre-Independence period, the role played by the state in changing rural society is the critical issue that now occupies Desai's attention. He argues (a) that rural change generated by the state has resulted in sharpening the contradictions among various classes, which in turn is leading to the growth of tensions, antagonisms, and conflicts; and (b) that these changes are strengthening the rich sections of rural society.

Desai was also one of the first sociologists to note the new relationship between caste and politics in contemporary India. Examining the correlation between caste, wealth, economic rank, class position, political power, and accessibility to education and culture in India, he argues that caste affiliations have led to the growth of caste movements, such as the anti-Brahmin and Adi-Dravid movements in Maharashtra and South India.

The task of nation-building cannot be accomplished by the historically weak Indian bourgeoisie in a backward country during the period of a general crisis in the world capitalist system. It cannot resolve or liquidate mass poverty, mass unemployment, mass illiteracy, and mass ignorance. These developments have led to the growth of a weak capitalist society which cannot resolve the economic, political, social, educational, and cultural problems arising from its current crisis. This crisis will only further aggravate economic disequilibria, which in turn will aggravate political instability and social, moral, and cultural degeneration. Desai concludes that the tasks left unfinished by nationalism could only be attained through a socialist revolution. He is convinced that Indian social and economic conditions have ripened to the point that a non-capitalist alternative is not only desirable but also necessary. This conclusion motivated him to spend the rest of his professional and political life documenting the ways in which the modern Indian capitalist state furthers inequalities, deprivation, and marginalisation among the Indian people. He documented how movements of resistance emerged to question these processes, and how the state in turn utilised the massive resources of violence at its command to repress these movements.

IV. STATE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: RESISTANCE
AND REPRESSION

In the two decades between the late 1960s and the late 1980s, intellectual and institutional forces helped to displace those perspectives in sociology that were competing with the dominant structural-functional school which affirmed a strong preference for distancing value from fact.¹² Its institutionalisation as the dominant school occurred in the context of institutional changes in the area of higher education.¹³ First, the expansion of higher education led to the growth and spread of the teaching of sociology as new universities were formed.¹⁴ Second, as mentioned earlier, there was a shift of the power centre of academia to Delhi. These trends were reinforced with the setting up of the Indian Council of Social Science Research in New Delhi. And it was in this period that the Indian Sociological Society merged with the All India Sociological Congress and shifted its offices to Delhi.¹⁵

If this was the condition of sociology, there were contrary developments in other social sciences. The establishment of Jawaharlal Nehru University in the late 1960s saw the growth of the Marxist perspective in social history, together with an increasing interest in Marxist

¹² For instance, in his Presidential Address to the All India Sociological Congress in 1980 Desai states: 'The dominant approaches which shaped sociological studies have been basically non-Marxist. The practitioners and advocates of dominant approaches have always adopted an attitude wherein the potential of Marxist approach to understand the Indian reality has been bypassed, underrated or summarily dismissed prima facie by castigating it as dogmatic, value based and therefore lacking objectivity and value neutrality (*Sociological bulletin* 30, 1: 8–9).

¹³ The review of the theme Sociology of Politics for the first ICSSR Survey of Sociology and Social Anthropology does not refer to any of Desai's texts on the modern state nor to his analysis of the public sector and planning in India. Ironically, Desai was a member of the committee conducting the survey.

¹⁴ Between 1960–1 and 1980–1 there was a 167 per cent increase in the number of Indian universities.

¹⁵ Desai does not seem to have played a significant role in the merger agreement, and was apparently noncommittal on this issue. On the politics of this merger, see Patel (1998).

theories of the state. Desai's earlier work, especially *Social background of Indian nationalism*, found a new audience in the disciplines of history and political science.¹⁶

Meanwhile, Desai was travelling on new paths and becoming very concerned about the looming crisis in society: in fact his perceptions of society and assessment of the development of new processes became sharper and more penetrating as time passed. Agitations, protests, and struggle were emerging in the countryside. The working class, the traditional revolutionary force, was in the throes of changes both in the context of its structure and its changing political consciousness, and the trade union movement was not able to play its traditional role. In the mean time, new contradictions were emerging in urban areas with the growth of new forms of social organisation—for instance, the slum. Simultaneously, politics was changing and political parties were using caste and religious issues to mobilise the populace. For Desai, the key to an assessment of all these processes lay in the analysis of the modern Indian state. He argues that it is important to ask the question: why was the state playing an undemocratic role? Why was the state in India using extra-constitutional powers to repress the growth of democratic movements in the country? Answers to these questions, he argues, can only come through a historical-comparative analysis of state-civil society dynamics in India. Desai, it seems, was no longer involved in a debate with conservative sociology, which had already made its assessment of him. Rather, his vision now encapsulated a set of questions that overwhelmed all the social sciences in India.

During these two decades Desai initiated four complementary projects which analysed contemporary trends by documenting new information. First, he expanded his earlier work on rural transition

¹⁶ Desai's *Social background of Indian nationalism* became the text for new histories to be constructed. In the Preface to his essays on nationalism, Bipan Chandra states, 'The social character of the [national) movement, its origins, stages of development, the nature of social support and popular participation, the tactics and strategies evolved or used, and stages of development were not properly studied. There have been of course exceptions; for example the works of A.R. Desai, R. Palme Dutt, and several economists during the 1920s and 1930s' (Bipan Chandra 1979: vi).

and attempted to capture the growth of new contradictions in rural India by documenting the struggles and agitations in contemporary agrarian India. From this there emerged two edited collections theorising the distinctions between colonial and contemporary social movements in rural India. Titled *Peasant struggles in India* (1979) and *Agrarian struggles in India after Independence* (1986a), these two books immediately became, and continue to be, a major source of reference on social movements and agrarian sociology. In the first of these, Desai questioned the received evidence that peasants were not and are not militant. He was also making visible a set of histories forgotten by mainstream social science, thereby constructing the foundations of the sociology of agrarian structure in India.¹⁷

Agrarian struggles in India after Independence divides the agrarian struggles of post-Independence India into two phases: pre- and post-Green Revolution periods. Desai argues that the first period is characterised by a low level of agrarian struggles, lack of political direction, and the predominance of the landed peasantry rather than landless labourers. On the other hand the post-Green Revolution period is marked by differences among classes and groups that revolt, a variety of protests, and differences in political ideology among agrarian struggles. It is interesting to note that Desai does not here distinguish between tribal and peasant struggles.

Second, during these decades Desai initiated one of his most ambitious projects, that of documenting the history of the working-class movement in India. In order to realise this, he organised a research collective of seven scholars who worked for more than ten years to collect and organise various documents, ranging from newspaper records to private diaries and interviews. Initially, Desai had proposed the documentation of labour history in three volumes. Ultimately, however, the project evolved into a twenty-five volume source book (Desai 1989–2006).

This work is significant not only because it made visible a series of struggles and agitations of the working class not known or documented before, but also because of the definition of the worker and

¹⁷ Commentators have acknowledged the definitive work of A.R. Desai which helped to facilitate the formation of the Subaltern School. See Ludden (2001).

the working class that he used. His study was not restricted to the industrial working class, but encompassed all oppressed sections in society who were selling their labour power in the market. The change in definition is significant because Desai was the first to notice the 'informal sector', discovered only later by economists and anthropologists.¹⁸

Third, Desai wrote a series of articles on the relationship between state and society in India that assessed the programmes, policies, and institutions of state and simultaneously captured the social and political processes that they promote. These essays, published as *State and society in India: Essays in dissent* (1975) and *India's path to development: A Marxist approach* (1984), not only lay out the terms of a Marxist sociology of development but also question the theories of modernisation being used by social scientists.¹⁹ These essays extend this argument and for the first time use theories of underdevelopment to explain India's particular situation. However, whilst using these theories Desai does not abandon his position on the critical role played by the state in modern India in creating underdevelopment out of development: all Third World states, he argues, tend to protect the interests of the propertied classes of their nation-states. These books contain an evaluation of the implications of imperialism, the planning process, the mixed economy, the public sector, and the casteist and communalist politics which emerged.

The importance and significance of the state and the use it made of its repressive powers caused Desai to initiate the last of his major projects, a task which occupied him through most of the 1980s. This

¹⁸ A.R. Desai organised a collective of researchers to do this work. These included Praful Bidwai, Sunil Dighe, Kamala Ganesh, M.N.V. Nair, S.D. Punekar, Manorama Savur, and Robert Varikayil. Desai was the General Editor of the series. The first three volumes were published in 1989–90 by Popular Prakashan, Bombay, on behalf of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR). These covered 1850–1920. The remaining volumes, prepared by Manorama Savur, were delayed and finally published in 2003 and 2006 by Pragati Publishers, New Delhi, for the ICHR.

¹⁹ A prelude of this argument appears as an introduction to the two-volume edited book (Desai 1971) on modernization theories published by Bombay University's Department of Sociology on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the department in 1969.

project also made him widen his political networks; he had resigned in 1981 from the Revolutionary Socialist Party, of which he was a member from 1953. As a result of this work he had met many 'activists', ranging from comrades in various sections of the Left, including Marxists-Leninists and independent Marxists, to others, including those in voluntary groups, and liberals who were committed to fight for civil liberties. The result of this endeavour was a two-volume book, *Violation of democratic rights in India* (1986b) and *Repression and resistance in India* (1990), which focused on the state and documented the way it restricted and curtailed the struggles of the oppressed for these rights. In these volumes Desai addresses the question: why does the state show little interest in ensuring that the oppressed get the civil rights guaranteed to the people of India in the constitution? He also examines the nature of parliamentary democracy and the contradictions that this institution raises for the ruling classes and the state in India. What is remarkable is the fact that, for the first time, Desai incorporates in his analysis struggles not only of classes but also other groups who cannot be defined as a class in Marxist language. For instance, he uses the categories 'rural poor', *adivasis* (to denote tribes), and *dalits* (to denote the ex-untouchables). Secondly he defines these struggles as 'rights struggles' rather than class struggles, and divides these rights into bourgeois property rights, civil liberties, and proletariat rights.

Why did Desai eschew the use of Marxist categories for assessing the entire range of struggles? Why does he feel the necessity to define them in terms of 'human rights'? Why does the first volume devote so much attention to the United Nations' definition of human rights? What indeed is Desai's theory of knowledge/fact and value? What relationship did Desai envisage between Marxist theory and scientific method? What is the defining characteristic of his sociology?

V. A.R. DESAI: AN EVALUATION

In a review of Desai's edited book, *Agrarian struggles in India after Independence*, K. Balgopal (1986) applauds the emphasis placed on the Indian state to understand the nature of struggles in contemporary rural India. However, two aspects of Desai's introduction puzzle him. The first is Desai's classification of the landed classes in Indian

agriculture into rich peasants, middle farmers, and landlords. The second is his division of agrarian struggles in terms of pre-Green Revolution and post-Green Revolution. In many parts of India, the Green Revolution programme was not introduced. And yet, Desai thinks that it is a benchmark for an analysis of the contradictions it generates. On what basis can one assert this? The same problem occurs again in relation to Desai's understanding of the differentiation among ruling classes. Where is the empirical substantiation for this classification? Balgopal wonders whether the problems lie in Desai's orientation. Is Desai being political and ideological rather than sociological? Is he interested more in changing the world rather than interpreting it?

Problems of empirical substantiation also occur in Desai's work from his first book, *Social background of Indian nationalism*. Here he argues that pre-colonial India did not have private property and that village India was self-sufficient, autocratic, and unprogressive—among other things. Though there is now enough historical material to question these assessments, Desai did not retract these errors in subsequent editions of his book. If his project was completely political, as is argued, then the logic of its ideology suggests that he should not have translated McIver and Page's textbook, *Sociology*, into Gujarati for students of sociology, nor should he have termed his sociology of the agrarian system 'Rural Sociology'. As he has himself suggested, the term Rural Sociology emerged in the context of developments in agriculture in the United States, especially the growth of a new class of farmers. One wonders why he uses this terminology when terms like peasant society and agrarian society were available within Marxism. Moreover, his introduction to the book gives a classification of aspects of rural life, and not an historical-materialist rendering of the nature of rural structure. If he became aware of these concepts later, why did he not change the titles of his books, or insert addenda? An entire generation of students has read and organised their ideas of agrarian systems on the basis of a very specific definition of rural sociology. One wonders why Desai allowed this conservative categorisation to continue in his own work? Surely it does not advance scholarship or extend his political project?

It is not that Marxist theory was insensitive to issues of method, and was not seized of the need for using new categories to embrace

new social experiences. When Desai was writing his sociology, the Frankfurt School's debates on various aspects of Marxism were being elaborated. Desai's own predilection was for a historical perspective. And he was certainly aware of the debates in Marxist historiography regarding transition and transformation and issues of class and state (widely discussed among the New Left, as most of its members were influenced by Trotskyite ideas).²⁰ In the 1970s and 1980s Desai was concerned more with the present than the past, and he interacted closely with Marxists developing the Dependency and Development of Underdevelopment theories rather than historians. As shown earlier, his attempt was to provide a specific interpretation of the Indian case against the background of underdevelopment theories: the latter were mainly economists keenly involved in examining new forms of the capitalist system in the emerging world economy, rather than evaluating the Marxist method and methodology.

That Desai's agenda was organised in political terms is not in doubt. But here politics should imply a perspective rather than a specific strategy of political mobilisation and intervention through collective action. Though a member of a political party, he did not allow the party line to dictate his intellectual questions and theories. He can be called a scholar-activist, with his scholarship defined by a political perspective, a commitment to assess facts in the context of values. It was this perspective that led him to ask sociological questions and evaluate contemporary processes in the context of the nation-state rather than the microscopic local that dominated the perspective of social anthropology. It is this perspective that made him a sensitive observer of the ills besetting India as he attempted to build an analysis to eliminate them. His assessments were macro-level attempts to understand the play of social and political forces in the context of the nation-state, and thus possessed contemporaneity. He was clear that the key to these ills lay in property relations

²⁰ This was related to the assessment of the peculiarities of the English case and led to a debate between E.P. Thompson and the New Left. The key to this debate was the contending methodologies developed by the empirical school of Marxist historiography in England and the New School, against the new approach that combined Western Marxist methodologies and theories. Additionally, Desai knew Thompson; the latter visited him when he came to India.

established in India through colonialism and nationalism. In this sense, nationalism was a theoretical frame through which he evaluated both the causes and consequences of contemporary processes. It also became a mediatory link to build a Marxist sociology for India.

Desai's corpus of work is an attempt to educate sociologists and the general public about the contradictions that affect Indian society. When he is arguing for nationalism or making visible the complexities of peasant movements in India (much before the Subalterns made the study of peasants fashionable), or analysing communalism and claiming human rights for all, he shows an understanding of Indian society unparalleled among social scientists of the day. In many ways his theories, and the broad strokes in which he argued them, paved the way for new arguments to be presented and new positions to be taken. Most significantly, his work as an archivist helped to make visible the complexities of the colonial and post-colonial experiences that shaped sociological processes in India.

This political orientation defined Desai's work within the department in Bombay University as teaching and learning became activities that would inspire students and like-minded colleagues to identify processes in the world around them. Bombay then was the theatre of new struggles: it saw the growth of the Shiv Sena as well as the Dalit movement. Additionally, there were demonstrations, meetings, and strikes launched by organised workers, which included anti price-rise demonstrations and the railway strike. The pre- and post-Emergency periods saw the growth of the women's movement. Desai considered these events an example of the maturity in contradictions. He initiated research projects to study these events (such as the projects on slums, the history of working class struggles, state, society and development) and simultaneously encouraged students, colleagues, and comrades to do research on these issues.²¹ He also tried to integrate these concerns within the intellectual community of the city.²² These concerns flowed into the curriculum of the department.

²¹ Desai guided the theses of 28-odd students. Topics ranged from Marxist theory, urban issues, industrial structure, labour and trade movements, peasant movements, and agrarian structure, as well as the sociology of art.

²² Desai started study circles in which scientists from the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and students and academics of the Indian Institute of

New papers such as Sociology of Development, Sociology of Marx, Sociology of Economic Planning, and Sociology of Art were introduced during his headship (Savur 2002).

However, Desai's audience was larger than that defined by the profession of sociology or that of the social sciences. And he wrote directly for this larger audience, not only in English but increasingly in Gujarati. The C.G. Shah Trust that he set up put into circulation small pamphlets containing his essays for the general public. He also wrote for *The call*, the party journal of the Revolutionary Socialist Party, and started and edited a Gujarati journal called *Padkar*. His commitment to the need for a 'correct' interpretation of processes taking place in India and for collective action made him align first with the Revolutionary Socialist Party, which he joined in 1953 and remained a member of till 1981. Later he continued to work with the Inquilabi Sangathan of India (a section of the Fourth International in India) till his death.

A.R. Desai believed that the first task of a revolutionary was to make a correct assessment of society: to this end, he devoted every moment of his life. His all-pervading enthusiasm was for a critical engagement with the world fashioned by capitalism, in an effort to demystify it. And so was his involvement in various struggles—those of workers and peasants, tribes and castes, women and slum dwellers, all of which provided ways of confronting the dominant order of the ruling class and different visions for developing a new society free from exploitation. This passion to learn, to relate, and to identify with movements of the oppressed enveloped him, and overflowed through him to others who came in contact with him.

Desai's ebullience and commitment were reinforced by personal traits of warmth, affection, and overwhelming generosity. As a result, he left an imprint on all those whom he encountered, whether Marxists or not, whether colleagues or students, whether activists or those who were ideologically neutral. Possibly, this was also because his interpersonal relationships were marked by a deep sense of humanism and a complete belief in democratic practices. In a predominantly

Technology participated together with students and colleagues from Bombay University (Savur 2002: 59).

hierarchical academic and political culture, he stood out for being absolutely non-hierarchical. He, his comrades, and his students participated as equals in study circles that he led, analysing processes of class formation and state oppression in India. He continued with this work after his retirement in 1975. He moved back to Gujarat and interacted with its intellectual community. He travelled around the state, building groups that engaged with the changes taking place, making Baroda his base. His end, at the age of 79, came there.

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Ties that Bind

Tribe, Village, Nation, and S.C. Dube¹

SAURABH DUBE

WHEN SHYAMA CHARAN DUBE DIED IN FEBRUARY 1996 AT THE age of 73, he left behind a body of writing and a sphere of influence, spanning almost half a century, which traversed various disciplines, languages, and arenas. Initiated into the academy through the tribal anthropology of the 1940s, Dube was a major player in the village studies boom of the 1950s, straddled scholarship and administration over the 1960s, primarily occupied higher positions in academic bureaucracy in the 1970s and 1980s, and dedicated himself to political-cultural writing in Hindi after the mid-1980s. At each step, Dube's interests and presence could not be simply compartmentalised into discrete arenas, easily divided into distinct roles. His life and

¹ For obvious reasons, I have found this a very difficult essay to write. For reasons still unclear, an enormous resistance to writing and revision overcame me at different points. I would like to thank Ishita Banerjee for sustenance and comments through the process, Leela Dube for answering queries and detailed inputs, and the editors of this volume for their patience. I also acknowledge interviews/conversations with Leela Dube, T. N. Madan, André Béteille, Yogendra Singh, and McKim Marriot. Discussions with Purushottam Agarwal, Michael Herzfeld, David Lorenzen, and Anupama Rao put matters in perspective. The comments of two anonymous readers on the essay were more than helpful.



Fig. 12: Portrait of S.C. Dube (Photograph courtesy Leela Dube)

work were shaped by the interplay between the cosmopolitan and the vernacular, while imbuing such intersections with a distinct twist, a particular salience. Writing as a son and an academic, a critic and an admirer, heeding a warning Arthur O. Lovejoy issued several decades ago, I feel it would be a mistake to treat S.C. Dube's work and life as 'all of a piece'.² Rather, Dube's contribution and legacy emerge from a dynamic but chequered career, a productive yet divided vocation, an accomplished life but with under-realised possibilities.

My purpose in this essay is not so much to construct a narrative about Dube's legacy to the disciplines of anthropology and sociology as to discuss aspects of his work and life—attributes of an intellectual biography. Here I feel it is important to consider the texture of Dube's vocation and the terms of his writing by thinking through their inner tensions—from fluctuations and hesitations, to juxtapositions of opposed sensibilities and contrary ideas, to subterranean continuities tied up with productive contradictions, to expressions of ambiguities and containments of ambivalences. On the one hand my endeavour is informed by the history of anthropology (e.g. Stocking 1992, 1995; Tambiah 2002; Vincent 1990; see also, Peirano 1998), while being concerned with the difference introduced when understanding a particular scholar, the subject of an old colony and a new nation. On the other hand my effort keeps in view works exploring the conjunction of ethnography and biography (e.g. Battaglia 1995; Herzfeld 1997; Orlove 1995; Reed-Danahay 1997); while keeping a historian's disposition, interweaving historical readings with anthropological sensibilities. I will focus on the first four decades of Dube's life, which saw the publication of three important books by him. Then, based upon this discussion, towards the end of the essay I will raise a few questions concerning Dube's later career and writing.

I. EARLY YEARS

Born in the unremarkable town of Seoni (Central Provinces) on 25 July 1922 into a family of comfortable if middling circumstances, Shyama Charan was the only child of Dharma and Mool Chand

² Of course, Lovejoy (cited in Kern 1983: 10) was speaking of the reading of texts, an emphasis that bears extension to the narratives of lives. On such conjunctions see, for example, S. Dube (forthcoming).

Dube. Although there were close links with his ancestral home in Narsinghpur, close to Jabalpur, Mool Chand Dube after obtaining a Bachelor's degree in agriculture, worked in a transferable position, as a middle-ranking official in the Agriculture Department of the Central Provinces Government. However, this employment did not last long. Soon after the birth of his son, while in Seoni and following a racist remark by a British superior, Mool Chand resigned from his position. If this bold measure was born of personal pride, it carried the support of his wife.

By all accounts Dharma Dube was an unusual woman. Striking and beautiful—in the memory of those who had seen her; no photograph survives—she was also a person of integrity and intelligence. Her pride and politics played upon familial registers. An ardent nationalist, after the death of Bal Gangadhar Tilak a grief-stricken Dharma refused to eat for four days. While living in Narsinghpur, as part of the joint family, she quietly but firmly asserted her dignity before a self-willed and tyrannical mother-in-law, always covering her head modestly with the end of her sari, but ever refusing to entirely hide her face behind it. Influenced by writings on the new Hindu woman in Hindi literary magazines of the day, she extended sustenance and solidarity to the other, younger daughters-in-law in the family and neighbourhood. Indeed, S.C. Dube liked to describe his mother as the 'first feminist in the family'. So it is barely surprising that Dharma more than stood by her husband when he resigned from a job that afforded security at the cost of dignity to take up a less prestigious position, without the benefits of a pension, in the semi-government Court of Wards Service in the Chhattisgarh Division of the Central Provinces.

Before Independence the Chhattisgarh region comprised the *khalsa*—areas under direct rule of the imperial government; several feudatory states; and numerous *zamindaris*—landed estates under petty chieftains that had a semi-independent status, these zamindars (petty chieftains) placed under the charge of the Deputy Commissioner of the zamindari system. When a zamindar (or a feudatory chief) died with a minor to succeed him—or when a state or an estate were 'mismanaged' or became insolvent—they came under the charge of the Court of Wards. In the mid-1920s Mool Chand Dube took up the position of an administrator in the Court of Wards

Service, and, over the next two and a half decades, he worked primarily as Manager in zamindaris such as Deori, Pitora, Bilaigarh, and Phingeshwar, all in the western reaches of Chhattisgarh.

These zamindaris mainly occupied heavily forested regions, comprising a population that a colonial administrator described with characteristic candour as 'sparse and backward consisting principally of the simple aboriginal tribes' (Nelson 1909: 310). It was here that the child Shyama Charan took primary education, also making his first, distant acquaintance with the adivasi peoples of these estates. It was here too that his mother told him stories derived from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, tales of nationalist leaders, and legends of Hindu heroes, including Sikh Gurus; and Shyama himself brought out a magazine, 'Sevak', written by hand on un-ruled paper, his mother and father its sole readers. And it was amidst hill and forest that the little Shyama, barely eight years old, lost his vibrant young mother: Dharma, dying of tuberculosis, adored always by her husband and child, was unable in her last days to have either come close to her. Shyama Charan retained a vivid recall of these times, places, tales, feelings; and these memories became a palpable force—a structure of sentiment, a texture of experience—traversing his vocation and haunting his life.

After Dharma's death the father and son rebuilt their lives founded on loss—sorrow shared more than suffering spoken. Now, Shyama Charan studied in schools away from Chhattisgarh, first in Narsinghpur, living with his grandmother, and then at Model School in Jabalpur, lodging in the Boarding House there. During school vacations he would return to his father's home, books becoming his companions through solitary summer days and long winter nights. Away at school, but even more in a large house occupied by two inhabitants, with few acquaintances and no friends around, he read voraciously. 'I began with popular detective novels—Robert Blake and Sexton Blake—but soon graduated to serious fiction and poetry in Hindi, and later to classics in English' (Dube 1993: 24).³ Both in Hindi and

³ This short text primarily consists of Dube's autobiographical recollections of his times in anthropology/sociology and academic administration. I have quoted from it liberally in the earlier parts of this essay for two reasons. First,

English, the works he read included translations from other Indian and European languages. Reading was not all: 'While still in High School I began to write, and dashed off my efforts to magazines' (ibid.). These first efforts included pieces on popular cinema, their publication a matter of immense pride for the adolescent Shyama Charan. During these years his loneliness also led to an interest in the folklore of Chhattisgarh, a region that was to become the base of his writing and research for most of the 1940s.

Shyama Charan took the school-leaving examination in Hindi, apart from the obligatory papers in English language and literature. This was his nascent nationalist nod towards the live possibility of Indian languages and against the assumption that English alone was the medium of success. He performed well enough in this test but did not secure the results expected of him. Three months before the examination he had enrolled as a volunteer at the Tripuri Session of the Indian National Congress. At the meetings, the machinations of the old guard and the marginalization of the younger force within the Congress captured Shyama Charan's youthful passion and politics.⁴ The event itself was enormously demanding of his time and drained his energy, leaving him less than fully prepared for the final rite of passage out of High School. Dube's father's disappointment at his son's examination results was expressed in a single statement: 'I had not expected this of you.'

II. ENTERING ANTHROPOLOGY

For the Intermediate degree, Shyama Charan came to Raipur, joining Chhattisgarh College, which was affiliated to Nagpur University. Here he built upon his prior, extra-mural interests. While in his first year

such a move foregrounds the memory of Dube as subject, particularly when the passages are read alongside other materials and memories, setting up an interplay between distinct terms of remembrance. Second, the volume in which Dube's piece appears is often difficult to find, a result of poor distribution.

⁴ As is well known, it was in the Tripuri session that Subhas Bose was effectively sidelined after having been (re)elected as President of the Indian National Congress. Gandhi played an important role here (Sarkar 1983: 372–5).

of college, he wrote in Hindi and English on the folksongs and folktales of Chhattisgarh, the articles being published in journals such as *Hans*, *Modern review*, and *Vishal Bharat*.⁵ Somewhat later Shyama Charan also published a collection of Chhattisgarhi folksongs in the form of a small book, also in Hindi. As his range of interests expanded, he seemed—in his own remembrance—to be imperceptibly preparing the ground for a vocation in anthropology:

From folklore I moved to people, and wrote about their customs and traditions. The anthropologist within me was taking shape, although at that time I did not know what anthropology was all about. Around this time I came in contact with two tribal groups, the Kamar and Bhunjia. They came to my father with petitions or in connection with court cases that he was hearing. They would never spend the night in a town or in a mixed-caste settlement, retreating always to the jungle nearby. I liked their shy smiles and their openness. I persuaded them to sing, to tell stories, and to talk about their life and problems. I was irretrievably being drawn into anthropology. (Dube 1993: 24)

Yet these were contradictory times, their downs and ups partly excised by Dube's recollection of his entry into anthropology.

During his second year as a student of Chhattisgarh College, stricken by typhoid, he nearly died. Indeed, his state was so critical that the principal closed the college for a day in his remembrance. Luckily he survived, although his preparation for the Intermediate Examination consisted of a friend, Dashrath Chaube, reading from textbooks and supplementary texts to him. Shyama Charan nonetheless posted remarkable results. All this turned him into a local legend in a provincial town. It is hardly surprising that those around him felt that his future lay in entering the Indian Civil Service (ICS). I do not know how Shyama Charan looked upon this possibility at the time, but he

⁵ Needless to say, these were reputed and significant periodicals of the day. *Hans* and *Vishal Bharat* were flagship endeavours in Hindi writing inspired by Munshi Premchand and Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, respectively. Later, Dube would recall his enormous audacity in sending the articles to these journals, and his sense of utter disbelief and extraordinary excitement at their being accepted for publication.

wanted to offer his father a spectacular university career. After completing the Intermediate degree, inspired by Ziauddin Khan, his teacher of Civics (and a friend) in Raipur, in 1941 Shyama Charan enrolled for the BA (Honours) in Political Science at Nagpur University. He was now studying and living in the capital of the Central Provinces. His performance in the first year was exemplary, betokening a bright future.

During the Quit India movement various educational institutions closed down, Nagpur University among them. Shyama Charan returned to stay with his father, also visiting Raipur. While there, in those heady, stormy days, Shyama Charan and an acquaintance—possibly from Chhattisgarh College—engaged in a youthful prank, considering it as nationalist politics, as their own contribution to ridding India of British rule. They sought to burn a post box. The police caught them. The post box counted as crown property. A criminal case ensued. The details are not clear. Most people who knew Shyama Charan then accorded little significance to these events, but Dube himself emerged terribly shaken, refusing until the end of his life to talk about the matter, as was his way with unhappy memories. He had disappointed his father a second time, undoing, too, his own certainties regarding life and the future.

Back in Nagpur, Dube read widely for his elected subject, particularly works of political thought, even as he searched for a vocation. No longer envisioning the ICS as a possibility, but thinking about journalism as an option, he sent for the handbook of the Journalism Faculty at Columbia University. The other alternative he considered was anthropology; he tried to find out more about the subject. 'The library of Nagpur University did not have a rich collection of books on anthropology. . . . Grigson's *Maria Gonds of Bastar*; Elwin's *Baiga* . . . Christoph von Fürer Haimendorf's *Chenchus*; and Sarat Chandra Roy's *Kharia*. Later a copy of Lowie's *Primitive Society* was acquired. Frazer's formidable *Golden Bough* was also there. I read bits and pieces of it without much comprehension' (Dube 1993: 24–5). More concrete help came from an unexpected source: 'About this time I had a chance meeting with K.B. Lall, then an I.C.S. probationer. . . . He had studied anthropology for the I.C.S. examination in England. He spoke of the climate of British anthropology and the

debates around the approaches of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. As a model of analysis he suggested Malinowski's *Crime and Custom*, which he also generously lent me. I borrowed several other books from him. My ideas were still hazy but my mind was being made up . . .' (ibid).

Indeed, Dube soon decided upon a career in anthropology, beginning with a study of a tribe of hunter-gatherers and shifting-cultivators, the Kamar, for the PhD, which he would pursue in Nagpur University. Many of his well-wishers considered this a foolhardy move, particularly as he had secured a first division and first position in the BA Political Science (Honours) examination. Not only was he the first student to gain a first class in this examination at Nagpur University—it being a difficult programme of study that was equal to an MA in the subject, along the Madras (or Oxbridge) pattern, but also the university did not offer anthropology or sociology as subjects. Nonetheless, for the PhD project, Dube got generous support in the form of two research awards—the King Edward Memorial Research Scholarship and, a little later, the Morris Memorial Fellowship—of Nagpur University. He was to be supervised by the Political Science Department's A. Sen, who had popularized anthropology and sociology in Nagpur. And he was also advised to consult the man who had put Central India on the map of anthropology, Verrier Elwin.

III. FIRST FIELDWORK

Dube had established primary contacts with the Kamars in 1939, recording their folksongs and taking notes on their 'life and living'. Gradually, his collection of Kamar songs had grown and his interest in their 'culture' had increased, permitting him to publish representative examples of the former and a brief account of the latter. This work was enabled by continued visits to Kamar settlements that allowed him to acquire a working knowledge of the Kamari dialect, also conversing with the group in Chhattisgarhi, which many of its members spoke by the latter part of the inter-War period. Based upon this familiarity, Dube (1951: x) began his fieldwork for the PhD project on the Kamar in the second half of 1944, limiting his 'field to the southern part of the Raipur district in Chhattisgarh, specially to the still wild and backward Zamindari of Bindranawagarh'.

Aided by his father's contacts in the region, Dube began fieldwork accompanied by his friend, Dashrath Chaube, and a cartman-cum-cook, Polu Kewat.

My research procedure was simple. I had to record all that I saw and heard. The outline of the coverage was provided by the standard monographs and by the sacred *Notes and Queries* brought out by the Royal Anthropological Institute. I was in no tearing hurry to start interviewing my informants. I began instead by observing the physical aspects of the settlement and its daily routine. When young people went out to collect fruits, roots, and tubers, I accompanied them. I also joined their hunting and fishing expeditions. They mostly hunted small game—rabbits and barking deer, or an occasional wild hog or spotted deer. Night fishing was particularly thrilling. I also observed the sixth day ceremony for [a] newborn, two weddings, and a burial. This was occasion for me to witness several stages of the slash and burn method of cultivation. When people had opened up sufficiently I began asking questions. Most of my data was gathered through informal discussions. My Zeiss-Ikon SuperIkonta camera was also active, although because of wartime shortages film was hard to get and expensive. (Dube 1993: 26)

Yet, these idyllic days soon yielded to live difficulties. Now, the wider terms of the unequal encounter between the anthropologist and the subject became palpable:

I stayed in the wild and sparsely populated Bindranawagarh Zamindari, the home of the Kamars, from January to June 1945. Unfortunately, my tours of investigation in the Kamar country were preceded by a drive for recruitment to the labour units of the army. This created difficulties for me. A rumour went around that I had come to enlist the Kamars for war. Our initial efforts to establish contacts with the people were mostly fruitless, and on several occasions we found that on our approach the entire population of the village deserted it. The first few weeks were thus spent in disappointment. (Dube 1951: 8)

Almost fifty years after, Dube (1993: 26) added that his mistake lay in 'recording genealogies and taking a village census before I had established a proper rapport. I was recording their names, they thought, to conscript them into the army.' This was not all. There

were other differential perceptions as Dube (1951: x) ‘penetrated deeper into the field and visited Kamar settlements in the hills’, for, ‘Although I could speak their dialect I was still an outsider and therefore suspect. A taciturn elder did not take kindly to my camera. From him spread the notion that each time a person was photographed he lost a little bit of his “life-substance.” All I could do was show hundreds of enlargements of photographs that I had taken earlier in my research without bringing any calamity upon their subjects’ (Dube 1993: 26).

What allayed the Kamars’ suspicions? In the 1940s Dube had written of establishing ‘some valuable contacts’, of securing the ‘friendship of Dukalu, Sukalu, and Bhainsa, the celebrated Kamar Baiga’, which cleared earlier misgivings, leading to their ‘excellent co-operation’. In the early 1990s the ethnographer-ethnologist presented a more dramatic account concerning how he convinced the Kamars:

One afternoon I found myself surrounded by the inhabitants of the settlement. Their mood was ugly. No book had prepared me for a situation like this. I had a flash. I said, ‘I am young. When I go back the British may recruit me forcibly. That is why I am hiding here.’ A few smiles encouraged me to go on: ‘Keep me here. If there is a dumb-witted girl I will marry her. Never mind if she is ugly and has been deserted by her husband. But keep me here.’ There was a burst of laughter. The dark clouds of suspicion had cleared. The next day I was taking photographs and recording genealogies again, without a murmur of protest. (Dube 1993: 26–7)

The tensions between these accounts notwithstanding, the vignettes stand shaped around a specific story line, intimating unexpected hurdles to research, each overcome, all in the interest of anthropology. At the same time, folded into the accounts, including in Dube’s remembrance of the adventure and romance of fieldwork—lingering invocations of ‘cool and comfortable shelters’, of lurking wild animals kept at bay through fires lit at night and the beating of drums—there lie other tales. They point poignantly to Dube’s ambivalent presence as an anthropologist, at once ‘alien’ and ‘native’ among a tribal people, ‘primitive’ yet ‘his own’, in the midst of war and conscription—an ambivalence and a present that shaped the Kamar study.

In the months that followed, travelling on foot or in a bullock cart, Dube (1951: x) made 'an extensive tour of the wild hill-villages', also visiting Kamar settlements in the Khariar Zamindari in Orissa. Here he 'witnessed a number of important rites and ceremonies and recorded a very full sociological census of a number of important villages visited', further tracing nearly 200 genealogies. While these visits provided the mainstay of materials that underlay Dube's dissertation and book on the Kamar, the fieldwork itself was interspersed with an important interlude which was to have important consequences for his research and, indeed, his life.

Late in the first quarter of 1945 Dube came to Nagpur, possibly to collect his fellowship money from the university. Here he received an unusual proposal. Leela Ambardekar, then studying for an MA in Political Science, had heard of Shyama Charan, two years her senior, as a brilliant student. She had only recently told her parents that, rather than their seeking a suitable match for her, she would try to find herself a husband. Now, she had a glimpse of Shyama Charan: 'When I saw him he was wearing khadi clothes. I sought further information about Dube from my younger sister's husband who was acquainted with him. Dube belonged to a Hindi speaking Brahmin sub-caste, but did not feel compelled to marry within his biradri (endogamous group). He too was, opposed to dowry, rituals, and ostentation. He looked forward to an academic career' (L. Dube 2000: 4039). Leela's brother-in-law carried the proposal for marriage. Although the prospective groom was somewhat chary of marrying at the time, he agreed, stipulating that the wedding would only take place once he had a job, their decision approved of by Leela's parents and Dube's father. Dube soon resumed his research in the field.

Around this time Dube was offered a lecturership, teaching Political Science, in Hislop College at Nagpur, which he took up in July 1945. A little over a month later Leela and he were married in a simple civil ceremony. When Dube returned to the field in April 1946 he was accompanied by his wife. Collecting 'important data on tribal law and its breaches' while checking 'the materials collected in previous tours' (Dube 1951: x), his fieldwork was aided immensely by her presence. Not only did he find greater acceptance among the Kamars as a married man, Leela also helped secure invaluable

information—and a wider perspective—through her access to Kamar women. Although she had no formal anthropological training, she was already familiar with Dube's research, helping him with analysis of the data and the writing of the dissertation, which he had begun soon after their marriage. Back in Nagpur, Dube completed and submitted his dissertation on the Kamar, helped 'unobtrusively' by his formal supervisor, Shri Sen, and aided by the warmth and support of Verrier Elwin, his unofficial advisor. As an examiner of the thesis, Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf appreciated the work, finding it comprehensive and capable. The dissertation was to provide Dube's first monograph, *The Kamar*, but this had to await moves to other institutions.

IV. INVIGORATING TIMES

Teaching Political Science in a small institution was confining Dube. There was little by way of sustained anthropological debate and discussion in Nagpur. Meeting senior figures in the discipline, such as D.N. Majumdar and Irawati Karve—both of whom delivered endowment lectures in Nagpur University—and attending the occasional anthropological event was exciting, but these encounters perhaps also enhanced Dube's larger sense of intellectual isolation. Majumdar drew him into the board of editors of the newly launched *Eastern anthropologist* and also published a collection of Chhattisgarhi folk-songs by Dube (1948) under the auspices of the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society of UP, but even this did not alleviate the intellectual loneliness. In the second half of 1947 Dube hesitatingly applied for, and in the following year delightedly accepted, the position of Lecturer in Political Science at Lucknow University.

Around the time of Independence, Lucknow University was a remarkable institution. Here Dube learnt about ecology and regional planning from Radhakamal Mukerjee, picking up 'valuable ideas about the importance of tradition' from D.P. Mukerji. Above all, he interacted professionally with D.N. Majumdar, whose 'zest for anthropology was infectious. He lived anthropology, talked anthropology, and, I suspect, even dreamt anthropology. We talked about the gaps in the ethnographic map of India and of the monographs

that remained to be written; and about how anthropology could be useful in the administration of tribal areas' (Dube 1993: 30). These discussions were based upon concrete collaboration. On the one hand, in addition to his duties in the Political Science Department, Dube was assigned classes in anthropology—teaching economic organisation, social organisation, and religion—for a few hours a week, sharing Majumdar's burden. On the other, Dube was an active volunteer in the activities of the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society, recently founded by Majumdar, also assisting his senior colleague in the running of the Society's journal, *Eastern anthropologist*.

In Lucknow, Dube met keen academic challenges alongside wider intellectual stimulation. Beyond anthropology, there were conversations with other scholars, an engagement with other disciplines. Beyond academics, there was lively political interchange, meetings in the Coffee House with important public figures, representing a range of political persuasions, from Communists to Lohiaites to Congressmen, including the occasional presence of a charismatic parliamentarian, Feroze Gandhi. Dube read widely, delving into the rich collection at the Tagore Library of the University. He also began systematically building a personal library that cut across disciplines and included various literatures, buying from two superb bookshops, Universal and Ram Advani.

In this invigorating atmosphere, Dube finalised the Kamar study for publication. Already, before his move to Lucknow, the work was quite complete. By way of a commendation of the manuscript, possibly in order to help Dube secure a subsidy towards its publication, Verrier Elwin had sent him a handwritten note in June 1947:

I have had the pleasure of reading Mr S.C. Dube's MSS on the Kamars. It is a substantial contribution to Indian anthropology. It is thorough, fresh, well-written and gives a clear and vivid picture of the life of the tribe. Mr Dube evidently has a future in anthropology, and I hope it will be possible for his work to be published in the style it deserves. . . . I again commend Mr Dube's work as of high excellence and as among the best by an Indian writer of recent times.

In Lucknow, Dube partially revised and mainly polished the manuscript.

The Kamar was published under the auspices of the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society, Majumdar extending a great deal of practical support to the project. The work bore the impress of discussions with Majumdar on the application of anthropology to the administration of tribal communities. Deeper anthropological influences upon the study came from Dube's long-term engagement with the work of Elwin and his ongoing exchanges with Fürer-Haimendorf. At the same time, he registered a particular voice in the book, providing a distinct twist to Elwin's primitivist blueprints of anthropological practice, bypassing Fürer-Haimendorf's diffusionist concerns—these being characteristic of the Vienna School. Dube's first monograph marks a specific moment in the passage of Indian anthropology.

V. TRIBE AND NATION

At the time, Dube saw the work as a contribution to the anthropology of the Central Provinces. The book has a simple structure. Its introduction lays out the basics of the Kamar country, earlier accounts of the tribe, and their attributes. The next three chapters describe, successively, the nature of Kamar settlements and forms of livelihood; their patterns of social organization; and the phases in their lives. The ensuing two chapters discuss customary law through its provisions and transgressions, sanctions and containments; and myths and legends, ritual and religion, magic and witchcraft. The last two chapters explore questions of 'cultural contacts' and issues of 'tribal adjustment' under a nationalist dispensation. Recall that Dube had described his approach to anthropology in *The Kamar* as being governed by the standard monograph and the *Notes and Queries* format. This actually led to a comprehensive presentation of ethnographic materials, based upon careful fieldwork, enlivened by an anthropological sensitivity which was related to Dube's wider familiarity with region and subject. In addition, through brevity of style and economy of expression, Dube averted the inelegance of the grab-all, salvage-baggage ethnography that confused volume with knowledge (see Madan 1996: 300).

But the significance of the work might also be traced in other ways. *The Kamar* lies in a cusp: the end of colonial rule and the arrival

of Indian independence. The study was shaped by presumptions of the prior 'primitive', the 'savage slot' (Trouillot 1991) within colonial ethnography, and yet it referred to Kamar life-ways as embedded within wider social processes. It cast its subjects as caught within the larger terms of nationalist transformation, but nonetheless constantly returned to an essential Kamar tradition. Such tension does not merely register a shift of accent in the study between portions written earlier and sections drafted later. Nor is the tension simply disabling. Rather, the tension is formative for the book, running through its chapters. This is to say that *The Kamar* captures and contains the ambiguities and ambivalences of S.C. Dube's thought and writing—themselves indicative of anxieties at the heart of his discipline—at a critical juncture, uneasily braiding anthropological demand and nationalist desire, raising questions for ethnographic practice in the shadow of empire and nation.⁶

The formative tensions and productive ambiguities of *The Kamar* appear bound to the style, structure, and sentiment of the work. Dube considered that primitive cultures were not static but dynamic, especially since culture itself was an adaptive mechanism. Here the notion of the primitive entailed twin registers. On the one hand it signified backwardness upon an evolutionist axis, a self-explanatory schema assumed *a priori*, the dominant vision of anthropology and nation at the time. On the other hand it registered cultural difference, coeval with the ethnographer, in the space of the nation, which invited empathetic understanding. Thus, in the study, the imperative to describe the Kamar way of life before it changed crisscrosses with the

⁶ I am not suggesting that Dube's first ethnographic monograph prematurely reconciled these contrary tendencies. Rather, my point is that the text is the site where such contradictory pressures are visible, the terrain where these tensions were set in motion, also revealing and unravelling the conjunctions and disjunctions between anthropological frames and nationalist formulations. Just as prejudice is not merely a mistake but can also be productive of a truth, so too are contradictions more than just lapses. My effort to stay with the tensions that were constitutive of work such as *The Kamar* is to point towards archival traces in the history of anthropology and the past of nationalism that require further examination. For a rich exploration of middle-class dispositions to the figure of the 'primitive' in colonial India, see Banerjee, 2006.

impulse to record the changing way of life of the Kamar, the dual dispositions pulling apart but also coming together.

The Kamar cast the economy of its subjects as being in transition, showing at crucial points that their social structure and oral traditions stood shaped by interactions with other tribes. At the same time, precisely through its terms of description, the work clung to the notion that the Kamars had not lost the 'distinctiveness of their tribal culture which shows very few signs of disintegration and degeneration' (Dube 1951: 177). Dube wrote of the Kamars as singing of 'the Englishman's *raj*, where *kantopwalas* (hat-wearers) used to rule', and mentioned their 'seriously talk[ing] about Gandhi Mahatma, *the king of all kings* . . . endowed with greater magical powers to fight the white *sahibs*' (ibid.: 166). Poignantly, he recorded that the Kamars 'talk despisingly about the Englishman who put an end to their age old practice of *dahi* [shifting cultivation]. With suspicion they talk of the *suraj* [*swaraj*], the reign of the Congress, in which "liquor may be completely forbidden to them" and "they may not be allowed to eat any meat" nor will "they be permitted to have two wives or more". They are afraid that in this new epoch they may even lose the semblance of freedom which they possessed under the British rule' (ibid.: 166). Yet Dube described the Kamars as 'almost untouched' by the 'great political awakening which has given a new national consciousness to India during the last sixty years', and as barely affected by the 'social and economic upheaval which had stirred the bulk of Indian society to its depth' (Dube 1951: 166). The narrative holds together, but it also strains at the seams.

The tension is palpable, the strands intertwine, each constitutive of *The Kamar*. For it is this strain and such braiding that suggest the need to approach the work in a manner that does not simply assimilate it to Elwin's propositions regarding tribal segregation or Ghurye's calls for tribal assimilation (on this debate, see Guha 1999: 155–60, 274–5), especially when Dube deals with the problem of tribal 'adjustment' in front of national reconstruction. Here analytical predilections, ethnographic sensibilities, and nationalist imperatives appear bound and separate, paternalist but also democratic, presenting the Kamars as at once object of anthropology and subject of nation. Long decades after, recalling how the book had stopped short of

describing the quotidian forms of exploitation of the Kamars, the abuse and corruption of local officials, and of the Kamars' questioning of everyday domination through their 'improvised skits', Dube (1993: 27) wrote that 'we really were the prisoners of a pattern.' Actually, the very tensions and the precise ambivalences of *The Kamar* hold up a mirror to the *pattern*, suggesting the need for readings that reconsider the chequered history of Indian anthropology.

The profession was pleased with the book for its own reasons. In his Foreword to the study, Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (1951: i) praised Dube's 'lucid and sympathetic description of the Kamars, a tribe hitherto practically unknown to anthropology.' An unsigned review, which appeared in *The Hindu*, carried a slightly different flavour:

Mr Dube's book on the Kamar is a pleasant surprise, for it is published in a series sponsored by the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society of Lucknow, which includes some of the most inferior work done in the field of Indian anthropology—and that is saying a good deal. But Mr Dube's monograph is admirable. It is the result of long and careful research; it shows a sufficient acquaintance with technical method and theory; it is simply and unpretentiously written. It obviously belongs to the Elwin school of writing, and Mr Dube in several passages echoes the ideas and methods of such a book as 'The Baiga'.⁷

Writing in *The illustrated weekly of India*, Elwin himself reiterated the terms of such critique and praise, finding *The Kamar* 'quite brilliantly illustrated': 'Dr Dube gives us really lovely photographs well reproduced. The text, too, is good. Dr Dube knows his people and wants the best for them. His chapter on "Problems of Tribal Adjustment" should be read by all Ministers of Tribal Welfare.' But then the twist: 'Unfortunately, the book appears in a series sponsored by the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society of Lucknow, whose previous publications are masterpieces of shoddy scholarship. Dr Dube should keep better company.' On the one hand Elwin was seriously

⁷ In a few cases, including this one, I have been unable to trace the full reference to reviews of Dube's works. Nonetheless, I have cited these, providing the bibliographic information that I have for them in the text.

concerned about poor publication qualities, a worry expressed in the commendation note that he had sent Dube in June 1947: 'Much good work in this line [of anthropology] in India is spoilt by bad printing and wretched reproduction of pictures. It is essential that Mr Dube's work be handled by a responsible publisher.' On the other hand Elwin used *The Kamar* to criticise Majumdar, who was a rival, further aligning Dube's work with his own writing.

Away from this struggle for turf in Indian anthropology, J.H. Hutton (1952: 77) at Cambridge wrote a generous review of the work in *Man*, emphasising that:

Dr Dube has aimed at giving a full and integrated picture of the Kamar culture and has done it well; and beyond that he has dealt with the problems arising from the contact of these primitive hunters and cultivators . . . with the external world of officials, traders and money-lenders, at whose hands they suffer the victimization and exploitation so familiar to all of India's primitive tribes. His treatment of these problems and his views as to the measures which need to be taken are moderate and sane, and might well be acted upon by those now in authority. . . . Dr Dube is to be congratulated on his careful and objective work.

At the same time, outside India, the best known of Dube's work in tribal anthropology is a concise essay on 'token pre-puberty marriage' (1953), also published in *Man* and widely cited within the discipline. Dube himself was in the midst of a journey from tribe to village.

VI. VILLAGE WORK

Much before *The Kamar* was published, and after a stay of less than two years in Lucknow, Dube was invited to Hyderabad for an interview. Here Fürer-Haimendorf served as Advisor on Tribal Welfare to the Nizam's Government while holding the position of Professor of Anthropology in the Sociology Department at Osmania University. He was soon to leave India and had suggested that Dube replace him, at an appropriately junior rank, in the university. Following a meeting over a drink with the vice-chancellor, Nawab Ali Yavar Jung, at the Secundarabad Club, Dube was formally interviewed the next

day under informal circumstances and offered the position. After a moving farewell from Lucknow University, home to an eventful, productive period and one piercingly painful memory—during this time the Dubes had lost their first child, a girl, who died some days after birth—they found a home in yet another urban centre of Indian Islam, Hyderabad.

Amidst somewhat eccentric, rather colourful, yet appropriately supportive colleagues, Dube reorganised the syllabi in his new location, teaching a general introduction to anthropology, a survey of the history of ethnological theory, and a course on ethnography. While none of these was entirely innovative, the latter two courses introduced aspects of recent developments in the discipline and comparative perspectives on tribal cultures. But it was research that truly occupied Dube in Hyderabad. On Fürer-Haimendorf's suggestion that he work on a tribe in the region, Dube had explored possible projects in adivasi pockets in the Andhra country, witnessing in the process ruthless killings by the police of communists and their sympathisers. Yet the research he eventually undertook was wholly different: the study of a village, Shamirpet, located in the Telangana region, twenty-five miles from the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad.

The project was an outcome of the shared imaginings of a seasoned, visionary administrator and a young, ambitious scholar:

the result of a conjunction of two somewhat dissimilar ideas. Ali Yavar Jung . . . had in mind an experimental rural social service extension project in which the different faculties of the university could pool their insights and resources to work for the uplift of the village. I was thinking of an in-depth study of a non-tribal village, different from the hundreds of surveys done by governmental agencies. The inputs of the several specialist units could enrich my study, which itself could serve as a benchmark for later extension work. Ali Yavar Jung recognized the fit between the two objectives and gave me the go-ahead to draw up a comprehensive plan. (Dube 1993: 32)

The choice of Shamirpet combined practical and sociological considerations. Not too far for project members to reach and return on

the same day, the village was more than merely a suburban extension; and in terms of its size (area as well as population) and caste composition, Shamirpet was representative of villages of the region.

The project team consisted of eighteen members drawn from six faculties—Arts, Agriculture, Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry, Medicine, Engineering, and Education—of Osmania University. Each unit carried out a research survey and conducted social work in the area of its interest and competence. The units had considerable autonomy with respect to social work, limited chiefly by the funds and resources available to them. At the same time, Dube and four other members of the Sociology Department designed the different surveys, also helping in the conduct of research by all units at every stage.⁸ The inter-faculty team carried out twenty weeks of work over two summer vacations, while the anthropology/sociology unit was active in Shamirpet for an entire year. Dube himself divided his time between Shamirpet, where he directed both the welfare and research activities of the project, and Hyderabad, home to teaching, administration, and family life with Leela and their new-born son Mukul.

On the one hand, given its novel objective of village welfare and rural research as part of nation building in a former princely state—a 'feudal' terrain—the project attracted from the beginning considerable attention in the press, including a documentary film on the venture. This tended to draw curious visitors and onlookers, their presence often annoying and aggravating, a difficulty resolved partially and gradually. On the other hand, the villagers themselves were at first sullen and suspicious, regarding the project as a missionary endeavour and then as anti-communist government propaganda, their apprehensions allayed in steps:

⁸ These members from the Sociology Department were research assistants on the project, mainly students who had recently finished their MA from Osmania University. Apart from Dube, the Sociology Department at Osmania included a guest lecturer, Nawab Mansab Jang Bahadur, and a professional sociologist, Jafar Hasan, neither of them involved in the Shamirpet project (Dube 1993: 31). In the context of a social work project, this also meant that Dube was the only one who produced an academic account (ethnographic or otherwise) based on the work of the project.

our resources, especially our tents, crockery and cooks and buses impressed them. The co-operation of highly placed officials rehabilitated us in the eyes of the village folk, and many of them who went to the city and made enquiries about us from educated relations returned to the village satisfied about our credentials. But more than all this, the excellent work of the Medical Unit established rapport with the community, and the sympathetic welfare activities of the Agriculture, Veterinary and Education units further helped us to establish more intimate contacts with the people. They were benefiting by our presence. . . . This changed the attitude of the people considerably. To begin with the investigators making anthropological enquiry were regarded as a nuisance; now they [we] were tolerated as inquisitive but friendly outsiders. In a few days there was a change for the better. We had never talked politics or religion, there was no propaganda or attempt at reform and no superiority of city-ways and sneering at the rustic ways of the village people in our attitude. Indifference turned into warmth and friendship, and at this point we intensified our anthropological investigations. (Dube 1955: 14–15)

The passage speaks for itself and of the texture of the times, optimistically straddling the instrumentality of fieldwork and empathy for its subjects, easily intertwining the means of rural welfare and the ends of village anthropology.

Beginning with a general sociological census, the anthropological enquiries of the project focused upon themes of social, economic, ritual, kinship, and family structure of the village. Here, an important role was played by intensive investigations by means of a selected sample of 120 families (out of a total of 380)—representing different castes and religions, at distinct levels of income, education, and urban contact—together with eighty episodic and topical life-histories and eleven full biographies, recorded through free-association interviews. Besides, the social sciences team used ‘the established method of participant observation and the usual techniques of anthropological enquiry’, also studying carefully available village records (Dube 1955). Surveys on diet and nutrition, village agriculture, and animal care provided useful, supplementary information. As a team endeavour, engaging the joint energies of several members, the research conducted by the Osmania project on Shamirpet village was wide-ranging

in its sweep and depth. At the end, Dube (1993: 32) had 'three-thousand sheets of notes neatly typed and systematically classified.'

Even as the project was under way, Dube received an invitation from Fürer-Haimendorf in London to spend a year as Visiting Lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Resolving to write up the study of Shamirpet over his year abroad, during the late summer in Hyderabad, from June to August 1952, Dube immersed himself in the notes and data, sketching an outline, preparing tables, and producing a tentative draft of two chapters. Sailing a month later, he reached London. Amidst seminars and lectures, lodging in the home of the archaeologist couple Raymond and Bridget Allchin, with a social life largely limited to academic acquaintances, working up to fourteen hours a day, Dube read widely even as he searched for means of giving shape to the materials at hand:

My main difficulty was that I had no model for my study. The complexity of working on the caste system made everything so different and difficult. Redfield's studies and many other books on villages around the world were helpful, but they could not solve several of my problems. The Wisers's *Behind mud walls* was limited in scope, and the village surveys of the time were tilted toward economic rather than sociological data. I was aware that some studies were in the pipeline. M.N. Srinivas was doing a Mysore village. With his cooperation the *Economic weekly* . . . was publishing a series of studies done by anthropologist and sociologists, including one by me, though it was not on Shamirpet. There was news that McKim Marriott at Chicago University had planned a symposium volume on village India, but its contents were not known to me. As I was working on a tight schedule, I had to find my own way. (Dube 1993: 33)

Dube's aim was an integrated account of an Indian village community, providing a feel of its fabric, conveying a sense of its texture. Two seminars helped him shape such a study: his own at the School of Oriental and African Studies; and that of Raymond Firth at the London School of Economics, where Dube presented some of his materials and arguments. In each case, the imperatives of clear exposition and the responses to his presentations proved crucial to the framing and the writing of his work.

Once the manuscript was complete, Dube sought the ‘professional opinion’ of a senior colleague: ‘Raymond Firth agreed to read the typescript, and with some trepidation I handed it over to him. Ten days later he asked me to lunch at the LSE. On his desk rested my typescript, with the brief notation “First Rate—R.F.” My vegetarian meal in the senior dining room could not have tasted better’ (Dube 1993: 33). Firth also felt that the work deserved a quality publisher: he sent the manuscript over to Routledge and Kegan Paul. Not much later, Dube received a letter of acceptance: the book was to form part of RKP’s prestigious series, *The International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction*.

Constitutive of *Indian village* (1955) is simplicity of style and ease of exposition. Setting out to provide ‘a clear and intimate picture of some aspects of life in one Indian village’ (ibid.: 15), Dube singularly succeeded in the endeavour. From Shamirpet’s physical, historical, and demographic attributes, to its social, economic, caste, political, and ritual structure(s), to its ethos and ambience, the book presented a compelling, vivid portrait of the village. This led Morris Opler (1955: vii) to describe the work as ‘a total study, not in the sense that it gives us all possible details concerning the village Shamirpet, but in the sense that it presents between its two covers all important aspects of the culture of this community.’ Here the descriptive devices and narrative techniques of the book were bound to its terms of theory. A latent functionalism unobtrusively woven into the texture of the account, the presentation of dominant norms and main variations—with personality often projected as ‘explaining’ the latter—shoring up the description, a tight terminology entwined with the narration, in the book analytical categories and empirical materials were imbricated in each other. As Edmund Leach wrote, in an unsigned review, in *The times* (London): ‘Dr Dube describes his book as a “descriptive” study and at the level of description it is unsurpassed. The moral atmosphere and facts of day-to-day life are well conveyed. It is perhaps a sign of this richness of matter that problems of theory change.’⁹ Dube’s concern with social change, interest in

⁹ Leach was suggesting that the book delivered marvellously at the level of description, but that there was also more to the work. With theoretical considerations woven between the lines, quietly organising the study, the very richness

the 'binding forces in Indian culture' (Opler 1955: ix), engagement with issues of 'civilisation' on the subcontinent (Yogendra Singh, interview, 2002), and insights into 'psychological' dimensions (McKim Marriott, interview, 2002) rounded off the picture.

Yet Dube's fluid, graceful prose, seamlessly binding the analytic and the empirical, also contains contrary strains lying at the heart of the narrative. Let me turn here to the tension between the presence of history and the present of anthropology—or the push and pull between projections of a village shaped by the past, and propositions regarding a community out of time—which are at the core of *Indian village*. In his account Dube (1953: 3–7) not only questioned the notion of an entirely 'representative' village, casting matters instead in terms of the important distinctions and structural similarities between villages in India, but also argued that 'we cannot regard the Indian village community as static, timeless and changeless. Time and the interplay of historical and sociological factors and forces have influenced the structure, organization and ethos of these communities in many significant ways.' Yet, in the narrative, transformations through time primarily made their appearance at the opening and the close of the account, the first steps its framing devices, the last strides its masterful finale—a comprehensive chapter describing the changes in the village in the past and present.

This is to say that the work of history is not absent from *Indian village*. On the one hand such labour inhabits the edges of the account, intimating its ends, marking a breach between change and transformation that come from outside the village, and continuity and stability that inhere within the community, a divide between external history and internal structure. On the other hand the narrative equally presents historical processes and contemporary developments as encompassing the village, thereby further inserting and instituting Shamirpet in a lasting ethnographic present, descriptively a place in history, analytically an entity out of time. These twin attributes are a result of the structure of the work, and of its style of writing, which work in tandem. For example, the organisation of *Indian*

of the materials presented in the book meant that it raised new questions for anthropological theory.

village and *The Kamar* bear a family resemblance, each discussing the changes affecting its subjects at the end. Yet, while Dube's exploratory prose in his first monograph could not rein in the transformations of 'tradition' among the Kamars—despite wider predilections concerning an unmoving social structure, registering its reworking over time in the middle of the account—in his second study an accomplished, elegant writing style managed to neatly fit such tensions into the flow of the work.¹⁰

Such questions of substance and style have wide implications. André Béteille (1996: 811) has hinted that a critical reading of *Indian village* today would consist of revisiting the work in light of what we have come to know of villages on the subcontinent since its publication. In addition, it seems to me, such a task equally entails con-

¹⁰ When focusing on an Indian anthropologist studying Indian society soon after Indian independence, to pose matters in this manner is to indicate the importance of revisiting and extending issues of the 'denial of coevalness' (Fabian 1983) between the anthropologist author and the native subject, questions of the presence of 'never, never lands' (Cohn 1980) and the 'savage slot' (Trouillot 1991; see also, Trouillot 2002: 848–55) in ethnography, problems of the persistence of 'enchanted spaces and modern places' (S. Dube 2002, 2004) and 'exotics at home' (di Leonardi 1998) in social worlds. This is to say that the contrary tracks of the timeless object of an enquiry/civilisation which is also the coeval subject of a nation/knowledge require further investigation. The point equally holds for other anthropological works on South Asia, such as those that appeared around the time of Dube's book, including collections of village studies (Srinivas 1955; Marriott 1955) and Srinivas's (1952) seminal study of the Hindu Coorgs (which had, however, also earlier seen a different incarnation under the supervision of G.S. Ghurye in the 1940s). To ask such questions is to be vigilant about how metropolitan theory came to be translated in practice in its application in the academic context of a new nation, such procedures equally holding a mirror to the contradictory strains that could shore up metropolitan anthropology. All this is also to consider further the legacy afforded to the post-Independence sociology of India by the prior presence, the extended tradition, of colonial and nationalist writings on the village in the subcontinent (see Inden 1990: 131–51), especially if it is admitted that colonial modalities of 'knowledge/power' themselves shifted from the 'historical' to the 'ethnographic' (Dirks 2001) between the first half of the nineteenth century and the last ninety years of imperial rule.

sideration of how later village studies, too many to recount here, were influenced by the terms of writing—both implicit assumptions and explicit descriptions—of Dube's work, bracketing ethnography from history, forging a tendentious relationship between anthropological structure and historical process.

Indian village received wide acclaim and attained an extraordinary success. As 'the first book on a single village' (Mandelbaum 1956: 579) in post-Second World War South Asia, it was a key statement of the wider shift from tribe to village in Indian anthropology, a work presented further as part of the movement away from studies of 'isolated' groups toward writings on 'modern' communities in the discipline at large (Dube 1955: 8–13). André Béteille (interview, 2002) recalls that as a college student in the late 1950s, *Indian village* appeared to him as embodying meaningful, relevant anthropology, distant from the dead weight of tribal studies, providing for his own arguments in discussions with friends such as the economist Sukhomoy Chakravarty. The book's contents and close connections with a collective project of social welfare carried intrinsic interest in an India aiming at directed change in rural areas through Five Year Plans. The work's moorings in a multidisciplinary team endeavour captured the attention of social science scholars in post-Second World War US, where collective research projects signalled the mood and interest, sensibility and ambition of departments of the state and the academy (see Cohn 1996: 11–15; Geertz 1995: 99–109). The intimacy of the account and its straightforward nature led to mentions of Dube's 'Indian background and Western scientific training' as providing him with a 'double insight' (*The new statesman*); of his exploiting 'to the full his advantages as a man of the country to gain that kind of information and insight usually denied to the Western sociologist in India' (*The times literary supplement*).

The work blended with the times, making *Indian village* something of a flagship endeavour of social sciences in a young, independent India—generously cited, drawn upon as a model monograph, and heavily used in teaching in various parts of the world. It had several hardcover and paperback editions in the UK, USA, and India, and came to be widely excerpted and translated in Indian and foreign languages. Reviewing the book in *Rural sociology*, James Silverberg

(1955: 332) had commented that it provided an 'excellent' basis for 'measuring' directed change and the impact of technological factors, further wondering about the fate of India's community development programme in Shamirpet. Indeed, this was the direction and drift of Dube's next book, even as he relocated his research in North India.

VII. TWO VILLAGES AND THE NATION

Soon after his return from London, Dube very nearly left the academy. Selected for the high-powered Indian Frontier Administrative Service, which was later merged with the Indian Administrative Service, Dube was a younger member of an elite corps handpicked to work in the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). After a brief meeting with Nehru in the presence of Elwin, Dube underwent a month's training in Delhi as he awaited his first posting. Then, at the last moment, he declined the appointment. Much later Dube (1993: 35) recalled that, while this was not a case of his developing 'cold feet', he had realised that the move would mean a farewell to academic anthropology. The statement, it seems to me, tells us only partly why Dube took the final decision at such a late stage. At the time, there were other opportunities waiting in the wings, taking Dube toward questions of community development.

During his stay at SOAS, Dube had participated in Claude Lévi-Strauss's seminars in London on questions of myth, making interventions there that drew upon adivasi legends, myths, and stories, especially from Central India. Based on these contacts, towards the end of his year in London he received an invitation to a UNESCO roundtable in Paris on the human implications of technological development, organised by Lévi-Strauss. While he had discussed aspects of social change in his first two books, the roundtable provided Dube with 'an abiding interest in planned change and its human dimensions' (Dube 1993: 35). A little after Dube's brief flirtation with joining administration, two developments permitted him to translate this interest into a concrete study.

Among the different multidisciplinary projects on newly independent nations launched within the US academy after the Second World War, the Cornell India Project, directed by Morris Opler,

focused on villages in North India. Opler was enthusiastic about Dube's work—recall that he had written the Foreword to *Indian village*—and now invited his Indian colleague to join the project, the offer consisting of a year of fieldwork in UP, and then a year as a visiting professor of anthropology and Far Eastern studies at Cornell University. Equally, at this time, India's community development programme had been launched amidst great expectations, and with even greater fanfare. The Secretary of the Planning Commission, Tarlok Singh, wanted Dube to play a role in evaluating the programme. Dube himself was keen to get a grassroots perspective on the responses to these initiatives. Dube accepted Opler's offer to join the Cornell India Project, choosing to focus on the community development programme at work in UP villages, and was left free to devise his own terms for the study.

During 1954–5 the Dubes were part of the Rankhandi Field-Station of the Cornell project. Conducting research along with other scholars—among them John Gumperz, Michael and Pauline Mahar, and Leigh Minturn—Dube had four associates as part of his own study: Leela Dube, Raghuraj Gupta, R. Prakash Rao, and Tuljaram Singh. The aim was to analyse and evaluate a wholly rural community development project—especially the responses it engendered—covering slightly over 150 villages. The team carried out an in-depth study of two villages, 'Rajput' village with a population of slightly over 5000 people, and 'Tyagi' village with around 750 inhabitants. The research procedure primarily consisted of fieldwork among officials and villagers, using extensive interviews and wide-ranging surveys, and the study of materials generated by the community development programme. The work was carried out under the leadership of Dube, but the team members also took up specific aspects of the study more individually—for example, Leela Dube took care of research among women in the villages.

At the end of the year in the field, during the late summer of 1955, the Dubes left for upstate New York, the data from the Rankhandi research shipped to Ithaca. Here they found a stimulating academic atmosphere and keen intellectual interlocutors, but Dube also had to shoulder a heavy teaching load, consisting of a graduate seminar on culture and change in India, and large parts of both a

seminar on anthropological theory and a survey course on Asia with a very large number of students. Living close to campus, Dube worked prodigiously to write up the study, assisted in his analysis of the data by Leela, while Prakash Rao and Tuljaram Singh continued to provide help from the field. The time away from this hectic schedule primarily consisted of travel for talks and seminars, including a memorable visit to Chicago at the invitation of Robert Redfield. In the end Dube completed the manuscript three days before leaving Ithaca, submitting it to Cornell University Press on the eve of his departure, and handing it over to Routledge and Kegan Paul in London en route to India.

Quite possibly, the work was completed too quickly, finished too fast. In *India's changing villages: Human factors in community development* (1958) the writing is clear, the style adequate: but there is something somewhat un-weighty about it. If the neatness of *Indian village* was the strength of the study—as well as containing its tensions—in its sequel the structure was too linear, the materials too modular. It is not only that the first four chapters of *India's changing villages* largely detailed a community development project and its work through mainly descriptive and statistical commentary, it is also that such terms of organization, these requirements of writing, cast a tangible shadow upon its later, more imaginative and analytic chapters which discuss questions of communication and issues of culture in community development.

The departures, distinctions, and difficulties of *India's changing villages* entail each other. Here, the key departure derived from the focus of the study on actions of the state, the building of the nation. Several decades before ethnographic considerations of the state became important in the discipline (e.g. Axel 2001; Fuller and Bénéï 2000; Gupta 1998; Hansen 1999), Dube's work gestured towards anthropological apprehensions of the interplay between nation and village, articulated by protagonists seen as subjects moulding the present, rather than as peoples of 'never never' lands. If the concerns of the book intersected with those of wider area-studies projects launched in the US academe in the 1950s, the distinction of the work emerged in the ways such interests and apprehensions were sieved through the filters of a nationalist provenance, being imbued thereby

with a specific salience.¹¹ Yet, precisely these measures of the work appear orchestrated and overdetermined by its construal of a specific sociology uncertainly in and out of the tracks of the state, the grooves of governance, its envisioning of anthropology in the looking-glass of the nation. Now, my quick remarks do not form a total appraisal, intimating instead possible, critical-constructive readings of the contrary archival traces of state and nation in Indian anthropology/sociology. Here can be readings that might even pick up quotidian configurations of state and everyday formations of nation, which are embedded as details, especially in the latter part of *India's changing villages*—an authoritative account that was yet unable to entirely stamp out such stubborn, recalcitrant residues.

The work did not entirely live up to the expectations aroused by its predecessor. A part of the problem, as McKim Marriott (1958: 192) pointed out, concerned the title of the study, which implied a link with Shamirpet of *Indian village* and an account of changes in Indian villages, though the book had nothing to do with the Deccan village and primarily discussed villagers' 'responses' to change. (Calling the work *India's changing villages* was a decision of Routledge and Kegan Paul; Dube's preferred title, *Human factors in community development* was used by the publisher as the subtitle.) The larger difficulty concerned the nature of the work, which meant that although the scholarly response to the book was broadly enthusiastic, it did not necessarily consist of critical acclaim and academic accolade. Nonetheless, as T.N. Madan (interview, 2002) put it: 'In the

¹¹ Interestingly, Dube's study was the only one in the Cornell-India project that focused on efforts at nation-building through community development and village welfare. The other scholars at the Rankhandi station, all from the US, pursued more conventional ethnographic, social-scientific, and linguistic enquiries (e.g. Gumperz 1958; Minturn and Hitchcock, 1966; yet see also Gumperz 1957). Apart from Dube, the other Indians on the project based in western UP were academic associates, research assistants, and interpreters. There were few dissensions here of the kind that led to D.N. Majumdar's criticism of the conduct of the Cornell-India project in another part of UP. Nor did Dube's association with the project affect his relations with Majumdar (L. Dube, interview 2003).

1950s, Dube and Srinivas were showing the way for Indian anthropology.' The real success of *India's changing villages* came from its use in administrative programmes in third world nations, questions of modernisation and development themselves central to Dube's thought and writing in the following decades.

At the same time, even before the book was published, the Dubes had moved from Hyderabad. Here is how Dube (1993: 37) recalled the events:

On my return from Cornell I was keen to remain in Hyderabad. C.D. Deshmukh, Chairman of the University Grants Commission, suggested the creation of a research professorship for me with the Commission's support; but this idea did not materialize as there was a clause in the university's statutes which prescribed thirty-five years as the minimum age for a professor. In retrospect I feel that I should not have become sore about the snag, but I was young then and very sensitive. I decided to leave Hyderabad. Within a month I had a senior position in the Anthropological Survey of India and a few months later I was appointed to the chair of Anthropology at the University of Saugar. I was still under thirty-five and had made my point.

As at many other points in Dube's life, success was shadowed by sorrow. Not much after the move to Sagar, Dube's father—who had taken early retirement to live at his son's—took a journey alone to Amarkantak, dying on the way.

VIII. AFTERWARDS

It is time to end the detailed description, but not to terminate the tale. How are we to apprehend Dube's later vocation and work? In broad strokes, there are two kinds of orientations to the life and work of a figure such as Dube—two dispositions that find everyday expression and public pronouncement within the academic world. The first concerns projections of Dube's important earlier studies giving way to synthetic, thinner, general pronouncements—especially as he moved back and forth between administration and academics—until, in the end, he became an essayist in Hindi, marginal to anthropology and sociology. The second entails proposals of a singular

success story—of Dube following his early achievements by making solid contributions to academic administration, participating actively in public life, always widening his intellectual canvas, addressing questions of national import, increasingly drawing in a larger readership, with this process culminating in his later writings in Hindi.¹² Neither orientation is wrong, each points in important directions: yet both reflect the image of ideal academic life and suggest the possibility of an immaculate intellectual biography. Failure and success are all too easy to find here. Rather than arguing with such propositions, my point is that the uneven textures of a life and the contrary pasts of a discipline suggest other dispositions to ethnography and biography, history and anthropology.

Consider Dube's presence in Sagar. On the one hand it can be proposed that the precise limitations of a provincial university curbed Dube's academic talents and scholarly energies. It can be argued, on the other, that intellectual dynamics are not the prerogative of metropolitan centres, and that Dube's contribution exactly lay in developing teaching and research in Sagar, a place of scholarship in its own right. My worry concerns the singularity and starkness of such suppositions.

When the Dubes moved to Sagar in 1957, the university there was an exciting place: counting some distinguished scholars on the faculty, there were efforts afoot to draw in younger talent from different parts of the country, and a new campus was under construction.¹³ Dube was on par with the senior scholars yet one with the younger faculty, both marks of distinction.¹⁴ Here Dube built

¹² As already indicated, such dispositions circulate as part of quotidian configurations of academic worlds, and over the years I have encountered them so often that to signal particular writings as indexing the one or the other orientation may well be to miss the point.

¹³ This paragraph is based on the following accounts: Krishna 1997; Atal 1997: 93–7; Mishra 1997: 53–5; Premshankar 1997: 39–41; and Chauhan 1997: 47. All these people knew the Dubes, in different capacities, in Sagar. See also, Dube 1993: 37.

¹⁴ Younger members of faculty in Sagar at the time included Daya Krishna and Pratap Chandra (Philosophy), S.R. Swaminathan and Malikaarjunan (English), Muzzafar Ali and Vinod Mishra (Geography), R.N. Mishra (Ancient

the anthropology department very nearly from scratch, starting novel courses, recruiting new faculty, initiating team projects of research, insisting on plurality and autonomy in academic endeavour. With his trademark pipe and classic cigar, Harris Tweed jackets and well-cut suits, an impressive presence and a striking manner—‘something subtle that had to do with “style”—what he said and how he said it’ (Madan 1996: 299)—Dube was a figure of admiration and envy, a role model to his male students. In a relaxed social environment and with few hierarchical distinctions among the younger set, Dube’s broad range of intellectual interests meant that he was at the centre of lively discussions on literature and philosophy, politics and psychology, his colleagues and friends from other departments also invited to address his students. Clearly, Dube loved all this, none of it in fact adversely affecting his academic productivity as he initiated a major team project of research on leadership in villages of Madhya Pradesh and wrote a non-textbook introduction to anthropology in Hindi, *Manav aur sanskriti* (1960), both ventures intimately tied to his presence in Sagar.

Yet these times came with their twist. Rather less than three years after the move to Sagar, in 1960, after D.N. Majumdar died, Dube received a proposal to take up his position as professor and chair of the anthropology department from the vice chancellor of Lucknow University. The details need not detain us, but matters proceeded very far before administrative mismanagement together with opposition from a section of the department meant that Dube could not take up the appointment. Dube spoke little of the affair afterwards, but it was a blow at the time. Not surprisingly, a few months later, at the end of the year, a little before I was born, he accepted the position of Director of Research at the National Institute of Community Development (NICD) in Mussoorie, remaining at the institution for four years. Upon Dube’s return to Sagar, after times of prominence

History), Premshankar (Hindi), and Brijraj Chauhan (Anthropology/Sociology). Senior scholars included Nanddulare Vajpeyi (Hindi), George West (Geology), M.P. Shrivastava (Physics), and Baburam Saksena and Dharendra Verma (Linguistics). This is an indicative inventory: there were other, young and established scholars on the Sagar faculty.

on the national and international stage, the university may have seemed constraining, the town too small. Now Dube organised conferences and held seminars, inviting senior and promising scholars, yet he did this on a campus that had lost some of his main interlocutors and friends—such as the philosopher Daya Krishna. Dube secured a grant of ‘special assistance’ from the UGC for the department he reconstituted as one of anthropology and sociology, initiating new broad-based courses on communication, modernisation, development, and sociological theory, linked not just to one or two schools, but introducing and discussing the work of, for instance, Merton, Parsons, C. Wright Mills, Gunnar Myrdal, and Barrington Moore, Jr. But Dube also increasingly travelled away from Sagar for conferences, meetings, and selection committees.¹⁵ He was not dying to leave Sagar—for example, he took insufficient interest in a possible professorship in the US (Stanford or Hawaii, we do not know clearly), suggested by Wilbur Schramm—yet when offered the position of Director, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, in the early 1970s, he was happy to move on.¹⁶

¹⁵ This is not suggest that Dube travelled away extensively from Sagar only after his return from Mussoorie. When he assumed the chair of anthropology in Sagar in 1957, full professors were rare in the Indian academy (see Atal 1997: 95). A decade or so later, when he was still in his mid-forties, Dube was one of the senior figures in sociology/anthropology. Between these years, there were numerous appointments made in departments of sociology all over India, Dube being called as an expert on several selection committees. Together with conferences, this involved a great deal of travel from the later 1950s through to end of the 1960s. It also meant that Dube had an important role, which cut different ways, in the founding of sociology departments in India (Sharma 1997: 33). My question is: should Dube have refused some of these invitations, especially as he was seeking to establish a major centre of research and teaching in Sagar from the mid-1960s?

¹⁶ For most of S.C. Dube’s working life, his career intersected with that of Leela Dube. Not only had he first advised and encouraged her to work on Gond women for the PhD (L. Dube 2000: 4040), but Dube’s father was also very supportive of his daughter-in-law’s fieldwork. Later, she recalled (ibid.: 4041), ‘While working on and completing my dissertation, for a few years, I had an interrupted

The years in Mussoorie further left a strong imprint on the nature of Dube's writings. *India's changing villages* had led to Dube's appointment at NICD, first as Director of Research and then as Principal. Here, acute conjunctions between administration and academics shaped his concerns, moulding his work. Official visits to assess rural development programmes and village leadership initiatives in Afghanistan and Pakistan provided him with hands-on experience of nation-building in a wider South Asian context, and he participated in numerous international conferences and workshops, where his contributions primarily consisted of 'think-pieces', which drew upon his ongoing involvement in research and bureaucracy, particularly training programmes for rural development conducted by NICD. At the same time, Dube's insistence on research inputs

career. In a way I had become an adjunct of S.C. Dube, temporarily teaching in his place, helping him in field work and its analysis, being his research associate . . .' In Sagar, Leela Dube first took up an honorary teaching position at the Department of Anthropology, S.C. Dube's ethics preventing him from asking the academic authorities for a position for his wife. It was at the initiative of the vice chancellor that Leela Dube was offered a permanent position there. The two worked together in the conduct of anthropology and sociology at Sagar University, Leela taking charge of the department in the absence of Dube, particularly when he left for Mussoorie and then for Shimla. Not only during these years, but also from the mid-1970s through to the late 1980s, Leela Dube and Shyama Charan usually lived apart, taking up appointments in different places, which in their case meant both personal understanding and professional support to each other. Such mutual support also extended to scholarship: despite their very different scholarly styles, Dube often edited his wife's writings, just as Leela was generally the first reader of his work, both intensely loyal to each other's academic endeavour; my father took care of me when my mother travelled to Lakshadweep for fieldwork in the late 1960s, and Leela stood by Dube through his successes and disappointments. Yet I doubt that they professionally promoted each other. All this is not to envision the Dubes' married life as immaculate. Rather, it is to register intersections that bear consideration in understanding two distinct lives and scholarly styles that constantly crisscrossed, bearing upon and shoring up each other, issues that require further elaboration in a manner biographical and analytical, ethical and critical.

meant that the NICD forged close connections with academic departments, involving scholars from universities, and running a PhD programme. It followed that Dube also produced work grounded in detailed field investigations by team projects. Especially important was a long essay on communication and planned change (Dube 1967), carrying forward issues initiated in *India's changing villages*, which proved influential in discussions on the 'modernization' of developing nations, addressing and extending the influential views, at the time, of Daniel Lerner and Wilbur Schramm.

Taken together, we might ask two questions of this body of Dube's work. Despite shared concerns and a mutual sensibility, do these writings perhaps lack a consistent engagement with a set of theoretical questions or empirical materials, possibly because Dube wrote to address readily, immediately, the themes at hand? But can we also approach this work as constituting an acute record of social sciences in pursuit of nation-building, issues of analyses bound to matters of state, the envisioning of sociology in the mirror of the nation, a salient chapter in the contrary pasts of Indian anthropology?

The concerns of the period actually led to a more systematic study, which Dube wrote after completing his tenure at NICD, based on the results of research projects on questions of leadership, factionalism, and communication in villages of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, team endeavours that Dube had initiated before and after the move to Mussoorie. Much of what we know about this work is through T.N. Madan (1996: 302), who had read the manuscript soon after its completion:

On his return to Sagar, Dube resumed analysis of data gathered earlier. . . . Unlike the work in Hyderabad, this research was more concerned with 'problems' and 'processes' than holistic description. It focused on themes such as 'power', 'factionalism', and 'leadership'. For reasons never clear to me, the book that was written on the basis of this research . . . was not published. Only one article, which was an abridged chapter from it, came out in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (1968). Some of the results of this research, however, appeared as articles in a few edited volumes.

Upon my further enquiries about this study, Madan (interview 2002) added that it was a rich work, with 'a lot of data, a lot of analytical

categories, not just descriptive categories' that might well have been Dube's 'best book'.

Why did Dube lose interest in publishing an almost finished manuscript? Leela Dube (interview 2002) does not remember the reasons behind Dube's decision. Madan himself asked Dube several times regarding his plans for the manuscript, but received evasive answers. Was there insufficient intellectual stimulation in Sagar to prod Dube into providing that final push? Did a severe illness and a major operation—one that Dube almost did not survive—come in the way? Had Dube's interests and commitments widened so much that he simply forgot about the manuscript and moved on to other challenges? Was there no sense of loss, feeling of pain, from work unfinished, so tantalisingly close to completion? Is this the reason that Dube never talked about this study, bearing it like his other disappointments as a quiet secret? In the past, Dube had left behind research agendas—for instance, work on the Bhjunjia adivasis carried out in the late 1940s; detailed, rich materials from the Shamirpet study—but he had always turned manuscripts into books with dogged persistence. In the late 1960s, he partly assumed the mantle of scholar-at-large, inaugurating the anthropology series of the University Grants Commission National Lectures and the Dr Rajendra Prasad Lectures, the former in English, the latter in Hindi, broadcast on All India Radio to public acclaim, the two series together comprising a slim book on development, *Explanation and management of change* (1971).

For Dube, the role of academic administrator shadowed his prominence as a public intellectual. In 1972 he became Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS) in Shimla, appointed to the position by his friend from Lucknow days, the historian Nurul Hasan, now Minister of Education in the Congress government at the Centre. In the magnificent environs of the former Viceregal Lodge, and as the head of an institution commanding generous resources (the support of the Education Ministry in Delhi in hand), Dube was pleased with the position, seemingly tailored for him. Here he could express his ability in administration and enjoyment of power. Here he could articulate his wide-ranging intellectual interests and gift for public speaking. Here he could seek out younger talent, something that always gave him true pleasure (Madan 1996:

299), from different disciplines—Mrinal Miri, Ramchandra Gandhi, Sudhir Chandra, and Sudipta Kaviraj among them—invited as Fellows, Visiting Fellows, and participants in several imaginative, important conferences he organised over the years at the institute. Here he could invite a range of senior scholars. Here he could encourage newer scholarship by upcoming academics and established scholars, including Satish Saberwal, S. C. Malik, Prabhati Mukherjee, K. N. Sharma, Baidyanath Saraswati, and A.K. Saran, engage his passion for publication qualities, and increase too the range and number of books published by the Institute. Under Dube's direction (1972–7), the IAS regained its prior prominence—acquired in the mid 1960s under Niharranjan Ray—and posted new achievements in the Indian academy (Mishra 1997, 55–6; Sacchidananda 1997: 78–9; Sharma, 1997: 33–4).

Not all was smooth sailing, of course. Dube's desire for affective acknowledgement and readiness to trust people, too easily, too much, meant that he was pursued by 'favourites' (Saraswati 1997: 61). This did not always augur well in front of a community of Fellows with its distinct commitments and cleavages, ambitions and dissensions (see Jain 1997: 65–6). Besides, as India inched towards the Emergency and after its declaration, Dube's friendship with Nurul Hasan meant that he was often seen as a state intellectual. Given the texture of the times, the sharp divisions in academic and public life, the charge sometimes stuck, although Dube resisted pushing the Institute's activities in the service of a political regime, while retaining his own academic integrity, sense of justice, and fierce personal pride (Saraswati 1997: 62). This found expression when, soon after the declaration of the Emergency, Dube announced to the Fellows of the Institute that within its premises they had the right to discuss any question, and that he would defend their academic freedom (Mishra 1997: 56). The sense of justice was manifest in Dube's readiness to shelter in the official camp office of the institute in New Delhi an old acquaintance, gone underground, a prominent accused in the Baroda Bomb Conspiracy Case, at the height of political victimisation in Indira's India. In times that spawned a culture of sycophancy and demanded absolute loyalty, Dube asked the Minister of Education: '*Nurul bhai, aapko chamche chahiye ya dost?* [Nurul bhai, do you

want sycophants or friends?].’ Dube’s stay at Shimla came to a somewhat abrupt end in the middle of 1977.

Subsequently, he held other senior appointments in academic bureaucracy: but the period at the IAS was possibly the most productive and successful of his administrative forays. As the vice chancellor (1978–81) of Jammu University, his efforts at developing a new campus, cleaning up the administration, and bringing in new faculty are remembered with fondness and admiration.¹⁷ Yet, it is also important to ask if the university and the town did not in the end prove much too resistant, caught in a curious warp, of place and time, which turned upon each other (see Jain 1997: 66). As the Director of the Madhya Pradesh Ucha Shiksha Anudan Ayog (1984–8), Dube undertook a dynamic drive and wide-ranging measures to revamp the higher education system in his home state, redrawing syllabi, changing examination patterns, seeking to infuse a new life into teaching (Mishra 1997: 56–58). But it is equally important to consider whether his best laid plans and well meaning measures were eventually rolled back by a formidable inertia and sedimented interests at the heart of higher education in Madhya Pradesh (see Jain 1997: 66–7), save perhaps in tiny pockets.

How did these long years in academic administration—broken by a short, three-year spell as National Fellow, Indian Council for Social Science Research, and as Consultant at the United Nations’ Asian and Pacific Development Centre, Kuala Lumpur—augur for Dube’s scholarship? Over the 1970s and 1980s, in addition to the volumes he edited (Dube 1977a, 1977b, 1979; Dube and Basilov 1983), much of what Dube published in English took the shape of synthetic writings, including several papers presented at international conferences and workshops, many organized by the UNESCO and related UN institutions connected with development.¹⁸ There were books, of course. At the beginning of this period there was a short

¹⁷ This was evident more than twenty years after Dube left Jammu, when I visited the city in February 2003 to deliver the second S.C. Dube Memorial Lecture of Jammu University.

¹⁸ During this time, Dube also frequently lectured and published in Hindi (for example, Dube 1983a), further writing a textbook in English on sociology for the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT).

work (Dube 1973), consisting of the inaugural D.N. Majumdar Lectures delivered in Lucknow in 1972; another work on modernisation (Dube 1974); at its middle two slim volumes (Dube 1983b, 1983c); at its end three books, one commissioned by United Nations University (Dube 1988), the other two comprising collections of papers written over the previous thirty years (Dube 1990a, 1992). This corpus addressed three broad, overlapping sets of concerns in the sociology of India: communication, education, and change; tradition, development, and modernisation; and the terms for relevant, adequate, and 'indigenized' social sciences.

Despite a shared sensibility, the corpus equally embodies important differences of emphases, carrying rather particular distinctions. This is to say, these writings need to be read together but recognised for their wider, constitutive contrariness—from their conception through to their reception. On the one hand, labouring under administrative burdens, pressures of time, and endless deadlines, most of this work was written quickly, usually realised in order to meet specific requirements of conference formats, which called upon Dube to make general statements on broad problems. On the other, Dube himself increasingly insisted upon a 'committed' social science, directed towards public policy and national concerns, written in an entirely accessible style, exceeding narrow scholarly concerns. Taken together, necessity and belief fed each other.

There are continuities between Dube's earlier work and his later writings, from the 1940s through to the 1980s. These concern the emphasis upon the application of the social sciences towards nation-building—finding first expression in the Kamar work and providing the grounds for *Modernization and development* (1988)—and the characteristic ability of Dube's scholarship to synthesise ideas and materials, using theoretical considerations primarily as a means of analytic description. Yet there were also critical differences. Earlier, Dube's statements regarding a practice of anthropology adequate for the time(s) and the nation—and his synthesis of empirics and analytics—had emerged from broad-based research, individual and collective. Later, the requirements of social sciences relevant to development, modernisation, and the nation expanded from being a key concern to becoming the frame and locus of his writing,

secondary works now shoring up his reflections. Here the 1960s were at once a bridge and a watershed.

In the context of the greater professionalism of Indian sociology by the end of the 1960s—and following the wider institutionalisation of the social sciences, especially through the efforts of the ICSSR, in the following decade—Dube's body of work of the 1970s and 1980s appears as bearing contrary connections with disciplinary emphases. Here, in his own way, Dube addressed the terms for a relevant sociology, including issues of academic colonialism and decolonisation of disciplines, which were being variously debated in the social sciences in India (e.g. *Seminar*, 1968; *Seminar*, 1980; see also, Uberoi 2000), and his formulations regarding modernisation and development, tradition and change were read with respect in various arenas, provincial and metropolitan (Yogendra Singh, interview 2002). But these writings could also appear at some remove from the more theoretical preoccupations of the discipline, particularly in its important hubs such as the Delhi School of Economics. Unsurprisingly, Dube's friends and critics such as T.N. Madan and André Béteille were disappointed in this corpus, finding that it looked askance at what they considered the important analytic issues within the discipline, insufficiently thinking through these concerns, and progressively turning away from professional colleagues.¹⁹ Once again, it is precisely because of such varying attributes that Dube's work of the time bears critical reading, its limits and possibilities articulating the past and present of the social sciences in India, indexing abiding ironies and formative tensions.

As noted earlier, these writings insinuate more than unchanging verities and dead certainties, registering shifts in accent, movements in thought, particularly as Dube developed his ideas regarding pur-

¹⁹ Also, as Madan (interview 2002) put it, compared to M.N. Srinivas, from the later 1960s Dube lost contact with important centres of anthropological research in the UK and the US. Of course, this had to do with the nature of Dube's work, including his generally intelligent but often impatient responses to analytical and theoretical concerns within the discipline. Yet, it was also a matter of Dube's increasing ambivalence towards approval from abroad in developing the social sciences in India, and his insufficient professionalism as regards sending his writings to colleagues, which he did but rarely.

positive scholarship and elaborated his apprehensions concerning meaningful development. The call for a relevant anthropology, eschewing grand theory and abstruse formulations, endorsing committed, objective research that offered analysis, interpretation, and social criticism, influencing change yet not legislating upon it, advising but not dictating policy (Dube 1972) found distinct formulations a decade later in Dube's appeals for 'indigenisation' and 'decolonisation' of the social sciences (see, for example, Dube 1990a). The former drew upon the wider criticism of the disciplines in the 1960s and the latter elaborated the critical third world spirit directed against Western epistemic domination at the close of the Bandung era, each anticipating some of the questions concerning Eurocentrism that are important in the academy today. Similarly, Dube's incipient questioning of authoritative paradigms of development and modernisation in the early 1970s was elaborated over the following years, especially as he spoke and wrote more and more on the importance of tradition, until it found a much clearer manifestation in his writings of the 1980s, which revised and recast his prior predilections (e.g., Dube 1988). At the same time, it is important to ask if this corpus also appears caught between a desire for innovative understanding and the force of inherited apprehension: for example, pointing to the salience of 'everyday' categories, yet realising these in all too given, attenuated forms. In what ways did Dube's probing in newer directions simultaneously push against yet remain limited by the categorical compulsions and analytic grids of the nation?

Woven into the warp of the times, such strains in Dube's work were bound to its style and sensibility, poised between academic sociology and public scholarship. They raise crucial questions. Did Dube's preference for objective scholarship, which could advise policy, lead to his opting for clear solutions rather than staying with, thinking through, critical tensions? Did this mean that although Dube struggled against what Bourdieu (2000) has called 'scholastic reason'—the detached view of the world of the ascetic scholar—he nonetheless questioned its premises inadequately, reproducing its oppositions, so that he was separated from his critics regarding the terms of academic endeavour by just an old, rickety epistemological fence? While addressing varied, distinct audiences, Dube wanted to

present the model of a relevant scholarship to his professional colleagues, but in going about this task, did he not become increasingly distant from at least some among them? Dube never wanted to marry off sociology to the state, yet is it not the companionship between social sciences and nation-building, shoring up his writings of the 1970s and 1980s, which registers these works as a key presence in the archival tracks of Indian anthropology?

After completing his term of appointment in Bhopal in 1988, Dube came to live in Delhi. In an aggressive city resonant with institutionalised power, he found prestige away from office. Of course, he was now part of important juries and committees, himself receiving prestigious awards and commendations.²⁰ There were meetings and travel, conferences and talks, plenary lectures and keynote presentations. However, above all, Dube wrote. He wrote furiously and mainly in Hindi—with passion and desire, urgency and anxiety.²¹ The terms of this writing require close, careful, critical reading, which I cannot offer here. My point is that, in the last decade of his life, Dube's medium of expression drew in a wide readership.²² He commented incisively on cultural politics and critically analysed political cultures, combining a literary sensitivity, a sociological sensibility,

²⁰ These included the coveted Moorti Devi Award of Bhartiya Jnanpith in 1993 (awarded for Dube 1991), the Indira Gandhi Gold Medal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1993 (he had already won the S.C. Roy Gold Medal of the Society in 1976), and honorary doctorates from Kashi Vidya Peeth and Kanpur University.

²¹ During the 1990s, Dube's books in Hindi included those comprising earlier essays (Dube 1991, 1994a), and others written after his move to Delhi (1994b, 1996a, 1996b), some published posthumously, including revised reprints of earlier translations (Dube 1996c). A wider appreciation of Dube's contributions to writing in Hindi can be found in most essays in L. Dube and S. Pachori (1997).

²² This was also true of Dube's writings of the period in English. Thus, *Indian society* (1990b), written in the late 1980s for the younger and lay reader, showcased Dube's capacity to synthesise varied and complex materials in an accessible style, the book appearing in translation in several Indian languages over the 1990s. In English and in translation, the work is widely used as a textbook at school and college levels.

an ethnographic imagination, and a citizen's concerns. He wrote on new subjects and returned to older concerns of education and development, tradition and culture, conceptually translating and imaginatively recasting the terms of the social sciences into Hindi, coining, according to his interlocutors, a new idiom of apprehension and expression in the language (see Kumar 1997: 152–3; Mrinal Pandey 1997: 155–6); Manager Pandey 1997; Rajkishore 1997; Singh 1997; see also Tandon 1997: 71–2). Now a somewhat different, more vernacular nation came to the fore. Dube became concerned about its progress by salvaging its civility, quite as he extended support, publicly but also privately, to citizens' struggles such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

These years and this labour came with their twists—another chapter in Dube's life and vocation. In *Samay aur sanskriti* (1996a), a work published posthumously, he wrote of how the contemporary Indian intellectual was alienated from indigenous thinking and the common man, writing and publishing mainly in a foreign idiom, adding that those who wrote in Indian languages were either ignored or considered second- or third-grade intellectuals. Commenting on this passage, the critic Namvar Singh (1997: 109) wrote:

Antim dino mein Dube ji adhikanshtah Hindi mein likhte they. Is gunah ki saza bhi mili. Dusre darze ke buddhi jivi mane jane lage. In shabdon mein kahin na kahin unki peeda bhi hai. 'Bhartiya Gram' multah angrezi mein likhi gayi thi. Yah Dube ji ki dusri pustak thi. Desh ke sath sath videsh mein bhi sarahi gayi. Aaj bhi Dube ji usi pustak ke liye yaad kiye jaate hain. Is prashansa mein bhi ek dansh hai. Use Dube ji khub samajhte the.

[In his last days Dube ji wrote mostly in Hindi. He also received punishment for this crime. He came to be considered a second-grade intellectual. Somewhere among these words there is also his personal pain. *Indian village* was basically written in English. This was Dube ji's second book. It was praised both nationally and abroad. Even today Dube ji is remembered for this book. This praise also carries a sting. Dube ji understood this very well.]

The contrast between the enormous prestige accorded to Dube's later writings in Hindi and the formidable odds against anyone writing

in the vernacular being heard in the English-dominated academy are important issues. At the same time, rather than reading Singh's statement as a final appraisal, it is better approached as symptomatic of the divisions and tensions between the worlds of reflection and writing in English and Hindi.²³

Dube straddled these divisions and embodied such tensions, his life and work shaped by contradictions and conjunctions between Hindi and English, administration and academics, nation-building and 'classical' anthropology, the vernacular and the metropolitan. Similarly, the notable shifts indexed by Dube's scholarship, from tribe to village, from proposals of modernisation to critiques of development—each mediated by nationalist concerns and policy prescriptions—do not simply insinuate a clear-cut trajectory. Rather, they appear imbued with a wider contrariness, emblematic of the pervasive and present yet chequered and changing relationship between the pursuits of sociology and the provisos of the nation. Neither the tensions nor the shifts bear easy resolution. They demand patient and prudent thinking through. And so we return to Namwar Singh (1997, 111), who closed his essay with a near clairvoyant, intensely personal profile of Dube, noting that he was 'Adequately successful in every way, yet pained by a hurt of failure. Entirely secure, but still haunted by insecurity.' When placed alongside the shifts and tensions at the core of Dube's life and work, these appraisals—entwining the public and the personal—are pregnant with questions for an adequate, ethical biography of an Indian anthropologist, for a critical, careful history of Indian anthropology.

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²³ As already indicated, Dube continued to write in Hindi throughout his life. Thus, between his earliest essays from college days and his final books of the 1990s in Hindi, apart from the works (Dube 1960, 1983a) mentioned earlier, Dube also wrote for periodicals and magazines such as *Yojana*, *Kalpna*, and *Dharmayug*.

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Fashioning a Postcolonial Discipline

M.N. Srinivas and Indian Sociology*

SATISH DESHPANDE

THE SECOND VOLUME OF THE WELL-KNOWN *HISTORY OF Anthropology* series launched under the editorship of George W. Stocking Jr. has an interesting photograph on p. 180 (Stocking Jr., 1984:180). 'Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford. Prof. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's class 1945-6', says the caption. At first glance, there is nothing unusual about this formally posed group photo of ten persons, five of whom are seated on straightbacked chairs, behind which stand the other five. It is hardly surprising that

**Acknowledgements:* My first debt is to Professor M.N. Srinivas himself—I would not have had the confidence to attempt this essay had it not been for the long interview that he was kind enough to grant me in December 1998. It is one of my deepest professional regrets that this interview, which I was treating as the first in a series, was fated to also be the last. Professor Srinivas had expressed considerable interest and even some quiet enthusiasm for the collective project of disciplinary history that this volume was part of. However, while acknowledging my debt to him, I must also emphasise that he did not and could not have seen this essay since it was commissioned for this volume after (and because of) his sudden death. The views and interpretations here are my responsibility alone, particularly since this is an exploratory venture. But this essay could not have been written without the patient support of my co-editors, Nandini Sundar and Patricia Uberoi, both of whom made many useful suggestions for improving it.



Fig. 13: Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's class of 1945–6: A.R. Radcliffe-Brown seated middle, Meyer Fortes (Reader, 1947–50) on his right. M.N. Srinivas standing extreme right. (*Photograph courtesy Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford University.*)

all the men are dressed in formal Western suits, or that the lone woman is identified as the 'secretary and librarian'. Seated next to her in the middle of the group is Radcliffe-Brown, with Meyer-Fortes on his other side. It is the remaining seven, all men and all students, who look vaguely odd. The initial sense of visual incongruity is triggered by the fact that only *two* of the seven students look like white Westerners, an impression confirmed by the names listed for the other five: K.T. Hadjoannou, K.A. Busia, L.F. Henriques, A.A. Issa, and M.N. Srinivas.

This was no doubt an aberrant cohort (except for its gender composition) because of the Second World War, which explains the minority of the white British men students, who might otherwise have been expected to dominate the student body at Oxford. Nevertheless, this photograph strikingly illustrates the truth that, by the end of

the war, there existed a significant (albeit small) number of anthropologists who were both Western-trained *and* ethnically non-Western. In other words, by the time decolonisation began, the colonised (or otherwise subjugated) countries of Asia, Africa, and South America were no longer only supplying the raw material for anthropology—they were also producing anthropologists. While there is nothing novel about this well-known fact, its implications for a critical history of anthropology—whether in Western or non-Western contexts—are yet to be fully explored.¹ Leaving aside the larger questions for another occasion, this essay focuses on the person standing on the extreme right of the Oxford photograph—the late M.N. Srinivas (1916–99)—and his role in the making of a postcolonial social anthropology in India.

Although its presence dates back to the pre-Independence era, it was only in the 1950s that a self-consciously *Indian* social anthropology, that is to say, one located in Indian institutions and relying on the work of Indian scholars, began to take shape. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see that the end of colonial rule did not (and perhaps could not) necessarily mean a fresh beginning—many of the institutions and, indeed, much of the logic of colonialism were taken over by the new nation, whether unknowingly or by design, or because there was no immediate alternative. Despite the inevitable euphoria of Independence and the millennial rhetoric that it provoked, therefore, there was as much continuity as change in the social system and the academy was no exception to this general truth.

Like many other institutions, universities and academic disciplines could rely on institutional inertia to keep going without having to

¹ This is despite the intense scrutiny to which the history of anthropology has been subjected in recent decades, including specially its implication in colonialist modes of domination. (There is a large literature whose route can be roughly signposted by Asad 1998/1973; Clifford & Marcus 1986; Stocking 1992; Fox 1991; and Trouillot 2003). The specific issues of non-Western anthropology and anthropologists have also been discussed (for example, in Burghart 1990; Fahim 1982; Fardon 1990; Peirano 1998; Gerholm & Hannerz 1982), so my claim that this literature has not pushed the question far enough must remain an unsubstantiated assertion for the moment.

justify themselves afresh in any fundamental sense. But some disciplines—history and economics are good examples—actually benefited by Independence, being gifted new agendas and enhanced prestige in the nationalist regime. On the other hand, because of their bad reputation as handmaidens of colonialism, disciplines like anthropology and social anthropology were put on the defensive by Independence. They could not afford the luxury of institutional inertia either, because they were under pressure to demonstrate their relevance for a post-colonial India. Unlike other disciplines, they had to reposition and reinvent themselves in an environment that, despite its general enthusiasm and optimism, was unsympathetic to them. The 1950s and 1960s were, therefore, a critical period for Indian sociology and social anthropology.

Paradoxically, the first difficulty in exploring the role played by M.N. Srinivas in moulding institutional practices and preferences during this crucial phase is posed by Srinivas's own fame and pre-eminence. Often described as 'the doyen of Indian sociology', MNS was widely recognised as a major figure in the discipline—so much so, in fact, that his influence acquires a natural, self-evident character that deflects detailed analysis and seems to render it redundant.² This sense of redundancy is underlined by the fact that there is already a significant body of work chronicling Srinivas's career, including several well-known autobiographical essays.³ It is therefore more important than usual to specify the objectives of this essay and its relationship to the existing literature.

As part of the larger collective effort that this volume represents, my essay attempts to ask questions which cannot be answered adequately today, given the rudimentary state of disciplinary history as a field of specialised research in India. Only a preliminary sketch of probable answers is being offered here, with speculative place-holders

² To avoid repetition and enhance readability, this essay will often refer to Srinivas by his initials, MNS.

³ These include: 'My Baroda days', 'Sociology in Delhi', 'Itineraries of an Indian social anthropologist', and 'Practising social anthropology in India', originally published in various volumes and journals but all available in *Collected essays* (2002: hereafter CE). Unless the context requires mention of the original place of publication, I will use CE for ease of reference.

marking the gaps to be filled by further research. Three main sets of questions are considered under the broad theme of MNS's role in fashioning the disciplinary stances of Indian sociology: (a) the 'take over' of sociology by social anthropology; (b) the advent of village studies and their implications for Indian sociology, including such issues as its acquisition of a new audience or its attitude towards the state and social policy; and (c) the installation of intensive fieldwork as the preferred method of Indian sociology/social anthropology.

I. OCCUPYING 'SOCIOLOGY'

Among MNS's first professional initiatives when embarking upon his career in India—one that is still distinctively associated with him—was his insistence on 'the unity of sociology and social anthropology'. What this meant in practice was the colonisation of sociology by social anthropology. Of course MNS himself never put it so bluntly, preferring to say that the union was to the advantage of sociology; but it is also clear that he thought sociology had little to offer and could only gain by being converted into social anthropology. MNS was quite open in acknowledging that this was largely a strategic move prompted by the need to avoid association with anthropology, which had a very bad reputation in the colonies. However, it would be misleading to suggest that it was entirely an act of pragmatism, for there were also intellectual reasons—mostly to do with the new look that British social anthropology had acquired under Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard—that encouraged and enabled this distancing from anthropology.

Perhaps the best source for Srinivas's views on this matter is a brief note on 'Social anthropology and sociology' that he wrote for the inaugural issue of the *Sociological bulletin*, published in 1952 (reprinted in CE). Written at the very beginning of his academic career in India, soon after he had resigned his lecturership at Oxford to become professor and head of a newly created department of sociology at the Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda, this programmatic piece is almost a manifesto. Srinivas begins with a candid confession about the embarrassment that social anthropologists must

endure because of their discipline's kinship with anthropology and its unsavoury public image outside the West:

It is unfortunate that the term anthropology should immediately suggest to one, bearded and myopic ancients who study apes, skulls, primitives, head hunters, witchcraft, and human sacrifice. In non-European countries the term is particularly odious, as the indigenous inhabitants—the term 'native' is deeply resented—do not like being regarded as 'primitives' (another unfortunate word). The more educated people in these countries have all kinds of suspicions against anthropologists—that they are the agents of imperialism, spies masquerading as scientists, people who dig up unsavoury customs like polyandry which are best not remembered even if they existed, and so on. Names are an important matter, and social anthropologists have reason to feel that their subject has not been lucky in the choice of its name. (CE: 457)

He then goes on to distinguish (and distance) social anthropology from the other branches of anthropology such as physical anthropology, ethnology, and prehistoric archaeology. As 'the comparative study of human societies', social anthropology would ideally include

all societies, primitive, civilized, and historic. Actually, however, it has until recently confined itself to primitive societies. But in the last twenty years, and especially in the last ten years, it has made great progress in England, and social anthropologists are beginning to study non-primitive societies. . . .

Anthropology in our country is mostly restricted to physical anthropology and ethnology—especially the former—and social anthropology is conspicuous by its absence. This is specially marked in the field studies undertaken in our country. (CE: 458)

Srinivas then provides a very brief genealogy for (British) social anthropology from Durkheim through Malinowski to Radcliffe-Brown before proceeding to distinguish it from cultural anthropology in the Tylolean and especially the Boasian tradition dominant in America.⁴ 'Emphasis on "culture"' reveals historical or ethnological

⁴ For broad overviews as well as detailed discussions of the issues involved

interests whereas emphasis on “society” reveals sociological interests’, according to Srinivas, and though he is careful not to claim superiority for the latter, this is more out of politeness. For cultural anthropology is described as ‘pre-Malinowskian’ in its willingness to settle for ‘anything less than 12 to 18 months with a strange people’, and for being willing to rely on informants rather than insisting on the ‘direct observation of social relations’. This is crucial because where the mere existence of a norm may be enough to reconstruct a ‘culture’, for those ‘interested in making significant general statements about social relations between persons, the verbal respect to the norm and the violation of the norm in actual behaviour are both important’ (CE: 459–60).

Srinivas identifies three main virtues in social anthropology: its emphasis on a holistic approach encompassing the totality of a society; its basis in intensive fieldwork involving total immersion and language learning; and its comparative perspective, which guards against ethnocentrism. Of these the second—intensive, long-duration fieldwork—is considered the most important, and the main source of social anthropology’s prestige in Britain. MNS acknowledges, but subsequently rebuts, the popular charge against social anthropologists, namely that ‘they are completely preoccupied with primitive societies, and that they have no time for anyone who wears a loin cloth.’⁵ This accusation is no longer true, he says, with social anthropologists having recently undertaken the study of peoples with a civilised past. Moreover, they have embarked on studies of ‘peasant communities’ in many parts of the world; they are engaged in village studies in India; and they are even beginning to take on urban studies in both Britain and America. But though it is true that social anthropology has concentrated mainly on primitive societies until recently, there is a lot to be gained by such studies because they present a historic opportunity to make a comparative analysis of societies that

in this intellectual history, see the *History of Anthropology* series, including specially Stocking 1983 and 1984.

⁵ Here Srinivas is implying that, in the popular perception, only naked or leaf-clad natives are primitive enough for anthropologists, who lose interest even in natives civilised enough to wear a loincloth.

are vastly different from modern ones; and because they serve to inoculate the social anthropologist against ethnocentrism.

In the next couple of pages, Srinivas turns to the specifics of the training that social anthropologists ought to receive, and it is here that his intention of replacing sociology with social anthropology is stated most clearly. He begins with an attack on American sociology, which, despite its 'belief in quantitative methods and "scientific objectivity"', is nevertheless 'bogged by utter subjectivity' and ethnocentrism. Mentioning the preoccupation of American sociology with the 'social problems' of a rapidly industrialising multi-racial and multi-ethnic immigrant society, Srinivas dismisses this kind of orientation as being prompted by the availability of funds: 'It is difficult to resist the desire to do good especially when it helps to keep the proverbial wolf at a respectable distance from the doors of sociologists. But this has not been advantageous to the growth of "pure" or "fundamental"—I regret I cannot find more suitable terms—sociology, which is devoted to the study of social institutions on a comparative basis, which has as its main aim the making of intellectually significant statements about the nature of human social relationships' (CE: 464). Then follows a contemptuous rejection of two major tendencies in American sociology, its penchant for surveys and questionnaires ('I am as yet unaware how exactly sociology has profited through them'); and its partiality for large, multi-country studies of cultural patterns ('A social anthropologist . . . would be aghast at the ease with which facile generalisations are made about vast countries'). The stage is thus set for the declaration that the textbooks and methods used to teach sociology in India constitute 'a national intellectual disaster of the highest magnitude'. The solution offered is hardly surprising:

How then should we teach the subject in our universities? It would be a good idea if we could insist that students wishing to study 'sociology' make a prior study of 'social anthropology' for at least two years. This is very desirable for a number of reasons. It provides a cure to 'ethnocentrism'. Besides, it produces a certain charity and tolerance towards ways of life other than one's own. The study of societies as integrated wholes provides the correct perspective for studying small fragments

of modern industrial societies. It is also more difficult to study one's own society than it is to study an alien society. Finally, it is essential that students of sociology must develop an empirical outlook—a knowledge of social anthropology will teach them that.

We could, of course, do away with the distinction between sociology and social anthropology and include them both under 'comparative sociology'. This would help to separate social anthropology from physical anthropology and ethnology. The union of social anthropology and sociology is desirable and will be to the advantage of sociology. . . .

The sociology we should evolve must then include all aspects of our society—it should include within itself the study of primitive groups, peasant communities, the various sects and cults, and aspects of our urban life. It should convince historians and Indologists that we have something to offer to them, something that will make their work even more fruitful and interesting. (CE: 465–6; quote marks in original)

Except for very minor modifications, MNS never deviated from this, his first considered description of the relationship between social anthropology and sociology, throughout his entire career over the next half century. It is interesting to note in passing that, at this early stage of his career, Srinivas singles out history and Indology rather than economics or political science as interlocutors. But what is most remarkable in this account is, of course, the passive and empty role for 'sociology'. There is not a single instance where the content or methodologies of sociology are described positively—either the discipline remains a blank, or its contents are uniformly tainted and worthless, fit only for immediate erasure. Conversely, social anthropology is the golden discipline that can do no wrong—its only problem is that educated natives cannot forget its links to the colonialist obsession with primitivism. However, this perception is itself unfair because it is not social anthropology but its siblings—physical anthropology and ethnology—that carry such stigma. Social anthropology has now turned over a new leaf and is abrogating its past by extending its interests beyond the primitive to all kinds of societies, including civilised and urban industrial ones.

A half century after it was written, this programmatic statement will surely strike the contemporary reader as being rather partial to

social anthropology, apart from being somewhat sanguine about its past. However, before proceeding with such evaluative analyses we need to explore the possible grounds for Srinivas's views being what they were, reasons why he may have felt his opinions and judgements to be justified or self-evident.

The first set of such reasons is perhaps related to the genuine ferment that British social anthropology was undergoing at that time and the missionary zeal with which its new self-image was being propagated (Kuper 1996; Stocking 1984). Srinivas was not just an observer but a privileged participant in this process, having been a student of both Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard. This was also the time when British social anthropology was at the peak of its power and influence; it would never regain this pre-eminence, but at the time it was the dominant voice of Western anthropology. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the young Srinivas found this heady environment inspiring, or that he enthusiastically and uncritically adopted the worldview of British social anthropology. Moreover, the new directions that social anthropology was taking at this time could not have failed to affect MNS deeply. As is amply evident from his writings, he was well aware of the nationalist antipathy towards anthropology in his own country, and the shift from an exclusive emphasis on primitive societies to a more universal description of the object of study must have been especially welcome for 'native anthropologists' of his generation. Given all this, the absence of a more vigilant stance towards the claims of the discipline is perhaps understandable.

The second and more important argument in explanation of Srinivas's patronising attitude towards sociology (in contrast to social anthropology) is that it was a reaction to the past reputation and present state of sociology at the time, namely the early 1950s. As is now well known, the latter half (and especially the last quarter) of the nineteenth century saw the rapid diffusion of European social theory and its attendant debates among the educated Indian elite, notably in Bengal (Forbes 1975; Chatterjee 1996). Positivism was particularly popular, and the early sociological thinkers were much discussed, especially Comte and Spencer. Thus, although a Bengal Social Science Association had been established in 1867 which also conducted 'empirical investigations on social matters, using schedules

and questionnaires' (Chatterjee 1996: 16), by the early decades of the twentieth century 'sociology' was mainly associated with social philosophy and social theory of a general and abstract kind. Indian intellectuals tended to see its importance in terms of the resources it offered for investing discussions of indigenous traditions of scholarship and modes of thought with the power and prestige of *science*. Works like Brajendranath Seal's *The positive sciences of the ancient Hindus* (1915) or, even more appropriately, Benoy Kumar Sarkar's *The positive background of Hindu sociology* (originally 1937, reprinted 1985), are products of this context. They attempted to assert the 'positive'—i.e., the this-worldly and material-practical—potential of the indigenous sciences and arts, thereby challenging dominant Orientalist/Indological scholarship and its positioning of indigenous knowledges as exclusively spiritual-ideal, and as belonging to an ancient and irretrievable past without relevance for the present. Such a vision of 'sociology' seems to have been quite influential at the time, particularly through the many-sided efforts of Benoy Sarkar (see Roma Chatterji, this volume); Srinivas himself recalled that sociology was sometimes referred to as 'Sarkarism' in the 1930s.⁶

However, we do not yet know enough about the career of this notion of sociology in the formal institutions of the colonial-era academy, particularly the universities. It is likely that 'sociology' did not remain the exclusive or most advantageous label for the nationalist intellectual-ideological project of 'Sarkarism' outlined above, or that the project itself dwindled into eventual silence. In any case, there seems to be a discontinuity of sorts between the activities of Indian public intellectuals and the history of sociology as an academic discipline. In Calcutta University itself, sociology was established as a separate department long after an anthropology department focusing on ethnology and physical anthropology. In India's first postgraduate research department of 'sociology and civics' (later to include economics as well) set up at Bombay University under Patrick Geddes, urban sociology was the area of emphasis during the initial

⁶ Excerpts from this interview are published in Deshpande 2000, although this particular reference is part of the unpublished full transcript. From the tone and tenor of Srinivas's remarks in this interview, it is clear that he felt this to be an unflattering term.

years. In Lucknow, widely regarded as an outpost of Calcutta in its early years, the combined department of sociology and economics hosted many different (and eclectic) tendencies. The only other colonial-era department of significance—at Osmania University in Hyderabad, under the leadership of Christoph von Fürer Haimendorf—was focused on tribal ethnology.

In short, at the time of Independence sociology had a rather diffused and unimpressive presence in the Indian academy. It is not very surprising, therefore, that to the young Srinivas in the early 1950s it looked like a modest discipline with much to be modest about. Moreover, Srinivas was extremely uncomfortable with the associations that sociology did call to mind—social philosophy ('a vague and woolly subject which consists of theories of philosophers who occasionally like to deck out their theories with facts which suit their theories' [CE: 463]), and social work ('a more prosperous academic neighbour' with the prospect of dangerous liaisons 'on the basis of expediency [which] will not only prevent the emergence of the proper kind of sociology but . . . will make popular a cheap variety of "applied sociology" which everyone with any respect for academic integrity and standards will keep away from' [CE: 463–4]). His remarks on these twin dangers are followed immediately by his scathing attack on American sociology and its preoccupation with 'social problems' (mentioned above). These remarks echo the disdain for American social science widely shared by contemporary European, and especially British, scholars.

It is thus impossible to be in any doubt about the specific mix of perspectives, prejudices, and judgments that shaped MNS's worldview and informed his desire to see sociology become social anthropology. Other individuals living in the same times may well have internalised a more or less different set of biases and preferences. The preceding account has tried to describe and (as far as possible) explain, the particular set of biases that MNS did in fact work with: it is not an evaluative assessment of these biases, much less an implicit invocation of a mythical 'God's eye-view' free of all bias. Such a disclaimer is not intended to preempt the question of an evaluation either: it is only to acknowledge that the present state of knowledge in disciplinary history does not allow us to venture into such terrain.

II. FROM THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF TRIBES TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF VILLAGE INDIA

From a contemporary vantage point, it is almost a cliché that the village studies phase of the 1950s and 1960s reoriented Indian social anthropology and gave it a new post-Independence identity that helped it to distinguish and distance itself from its previous association with the study of 'primitive' tribes. It is also well known that MNS was prominent among those who advocated (and were engaged in bringing about) this change of direction. However, for these very reasons, it is necessary to guard against the effects of presentist common sense when revisiting such apparently over-familiar terrain.

Common sense treats the advent of village studies as a logical and almost inevitable development arising out of the special status of the village in Indian culture and history. Three main factors tend to be cited—the civilisational idea of the village found in the Hindu scriptures and in subcontinental cultural traditions; the efforts of British colonial administrators in the nineteenth century to fashion a juridico-ethnological notion of the village useful for governance; and Gandhian nationalism and its enshrinement of the village as the authentic moral core—the soul—of the nation.⁷ There is nothing illusory about these factors, but it is only by a sleight of hand that they can be positioned as 'antecedent causes' underwriting the self-evidentness of village studies. From the perspective of disciplinary history, what is remarkable is that despite the undoubted existence of these antecedents, village studies were unknown in Indian social anthropology before the 1950s.

⁷ "The idea of the village in Indian civilisation, its reinforcement by Mahatma Gandhi, the pragmatic interests of government officers and the influence of anthropological methods elsewhere in the world have created this fundamental presupposition that the clue to an understanding of Indian society lies in the village' (Dumont and Pocock 1957: 26). S.C. Dube begins his well-known book, *Indian village*, with the assertion that '[f]rom time immemorial the village has been a basic and important unit in the organization of Indian social polity', and goes on to cite its occurrence in the Rig-Veda and post-Vedic literature, notably the Mahabharata and the Manusmṛti (Dube 1955: 1–2).

This is explicitly acknowledged not only by Srinivas himself,⁸ but by two other Indian scholars prominently associated with the advent of village studies, S.C. Dube and D.N. Majumdar. Recalling his sojourn as a visiting lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, in 1952 while he was writing *Indian village*, Dube complains about the lack of role models.⁹ And in his editorial introduction to the 1955 special double issue of *Eastern anthropologist* on village studies, Majumdar bemoans the fact that economists seem to have monopolised research on rural India, going so far as to declare that ‘there is a complete lack of first-hand studies of our rural life and the cultural setting that provides the stage for rural action’ (Majumdar 1955: iii).

It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that Srinivas’s interest in village studies of the type that he helped institutionalise in the 1950s and 1960s was almost entirely a product of his Oxford training. As he says himself, the idea for the Rampura study (MNS’s first and only substantial village study) was born in 1945–6 through the repeated suggestions of his first supervisor at Oxford, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, about the importance of a field study of a multi-caste Indian village (1976: 1). Radcliffe-Brown in turn may have owed his interest in village studies to his intimate acquaintance, while a member of the Anthropology Department at the University of Chicago in the

⁸ MNS does acknowledge partial- or proto-precedents in the work of Gilbert Slater, Harold Mann, and especially the Wisers. He also notes that between the two World Wars, some Indian scholars (like D.R. Gadgil and R.K. Mukherjee) had also begun to study aspects of rural life while others (like C.N. Vakil and G.S. Ghurye) encouraged their students to conduct field studies of villages. However, he still maintains that proper social anthropological fieldwork in villages only began after World War II (CE: 515–16).

⁹ ‘My main difficulty was that I had no model for my study. The complexity of working on the caste system made everything so different and difficult. Redfield’s studies and many other books on villages around the world were helpful, but they could not solve several of my problems. The Wisers’ *Behind mud walls* was limited in scope, and the village surveys of the time were tilted toward economic rather than sociological data. I was aware that some studies were in the pipeline . . .’ (see Saurabh Dube, this volume).

1930s, with the much acclaimed studies of Mexican villages done by Robert Redfield and his associates.¹⁰ In any case, whatever the route by which this idea reached Oxford and MNS, the important point is that his prior training in India—including his ‘eight years of apprenticeship’ under Ghurye¹¹—does not seem to have nudged him in this direction.

It is also pertinent in this context that *Religion and society among the Coorgs of South India*—the work on which MNS’s professional reputation mainly rested for the first half of his career—did not accord any special importance to the village. The main focus was on the *okka* or clan, the subject of chapter 5. All the larger social units relevant to the practice of religion—the *ur* or village; the *nad* or a collection of villages; and the larger regional unit called *simé* or *désha*—were all discussed in a single succeeding chapter (ch. 6: ‘The cults of the larger social units’; 1952: 177). Thus, although the *ur* is a significant social unit, it is one among others, none of which are accorded the analytically privileged status of the *okka*.¹²

If the idea of the village was not really a part of the sociological imagination at the time of Independence, what factors pushed it onto the foreground of Indian sociology during the 1950s? This is clearly an important question as it concerns a crucial moment in disciplinary history; but a full and detailed answer would take us

¹⁰ Radcliffe-Brown was in Chicago from 1931 to 1937, when he left to take up the newly created chair in social anthropology at Oxford (see Stocking 1984 for details). Redfield’s first major study of Tepoztlan village was published in 1930, and several others followed during the 1930s (Redfield 1930; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934).

¹¹ This apprenticeship stretched from 1936 to 1944, and included a book-length MA thesis (published in 1942 as *Marriage and family in Mysore*); a 900-page two-volume doctoral dissertation (containing the basic Coorg material, reworked for his second dissertation at Oxford); and at least two stints as a research assistant collecting folklore and other material from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

¹² It is true, of course, that the main objective of this book was to describe the linkages between social structure and religious practice; but it is nevertheless significant that the village, though it was included, did not appear as a self-evidently pre-eminent unit of analysis.

well beyond the boundaries of this essay. The paradigm shift represented by village studies was precipitated by a range of social and disciplinary changes that cannot be associated with any individual, even one as influential as Srinivas. The following account thus offers only a brief summary of the wider reasons for the sudden salience of the village in Indian sociology—just enough, that is, to situate MNS in the context of this larger shift.

Many of the background factors that are retrospectively claimed as antecedent causes that prepared fertile ground for the emergence of village studies were (by and large) already in place by the 1930s. The special status of the Indian village in the Hindu and larger sub-continental religious-cultural tradition is, of course, a 'timeless' factor, and for the purposes of the present discussion may be said to have been present for centuries. The writings of British colonial officials like Maine, Munro, and Baden Powell were also available well before the 1920s.¹³ The Indian National Congress adopted the 'constructive programme' designed by M.K. Gandhi in the 1920s, and Gandhian village renewal projects began functioning in the 1930s (Gandhi 1952; Kaushik 1964; Kumarappa 1958). What is not as well known is that even the statist developmental perspective on the village was already around by the end of the 1920s. Although more research is needed to identify similar projects and initiatives elsewhere in colonial India at the time, the Gurgaon 'village uplift' experiment of F.L. Brayne could be considered a prototype of the later developmentalism (Brayne 1927). Similarly, Charlotte and William Wiser's study—widely acknowledged as a precursor of village studies—was based on the authors' experience of living (as Christian missionaries) in the village of Karimpur from 1925 to 1930 (Wiser & Wiser 1963). So, if most of the enabling conditions were already in existence by the 1930s, why did academic village studies take off only in the 1950s?

The broad answer to this question is by now well mapped out—the cold war, decolonisation, and the birth of an independent Indian nation-state initiated a set of chain reactions that brought about the

¹³ Maine's *Village communities in East and West*, originally lectures delivered at Oxford, had already entered its third printing in 1876 (Maine 1993; reprinted from the 1913 edition). See also Baden Powell 1957 (originally 1896).

advent of village studies in Indian sociology. Decolonisation saw the emergence of numerous new nation-states in Asia and Africa, and the Cold War precipitated a competitive struggle between the two superpowers for winning over these new nations to their bloc and worldview. The USA's hegemonic position in the post-Second World War scenario prompted it to invest major resources in an academic component to the effort to win the Cold War. This created an unprecedented demand in the American academy for expertise on the societies, cultures, and politics of the new nations of the Third World, expertise that would help devise policy initiatives to wean these nations away from the attractions of socialism and the Soviet bloc. It was this contextual impetus that gave birth to new multi-disciplinary fields of research focused on Third World societies, fields like development studies, modernisation studies, area studies, and peasant studies (Gendzier 1985). At the same time, newly independent states in this part of the world carried the burden of the material and cultural aspirations of nationalism, which usually translated into ambitious programmes of state-led 'development', the idea that defined this epoch. Given that most of these new nations were overwhelmingly rural and agricultural, it was only to be expected that the combination of domestic aspirations and geopolitical manoeuvrings would give a historically unprecedented boost to research on rural economy and society in the Third World.

While this story has been well documented in the Indian context (see, for example, Deshpande 2002; Jodhka 1998; Rosen 1982), there are two problems with this big-picture account. The first is that this global narrative does not quite fit the Indian case, despite large areas of overlap. For instance: modernisation studies did not dominate the Indian academic scene as it did in many other Third World contexts (Deshpande 2002); despite the Gandhian push towards the village, there were powerful tendencies in the Indian polity that were not, for various reasons, enamoured of rural society (Jodhka 2002); and given the Orientalist scholars' longstanding interest in India, it is arguable that the Cold War context outlined above was not a decisive factor in the emergence of research on village or rural India—such studies would have developed in any case in response to both domestic and foreign interests. The specifics of such discrepancies need not detain us here, but they are also related to the second

problem, which is that the big picture account does not really provide us with detailed descriptions of the *specific institutional-intellectual routes* by which village studies entered the mainstream agendas of academic research on India.¹⁴

In terms of the details of disciplinary and intellectual history, then, there seem to be three main routes by which village studies entered the Indian academy. The first is via British social anthropology after its refashioning in the 1930s; the second is via US-based academic initiatives which were located in a range of fields including social anthropology, peasant studies, area studies, and political science; the third is via more explicitly policy-oriented and eclectic academic initiatives geared towards rural development and extension. Srinivas was, of course, the best known and most influential traveller along the first route. The second route has produced several major initiatives that have contributed significantly to Western scholarship on India, including the Berkeley Village Studies Program, the Chicago initiative, the Cornell-India Project, and (later) the Centre for Village Studies at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex.¹⁵ The third route saw many prominent efforts, including those at Osmania

¹⁴ While this criticism is not applicable to George Rosen's work, it is certainly true of the other 'macro' accounts cited above, i.e. Deshpande 2002 and Jodhka 1998. There is—invariably—a significant gap between the goals and intentions (howsoever established) of Leviathan-like entities such as the US state and the workings of smaller entities like university departments, disciplinary factions, and individual scholars. This is not to deny the plausibility of the relationship between the two, but to underline the need for more concrete and specific evidence for establishing causation, particularly in the context of disciplinary history.

¹⁵ McKim Marriott was initially affiliated to the Berkeley programme when working on Kishangarhi. The Chicago initiative was part of Robert Redfield's civilisational studies project, and brought Milton Singer to India; Marriott was also associated with it. The Cornell Project was led by Morris Opler and is famous for having trained a significant number of American scholars, including Bernard Cohn and Pauline Kolenda. Several Indian scholars including S.C. Dube, were also associated with this project. (A detailed history of this project is currently being prepared by Nicole Sackley; Sackley n.d.) The Sussex programme came later; it was led by Michael Lipton and involved mostly economists. I have avoided details as this essay is oriented to sociology and social anthropology; see Dasgupta 1978.

University and the Etawah Pilot Project in Uttar Pradesh, but over time receded from the mainstream of social science research into institutions like the National Institute for Rural Development (originally Community Development), agricultural universities and agro-economic research centres.¹⁶

MNS can be situated fairly straightforwardly in this broad context: he was, of course, identified with the British social anthropology route; he had a largely positive relationship with the scholars and studies produced through the second route; but he was always opposed to the third route and distanced himself from it throughout his career.

Given the current state of knowledge on this subject, it seems fair to say that in Indian sociology and social anthropology the emergence of the village as a privileged unit of analysis was due more to disciplinary trends in Britain and the USA than any indigenous inclinations. However, once village studies began, they quickly gathered a local support base both within and outside the academy. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the studies themselves were not preceded by any extended attempts at examining or defending the theoretical suitability of the village as a unit of social anthropological analysis.

But such self-conscious reflection was not entirely absent even if it was not visible in the work of the protagonists of village studies themselves. Louis Dumont and David Pocock wrote a long review essay in the inaugural (1957) issue of *Contributions to Indian sociology* on the two major collections of village studies edited by Srinivas and McKim Marriott that were both published in 1955 (Dumont and Pocock 1957). In this review essay, which has acquired retrospective fame as an early critique of village studies, they argue that the route linking British social anthropology to Indian village studies passes through Africa. Most of MNS's teachers and colleagues at Oxford in the 1940s had been initiated into the discipline via ethnographic research on African societies, for which Radcliffe-Brown had

¹⁶ The Osmania University project is best known for S.C. Dube's famous book, *Indian village*; the Etawah project was led by Albert Mayer, an American architect who was invited by Nehru to help design the community development programme of the Indian government. McKim Marriott was also associated with it in a consultative capacity.

been the major intellectual influence. Dumont and Pocock expressed concern about the consequences of this African influence,¹⁷ a concern echoed—albeit in a different register and context¹⁸—by Bernard Cohn in his perceptive essay on the influence of African models on Indian histories (Cohn 1987: 200–2). All three authors are agreed that the salience of the village in Indian social anthropology is directly derived from the theoretical and methodological presuppositions of the work done by British-trained Africanists in the 1930s and 1940s.

The Malinowski–Radcliffe-Brown school of social anthropology dominant in Africa was built on the twin foundations of the former’s (soon to be canonical) ideas about fieldwork, and the latter’s Durkheimian conception of social structure (later termed structural-functionalism). Both scholars firmly believed that the anthropologist’s object of study needed to be a bounded whole clearly demarcated—even isolated—from its broader social context. This ‘island’ model was thus a requirement of both the underlying theory as well as the method: Methodologically, Malinowskian norms of ‘participant observation’ fieldwork required a unit small enough to be directly observable by a single individual. Theoretically, structural-functionalism defined a social system as a synergistic whole constituted by the network of observable social relations (rather than fluid-bordered intangibles like culture, values, etc.) binding its parts to each other and each part to the whole. It was these requirements that the idea of the Indian village successfully met. As Bernard Cohn put it: ‘Unit, boundary, social structure, and group are the central

¹⁷ ‘Social Anthropology has grown up in Africa and this to such an extent that its African orientation has become almost implicit, an unconscious feature of its existence. Despite the much longer period of Anglo-Indian contact, the sociology of India has only properly begun in the last ten years. It might be assumed *a priori* that such a new branch of sociology would run the risk of being overshadowed by the conclusions of more advanced branches and fail to define its distinctive approaches. . . .’ (Dumont and Pocock 1957: 24)

¹⁸ Cohn was of course associated with the Cornell Project in the early 1950s. In this later essay, he is trying to ‘understand the limitations of the gift to us of British social anthropologists’ in the broader context of the relationship between history and anthropology in the study of India—a theme to which he devoted his entire career and made unique and lasting contributions.

concepts which appear time and time again in the anthropological literature of the forties and the fifties. A unit means something that was observable on the ground. Hamlets, villages, lineages, tribes were believed to be bounded—they were countable, mappable, had names, and above all had social structures—patterned relations between groups' (1987: 202).

However, while Cohn was not focusing exclusively on the village—his was a more general argument about the often unnoticed consequences of the 'travelling' of theories and concepts—Dumont and Pocock launched a frontal attack on the theoretical foundations of the village as the preferred unit of analysis. They argued that the Africa-inspired search for bounded wholes isolated such units not only from their larger socio-cultural milieux but also from their historical trajectories.¹⁹ Indeed, they went on to assert that Africanist influences had misled Indianists into mistaking an 'architectural and demographic' fact for a social fact:

A field-worker takes a village as a convenient centre for his investigations and all too easily comes to confer upon that village a kind of sociological reality which in fact it does not possess. The architectural and demographic fact which the village is lures us away from a structural perspective, where things exist only in the relations which are the proper objects of study, to an atomistic or elemental point of view where things exist in themselves. The substantial reality of the village deceives us into . . . assuming a priori that when people refer to an object by name they mean by that designation what we ourselves mean when we

¹⁹'One of the axioms which gave such vigour to English social anthropology in the thirties was the insistence that the field-worker approach his area untied by questions of a historical or cultural nature and that he be concerned with the social wholes in themselves, to describe and analyse their contemporary functioning. At such a period, Africa was an ideal field for study. But the Indian sociologist dare not isolate the area of his enquiry from neighbouring areas or from history. . . . To try and understand a local Indian society as an anthropologist in the past approached a primitive society elsewhere in the world, or as Indian tribes have been approached, is to fail at the outset. The Indian sociologist must keep his attention upon a constant interaction between a general idea and the local working out of that idea' (Dumont and Pocock 1957: 24–5).

speak of it. In fact we should be on our guard and examine the social referent of the term. When we do this we frequently find that the referent is not the whole village but merely the local caste group of the speaker. (Dumont and Pocock 1957: 26)

Although an anticipatory defence against this argument does appear in the editor's introduction to his 1955 volume of village studies (see below), MNS's extended formal response to this critique seems to have taken almost two decades to appear in print in the form of his well-known essay, 'The Indian village: Myth and reality'.²⁰ Typically, for Srinivas, the response is mainly in the form of copious empirical evidence for the sociological reality of the village culled from his own and others' fieldwork. However he does raise the theoretical issue of whether the presence of inequality within a community must disqualify it as such (as Dumont seems to imply); and the historical issue of the village and its linkages with larger entities. By the time that this response appeared, the exaggerations in the Dumont–Pocock position had already become apparent, and MNS managed to wrest back much of the ground claimed by their critique. Nevertheless, it gives the impression of a post facto defence rooted in methodology rather than theory.

At the time (1947–8) when he planned and carried out his own fieldwork, MNS does not seem to have been particularly concerned about the theoretical status of the village as a unit of analysis. His decision to study the village of Rampura, as described in the opening

²⁰ Dumont and Pocock's review essay appeared in 1957, in the inaugural issue of their journal, *Contributions to Indian sociology*. Srinivas's essay was first published in 1975, in a *festschrift* for his teacher, Sir E.E. Evans-Pritchard. The bibliography and acknowledgements to this essay suggest that it was written fairly close to the date of publication, although this needs to be fully verified. MNS has pointed out elsewhere that Dumont later revised his criticism and accepted MNS's position as 'a well-balanced synthesis' (see MNS 1996b: xii, the Introduction to *Village, caste, gender and method*). However, since the discussion in the editor's introduction to *India's villages* (see Section III, especially pages 5–11, of Srinivas 1955) refers to precisely those doubts that were voiced by Dumont and Pocock in 1957, it is possible that MNS was already aware of their ideas (either through personal communication or some other source) and was in fact responding to them.

pages of *The remembered village*, does not dwell on the choice of the unit of analysis itself (1976: 1–2). It is interesting that this choice is discussed mainly in terms of its fieldwork-related aspects (about which more below), although the general motivation of ‘adding to existing knowledge about the working of a uniquely hierarchical society which was on the threshold of far-reaching changes’ is mentioned at the outset (*ibid.*). But in his editorial introduction to *India’s villages*, written seven years later, by which time he had acquired an international reputation as a leading exponent of village studies, MNS does deal with the question of the village as unit of study. However, the distribution of emphasis in this introduction provides interesting evidence of the order of priorities that MNS was faced with at the time.

After the initial remarks locating (geographically and otherwise) the village studies in the volume, the second section is devoted to an explanation and defence of the fact that as many as nine of the twelve contributors are non-Indian scholars from the USA and Britain. MNS argues that social anthropological fieldwork is predicated on cultural strangeness and therefore privileges non-natives; that it is much more difficult for Indians to study their own culture; and that the time-urgent task of studying a rapidly changing society requires all possible help, especially given the expensive and time-consuming nature of social anthropological training, and the neglect of social anthropology (in favour of physical anthropology and ethnology) and consequent paucity of trained personnel in India (1955: 2–5). Section III begins with a careful overview of the status of the village as a unit of analysis:

A body of people living in a restricted area, at some distance from other similar groups, with extremely poor roads between them, the majority of the people being engaged in agricultural activity, all closely dependent upon each other economically and otherwise, and having a vast body of common experience, must have some sense of unity. The point is so simple and obvious that it seems hardly worth making it but for the existence of the institution of caste. Caste is even today an institution of great strength, and as marriage and dining are forbidden with members of other castes, the members of a caste living in a village have many important ties with their fellow caste-men living in neighbouring

villages. These ties are so powerful that a few anthropologists have been led into asserting that the unity of the village is a myth and that the only thing which counts is caste. Secondly, in spite of the fact that communications between villages are still poor and were even poorer in the past, they were far from being self-contained. It is argued that the many strong ties which existed between villages came in the way of the development of a sense of village unity. If in the nucleated villages, a sense of unity is weakened if not destroyed by caste and by the interdependence of villages, it ought to be even weaker in dispersed villages. The unity of the village is not then an axiom to be taken for granted, but something that has to be shown to exist. (1955: 5–6)

As this passage demonstrates, Srinivas was well aware that the village was not an unproblematic entity. But his characteristic response to such questions was to search for experiential (which is to say ethnographic) evidence for the unity of the village, and this is what he does in the pages following the passage quoted above. He does not enter into any extended theoretical discussion *à la* Dumont, and is content to rely on his own (and others') field experiences. On the whole, MNS was happy to go along with the broad justifications for village studies that were being offered at the time.

The earliest justification that MNS himself offers is that of invoking the urgency of producing an ethnographic record of a traditional 'way of life' that is fast changing and may soon disappear forever. This is the familiar refrain of anthropology in salvage mode, and has now been extensively critiqued in the literature. However, at the time it proved to be a persuasive argument to many. A second common justification, offered especially by the 'peasant studies' school of village studies, was that village dwellers represented the majority (and usually the vast majority) of people living in Third World or non-Western societies at the time; to understand such societies, therefore, it was imperative that villages be studied. While MNS was of course aware of this argument, he invokes it mostly implicitly rather than explicitly. A third justification for village studies, one that was most in keeping with the dominant ideas of the mid-twentieth century, emphasised their utility for purposes of development, planning, and rural uplift. Srinivas could not but have been aware of the attractiveness of this argument, because he mentions it

quite often, especially in his early works. However, he always remained not just sceptical but even hostile, and never failed to distance himself from its utilitarian ‘policy orientation.’²¹ He maintained this basic orientation throughout his career, as can be seen in his writings across the decades.

One may note as an aside that this is an important aspect of his professional worldview that needs more detailed study. Part of this attitude is of course a version of the classical scholar’s disdain for ‘interested’ knowledge, and it is likely that he was encouraged in this view by his teachers and colleagues at Oxford. But there is also a principled stand here against the temptations—of power, funding, and academic advancement—that such an orientation seemed to promise. MNS would have seen these temptations up close, given his location at the Delhi School of Economics, where his economist colleagues were deeply involved in the government’s development planning effort and enjoyed enviable access to the highest echelons of the state. By the same token, one cannot rule out the possible presence here of some degree of resentment aroused by sibling envy. Finally, there is an aspect to MNS’ attitude that may seem anachronistic today but was not uncommon in his time, namely his belief that ‘policy’ involved decisions about good and bad that a ‘value neutral’

²¹ A striking instance of such distancing is to be found in the introduction to the 1955 village studies collection cited above: ‘The two five-year plans aim, among other things, to increase agricultural production and to change the social life of our peasantry. An intimate knowledge of the social life of our peasantry in different parts of the country, obtained by men trained to obtain such knowledge, would have been thought helpful to the execution of the plans, in avoiding avoidable human misery, and in increasing efficiency. I may add here that I am not one of those social scientists who believe that the social scientist holds the key to the success of the plans. The far reaching claims made on behalf of the social scientist are unjustified and will, in the long run, do nothing but harm to the social sciences. [. . .] From the point of view of the growth of social anthropology, concentration on merely the useful or practical is not altogether healthy. The theoretical growth of the subject will be neglected as the best talent will be drawn into applied work. The only safeguard against this is the establishment of university teaching and research departments in social anthropology’ (MNS 1955: 11–12).

social scientist could not and should not take.²² This could also be related, in a general sense, to MNS' lack of enthusiasm for direct involvement in practical politics of any sort.²³ On the other hand a case could also be made for MNS's keen interest in contemporary social changes, including especially electoral politics in post-colonial India. This is clearly a subject deserving more detailed and extensive research.²⁴

As far as village studies are concerned, however, what is most striking about MNS is that, in the final analysis, his own justification is methodological. The village is important not so much for its own sake but because *it provides a suitable site for fieldwork*. By his own reckoning, MNS was powerfully interpellated by the social anthropological enterprise as it was being transformed and energised in Britain in the late 1940s. Central to the epistemological claims of this enterprise was the practice of Malinowskian fieldwork, which was the factor most responsible for the enhanced legitimacy and prestige of anthropology in the Western academy. And, as discussed in the previous section, MNS enthusiastically welcomed the shift (in principle if not yet in practice) from the older anthropological obsession with 'primitives' to the more catholic orientation of British

²² 'The anthropologist [. . .] can place his understanding of a village or tribe at the disposal of the planner. He can understand and sympathise with the difficulties of his peasant or tribesman. He may in some cases even be able to anticipate the kind of reception a particular administrative measure may have. But he cannot lay down policy because it is the result of certain decisions about right and wrong. Politicians and reformers lay down policy, and the anthropologist can at best make clear the implications of a particular policy' (MNS 1955: 12). Although this quote is from the early part of his career, MNS held basically the same views throughout his career. (See for example the interview in Deshpande 2000.)

²³ Interesting contrasts are provided by other scholars featured in this volume, specially Nirmal Kumar Bose and A.R. Desai.

²⁴ For example, he arranged for faculty and research scholars of the Delhi department to pay a special visit to their respective fieldwork sites to observe and report on the general elections of 1967 and 1971. These studies have now been published in Srinivas and Shah 2007. I am grateful to Patricia Uberoi for bringing this to my notice.

social anthropology. But though the city and city folk were declared to be legitimate subjects, it was still rather difficult in the 1940s to move away from the anthropological concern with the 'traditional'. Hence the importance of the village. It offered a site that was traditional yet not inhabited by primitives, a research site that was relatively free from the taint of racial-colonial stereotypes and could be defended in a post-colonial context. Moreover, it was also a site where, *despite being a native* (thereby lacking the reinforcement of colonial-racial dominance), the upper-caste, Western-educated, city-based anthropologist could nevertheless count on the social distance and status differentials upon which the highly intrusive, intense, and long-drawn-out practice of fieldwork inevitably depended.

I do not mean to suggest that MNS or his contemporaries necessarily thought in this fashion, at least not explicitly. What I am arguing is that this reason for choosing the village (in preference to towns or other locations) would have insinuated itself into the calculations of social anthropologists in the form of 'practical considerations' as they went about planning their research or looking for suitable field sites. It is not as though fieldwork-related social interaction in rural contexts was easy or tension-free; there were also the physical-logistical and social hardships that city-bred researchers had to face when living in amenity-scarce and privacy-scarce villages—tribulations which formed the stuff of professional lore.²⁵ Although it is difficult to generalise, since much would have depended on the particulars of each instance, it is certainly arguable that as an institutionalised and routinised practice (rather than an exceptional virtuoso performance), participant observation—like much of empirical social science—required the tacit support of status differentials. This was (and presumably is) true in spite of the apparently contradictory fact that fieldwork places the researcher in a position of relative vulnerability *vis-à-vis* his/her subjects. (To borrow Louis Dumont's terminology from another context, such vulnerability may be said

²⁵ See, for example, A. Béteille, 'The tribulations of fieldwork' in Béteille & Madan 1975; for similar accounts from an urban setting, see Khadija Gupta, 'Travails of a woman fieldworker' in MNS, A.M. Shah, & E.A. Ramaswamy 2002 [1979].

to be 'encompassed' by the researcher's position of power within a broader set of social relations.) While the situation today may be more complicated, it is surely plausible that in the 1950s and 1960s villagers were more likely to be accommodating than city folk. In this sense, therefore, fieldwork in villages may have seemed more likely to succeed, which is perhaps one reason (apart from other disciplinary preferences and traditions) why most apprentice social anthropologists tended to do fieldwork in villages.²⁶

III. METHODOLOGICAL MONOTHEISM: THE CENTRALITY OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Despite his role in establishing village studies, and as he himself repeatedly noted, Srinivas's lifelong commitment was not to any particular research site but to a *method*, namely participant observation in the Malinowskian mould, as propagated by Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard at Oxford. This was one subject on which he never changed his views; perhaps it is also the single-most enduring feature of his legacy. More than any other scholar, MNS was responsible, through all his professional activities and especially in his role as a teacher and mentor for students and younger colleagues, for the establishment of participant observation as the most prestigious methodological choice for the practice of social anthropology in India.

In his autobiographical writings, Srinivas has unambiguously

²⁶ This is well trodden ground, but it would still be worthwhile to revisit it from a contemporary perspective. Apart from the extensive discussions in the international literature, two Indian collections from the 1970s on fieldwork experiences provide much material on the issue of relative status and its consequences: Bêteille and Madan (1975) and MNS, A.M. Shah, and E.A. Ramaswamy (2002 [1979]). For different strategies for handling 'status-by-association', see in particular, the essays by Mayer, Bêteille, and Mencher in the former volume, and by MNS and Pandey in the latter volume. An interesting miscellany of the problems of urban fieldwork can be found in Saberwal's essay in the first volume, and those by Gupta, Dua, Bellwinkel, Patwardhan, Ramaswamy, and Baviskar in the second volume.

acknowledged the formative—indeed transformative—impact of Oxford on his professional self. It was here that he came to look upon social anthropology as something of a vocation rather than just a career. He went to Oxford in May 1945 as a ‘mature student’ armed with a two-volume doctoral dissertation of nearly 900 pages (CE: 651) written under the supervision of G.S. Ghurye and already accepted by Bombay University.²⁷ His decision to go to Oxford was motivated more by ‘push’ factors—a falling out with Ghurye that had seen him passed over for a lectureship at Bombay and which led to the termination of his research assistantship with no concrete career alternatives in sight—than by the ‘pull’ of Oxbridge (CE: 669–70; CE: 651–2). Acquiring a foreign degree was seen as the next logical step in the attempt to enhance his job prospects. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that during his early days as a student at Oxford—a period marked by financial and career uncertainties—he wanted to earn his degree as quickly as possible, being particularly keen to avoid further fieldwork.²⁸

Things had changed substantially by July 1947, when MNS’s dissertation, based on the Coorg material without recourse to fresh fieldwork, was passed by his second supervisor, Evans-Pritchard, and

²⁷ André Béteille has written: ‘When Srinivas arrived in Oxford in 1945 to work for a D.Phil. in social anthropology, he was a mature student. He had done fieldwork in various parts of south India; he had earned a Ph.D. degree from Bombay University; and he had published a book. Nevertheless, Oxford had a transformative effect on him. It was at the time the Mecca of British social anthropology, and the five or six years that he spent there were enchanted years’ (Béteille 2003: xvii).

²⁸ Here is MNS in his own words: ‘R-B’s [suggestion] that I analyse the material on religion in my Coorg thesis from the functionalist point of view was to teach me, in a way that I would never forget, the fruitfulness of his approach. . . . The idea was attractive, even challenging, but I was scared that he might want me to visit Coorg again. The last thing that I could think of then was the luxury of another field trip. Besides, I had protracted my student life too long and I wanted to get a job and start contributing to the family income instead of being a drain on their hard-won resources. R-B assured me that the material in my thesis was enough for a D.Phil. thesis, and armed with that assurance, I went ahead’ (CE: 654–5).

awarded the DPhil degree by Oxford University. During these three years MNS had been 'converted' (his word) to the structural-functionalist cause espoused by Radcliffe-Brown.²⁹ He had also earned acceptance in the inner circle of Oxford social anthropology, developed a special rapport with Evans-Pritchard, a comfortable professional relationship with other teachers like Meyer-Fortes, and friendships with fellow students like Max Gluckman and Godfrey Lienhardt. Above all, his dissertation was well regarded and had been recommended for publication under the prestigious Clarendon imprint of the Oxford University Press, and he was being considered for a lectureship at Oxford. Despite all these achievements, however, Srinivas was acutely aware that he had not yet experienced the most important rite of passage of his tribe, namely Malinowski-style intensive fieldwork, and was therefore not really a 'proper' social anthropologist.

George Stocking Jr.'s now classic account of the emergence of 'fieldwork'³⁰ as the distinguishing characteristic of British (and later global) social anthropology tracks the evolution of this methodology from the 'intensive study of limited areas' proposed by A.C. Haddon through the 'concrete method' advocated by W.H.R. Rivers to its elevation as a 'mythic charter' for scientific anthropology by Bronislaw Malinowski (Stocking Jr. 1992; see also the 'Introduction' in Bétéille & Madan 1975). Having acquired prestige through the tireless proselytising of Malinowski, intensive, long-duration, solo 'immersion' fieldwork had become universally accepted as the mandatory method for social anthropology by the 1930s and 1940s. It marked a decisive break with the earlier practice of 'armchair anthropology' that relied on data collected by others, especially amateurs like missionaries,

²⁹ 'In the course of time I became an enthusiastic convert to functionalism, à la Radcliffe-Brown. I had the feeling that I had at last found a theoretical framework which was satisfactory but like all new converts I was a fanatic. I suppressed my natural scepticism, one of my few real assets, to accept such dogmas as the irrelevance of history for sociological explanation, the unimportance of culture, and the existence of universal laws' (CE: 655).

³⁰ Stocking notes that this term itself was 'apparently derived from the discourse of field naturalists, which [A.C.] Haddon seems to have introduced into that of British social anthropology' (Stocking Jr., 1992: 27).

traders, and colonial administrators, who happened to be the 'men on the spot' in distant lands. The insistence on trained anthropologists undertaking intensive fieldwork allowed the discipline to implement higher standards of rigour and thus claim scientific status equivalent to the natural sciences. In fact, even those who disagreed with everything else that Malinowski had to say agreed on the indispensability of fieldwork as the primary justification for the scholarly claims of the discipline. Srinivas's initiation had made him very conscious of the centrality of fieldwork for the discipline and its role in raising the intellectual and social prestige of social anthropology above that of rivals like sociology:

It is the insistence on the experience of intensive fieldwork that has chiefly contributed to making social anthropology a respected and respectable academic discipline. It is not without reason that in British universities, where academic standards are of a uniformly high level, social anthropology is an established and expanding subject, whereas, barring London, no English university has a chair in sociology. The distinguished occupants of the Martin White Professorship of Sociology in London, formerly Westermarck and Hobhouse, and at present, Professor Ginsberg, have all been not only deeply read in social anthropology but themselves conducted investigations which are social-anthropological in character. The difficulty in the establishment of social anthropology [*sic*—sociology?] as a subject of scholarship in the ancient universities of Great Britain is a moral for our country. (CE: 461–2)³¹

Understandably, Srinivas's own significant prior experience of fieldwork under Ghurye in India simply could not measure up to the heavily ideologised phenomenon that he was exposed to at Oxford. Despite his fanatical commitment to fieldwork (documented, among others, by MNS himself), Ghurye was largely an 'armchair scholar', who managed to get a lot of fieldwork done by

³¹ In the last sentence of this quote, 'social anthropology' seems to be an error, for it is clear from the context that MNS meant sociology rather than the 'established and expanding subject' of social anthropology. This quote is from the essay that MNS wrote in 1951 immediately upon his return to India from Oxford to take up a professorship at Baroda's newly created MS University.

students in the linguistic regions to which they belonged, through short trips to villages and towns, relying mainly on collecting information from knowledgeable informants.³² MNS was dissatisfied with his past experience of fieldwork and eagerly awaited the opportunity of a 'proper' experience; his first supervisor at Oxford had already encouraged him in this direction.

Radcliffe-Brown's suggestion that I should make an intensive study of a multi-caste village appealed to me for several reasons, including of course the purely scientific one of adding to existing knowledge. For one thing, I felt that my previous field experience, diverse as it was, had not been sufficiently intensive. I had only made brief forays into rural areas from towns, and I had gathered information from a few individuals instead of participating intimately, over a period of time, in the day-to-day activities of the people I was observing. I had been converted during my year of studentship to Radcliffe-Brown's brand of functionalism (subsequently designated 'structural functionalism' in the United States), and I was excited about its implications for field-work: I wanted to examine, first-hand, events and institutions in all their complex interrelations. (1976: 2)

The opportunity was presented to Srinivas in the form of a lectureship that he was offered in November 1947 by Oxford University at Evans-Pritchard's initiative, which stipulated that the first year could be spent on fieldwork in an Indian village. That is how Srinivas came to spend the better part of 1948 studying 'Rampura', a village very close to his ancestral village near Mysore. Apart from being the most famous instance of fieldwork in Indian social anthropology, the Rampura experience was profoundly important to MNS at a

³² Srinivas felt that the village studies conducted by Ghurye's students 'were more similar to the studies carried out by the agricultural economists than to the intensive studies undertaken by anthropologists since the 1950s' (1976: 9). But it also has to be mentioned that the range of subjects covered by Ghurye and his students and associates at Bombay was much wider, and the village did not occupy as central a place in this range as it did in the Srinivasian conception of social anthropology on display in Baroda and especially in Delhi (see also CE: 668).

personal level, one which he referred to with great feeling.³³ Glimpses of his personal and emotional involvement in fieldwork are visible in *The remembered village* (1976), particularly in the descriptions of his arrival in and departure from Rampura.

The point of recounting the story of MNS's encounter with fieldwork at such length is to demonstrate that it formed the cornerstone of his professional creed. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that from the very beginning of his teaching career in India till its very end and beyond, Srinivas remained steadfastly committed to making fieldwork a mandatory part of the training of every student of social anthropology in the two departments he headed at Baroda and Delhi. Even beyond the boundaries of his own departments, MNS promoted the cause of fieldwork in every academic forum, whether through his committee work or through his writings.³⁴ As a gifted fieldworker himself, he succeeded in training (or guiding) a generation of successful fieldworkers including A.M. Shah, André Béteille, B.S. Baviskar, E.A. Ramaswamy, and Anand Chakravarti (to name only a few). Above all, he succeeded in transmitting to succeeding generations of students much of his messianic zeal for fieldwork and his deep faith in its pedagogic and, indeed, redemptive worth.

If these can be said to constitute the unambiguously positive aspect of MNS's commitment to the fieldwork method, there are the more mixed and negative aspects still to be considered. Moreover, all these aspects, whether positive, ambivalent, or negative, remain in need of detailed historical research that will accumulate the necessary evidence on these questions and contribute towards knowledge cumulation, so that the same ground need not be trod repeatedly and new questions of interpretation and evaluation can be allowed to emerge.

³³ I still remember the emphatic way in which MNS spoke about this experience in the interview that he gave me: '... that changed *entirely* my outlook on anthropology, that ten months of 1948 living in Rampura' (Deshpande 2000: 108).

³⁴ For example, he arranged for paid leave for young teachers in his Delhi department so as to enable them to do fieldwork; he also got research funds created for financing the fieldwork of students. ('I attended innumerable committees to try and secure scholarships for my students to go to the field' [CE: 708]).

For example, as André Bêteille wrote almost thirty years ago, the actual teaching of intensive fieldwork methods has remained a rather vague process because 'few standardized procedures have been developed which can be communicated in a way that is at once abstract and meaningful. Manuals for research students which are so good on survey techniques and procedures in fact give very little actual guidance in the matter of intensive fieldwork. Apart from a few practical suggestions about collecting genealogies, observing ceremonies, recording disputes and so on, what the student is told in effect is that while in the field he should do his best to keep his eyes and ears open' (1975: 100). Thus, while the heavy emphasis on intensive fieldwork in Srinivasian social anthropology has become a much repeated commonplace, and we now have several collections of personalised accounts of fieldwork,³⁵ we still need a detailed history of what actually was done in the classroom (and in the field) by way of training in this method. This will have to be pieced together from the personal accounts already available, and from systematic interviews with different generations of the teachers and students involved in the transmission process. Particularly important here will be the tracking of syllabi and reading lists over time, since such data usually fall victim to weak institutional memory. A possible case in point is the 'Modern fieldwork monographs' course that MNS designed and included in the MA programme at the Delhi School of Economics.³⁶

³⁵ These include Bêteille & Madan 1975, MNS, Shah, & Ramaswamy 2002 [1979], and Thapan 1998.

³⁶ The Delhi department has a better institutional memory than most other institutions of a similar sort. But even here, though a full set of annual reports is available from the inception of the department in 1959 to the present day (albeit the period 1959–71 is covered in a single 'twelve year report'), the reports do not include course lists. (Full course outlines may, of course, be too much to include in an annual report. There exists a separate collection of course outlines and syllabi, but it has gaps which can only be filled through painstaking personalised efforts.) The 1966 report of the UGC Review Committee on 'Sociology in Indian universities' provides some valuable information on the kinds of courses that were being taught at various levels in universities across the country. Interestingly, the 'Modern fieldwork monographs' course is mentioned here as being taught at the Mysore and Panjab universities in addition to Delhi.

Coming now to the more mixed or negative aspects of MNS's single-minded devotion to intensive fieldwork, two main points may be made. First, MNS is much too uncritical about his chosen method—while his arguments in favour of fieldwork frequently mention the limitations of rival methodologies (which he invariably presented as popular, fashionable, dominant, or otherwise privileged in comparison to the 'underdog' method of fieldwork), he hardly ever mentions the possibility of problems with the fieldwork method itself. Whenever they are mentioned—as with the question of the 'expensive' nature of social anthropological research, meaning its insatiable appetite for enormous person-hours of work by highly trained researchers—it is as though they are virtues first and vices only a distant second.³⁷

Another frequently mentioned issue is that of the long time-lag between social anthropological fieldwork and its publication: '15–20 years' is the period mentioned in one essay (CE: 461), while the results of the only intensive fieldwork that Srinivas ever did, that in Rampura in 1948, were finally fully published in book form (as *The remembered village*) in 1976, a full twenty-seven years later! Of course, this is an exceptional case; it is well known that various misfortunes including a fire at Stanford delayed publication beyond what would have been normal. But, as is clear from Srinivas's writings, if fifteen to twenty years is normal then twenty-seven years is only slightly

But it is only through the independent testimony of others (such as André Beteille: 'The fieldwork monograph became the hallmark of social anthropology as an intellectual discipline. Srinivas set great store by it, and when he designed the first MA syllabus in sociology at the Delhi School of Economics in 1959, he had a separate paper entitled "Modern fieldwork monographs" [2003: xix]) that we know that this course was taught from that very year, 1959, and that MNS designed it. (See also Kabir, Mathai, Vakil *et al.* 1968, which includes G.S. Ghurye and D.N. Majumdar among its authors, and has separate sections on sociology, social anthropology, and anthropology. Patricia Uberoi informs me that a similar course on monographs was also taught for several years at the Jawaharlal Nehru University.

³⁷ See, for example, the preface to *India's villages* (1955), or the 'manifesto' essay of 1951 (CE: 461).

above normal. It is a curious aspect of MNS's orientation to methodology that the consequences of such long lags are rarely discussed. This is all the more puzzling in the Indian context, where 'social change' was the major item on the research agenda for social scientists, an item which MNS himself believed to be important and was engaged in addressing. Should it not be a matter of concern that it takes two decades to make available a 'thick description' of social *change*? There is an interesting standoff here between the notion of an asynchronous snapshot view of a contextualised community and the dynamic of change—the snapshot is considered valuable in and of itself, and it does not bear the burden of an urgency to address the present.³⁸

The major problem which MNS does consider in the manner of a shortcoming is the lack of generalisability—the social anthropologist relying on participant observation alone can only study one or two communities in an entire career. Understandably, this is usually discussed in the context of the criticisms of social anthropology often made by economists. Here, Srinivas's usual response is to invoke the complementarity of methods and say that micro and macro studies each have a valuable role to perform.³⁹ However, it was generally left to others to deal with macro methods; there is little evidence to show that this complementarity was taken seriously by the institutions that MNS shaped, or that they did much to bring about a 'mutually creative relationship'.

This, then, is the second negative: a methodological exclusivism in practice, despite the profession of catholicity in principle. It can

³⁸ In this regard, perhaps the specifically Indian forms of the 'allochronism' of anthropology that Johannes Fabian (1983) talks of could form a fruitful research topic.

³⁹ For example: 'Indeed, participant observation and the quantitative techniques associated with macro-studies can be used in a mutually complementary way. Thus macro-studies describe the behaviour of large categories and aggregates in specific matters while micro-studies provide insights into relationships and motivations in small units. Properly used, micro-studies can provide hypotheses to be tested by macro-methods while the latter yield perspectives as well as problems to be tackled by new micro-studies. In short, the two can be brought together in a mutually creative relationship' (CE: 662).

be nobody's case that a single individual should embody in his or her person all the methodologies of a discipline. Moreover, it is also true that no individual can be held solely responsible for the methodological vices or virtues of an entire discipline. But future research will have to address the question of MNS's methodological exclusivism and its potential impact on the discipline at large. This is clearly a very complicated issue, for it is not a matter of assessing MNS alone. During the early part of MNS's innings in the profession, there were a number of well-known practitioners who used other methods, such as surveys or interviews of various kinds in addition to intensive fieldwork.⁴⁰ Why did these other scholars and centres decline relative to Delhi or MNS? Did they really decline? What kind of evidence—and conceptual/historical perspective—will allow us to answer such questions in a constructive and useful manner? MNS frequently mentioned the fact that, at the beginning of his career, intensive fieldwork of the Malinowskian kind was almost completely absent in India, while all kinds of other methods, including especially survey methods, were extremely popular. By the time his career ended, however, the shoe seems to have been on the other foot. Both these impressions—the early paucity of fieldwork as well as its later dominance—need to be subjected to rigorous scrutiny.

IV. CONCLUSION

This essay has confined itself almost entirely to the domestic concerns, so to speak, of Indian sociology and social anthropology. The question of their relationship to the global milieu—the non-Western as much as the usually dominant Western—has not been dealt with. Consequently, I have set aside the subject of MNS's relationship to the global discipline and the place that it could or could not offer him and others like him, in the times that they lived in. I have suggested that in the crucial post-Independence decades, MNS helped social anthropology gain a new name ('sociology'), create fresh objects of analysis relevant to the new India (village studies), and lay claim to a rigorous method (intensive fieldwork). All these moves

⁴⁰ Examples include Irawati Karve, D.N. Majumdar, I.P. Desai, S.C. Dube, A.R. Desai, and, of course, MNS's own teacher G.S. Ghurye.

brought benefits, but none of them came free. However, any reliable evaluation of the net gain or loss can only be made after more intensive and extensive research. For disciplinary history, as much as for other kinds of history, God is in the details.

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