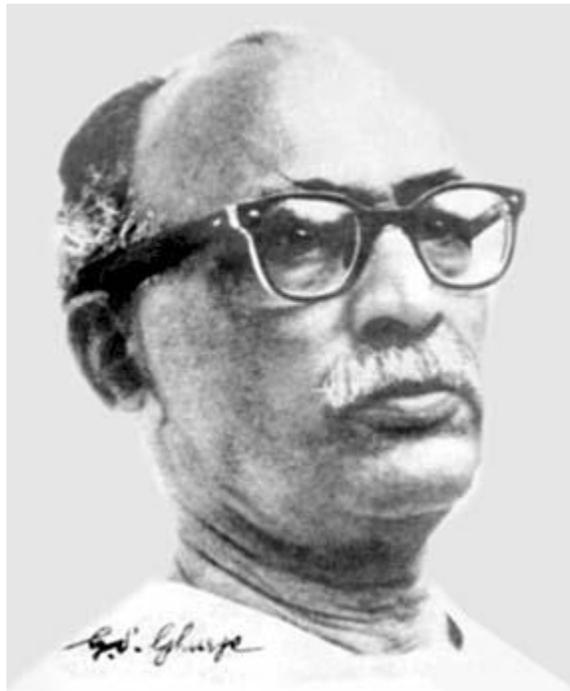


## **Module-14**

# **GOVIND SADASHIV GHURYE** **(1893-1983)**



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# GOVIND SADASHIV GHURYE

## (1893-1983)

### INTRODUCTION

Govind Sadashiv Ghurye is a towering figure in intellectual and academic circles for his unique contribution in the field of Indian sociology. He has often been acclaimed as the ‘father of Indian sociology’, ‘the doyen of Indian sociologists’ or ‘the symbol of sociological creativeness’. Ghurye had been engaged in building up; almost single handedly, the entire first generation of Indian sociologists in post-independence period. M.N. Srinivas has rightly said, “Nothing disguises the fact that Ghurye was giant”. Efforts of individuals, who have variously been regarded as the ‘founding fathers’, ‘pioneers’ ‘first-generation sociologists’ etc., constituted the most important factor in the growth of Indian sociology. These pioneers provided direction to shape the future of sociology in India. And, of all these, none did as much for sociology in India as Ghurye.

As an institution-builder, deservedly, the most profound impact on Indian sociology was made by Ghurye. Ghurye was the principal architect of the Department of Sociology of Bombay University and produced a batch of renowned scholars including M.N. Srinivas, who is now internationally known. His students headed (and many of them are still heading) the departments of sociology in many universities in India. Ghurye was the prime mover in the formation of Indian Sociological Society in 1952 and was also instrumental in the publication of its mouthpiece, Sociological Bulletin, as its official bi-annual journal. However, the first sociological journal in India, The Indian Journal of Sociology, was started in January 1920 under the editorship of Alban G. Widgery of Baroda College in Baroda. As a scholar, in fact, throughout his life, Ghurye has been active from the academic standpoint. His 16 books, out of a total of 31 books, published during his lifetime. His output is indeed prodigious by any standard. Several of them are noteworthy as pioneering contributions to the sociology field.

**The important works of Ghurye are as follows:**

1. Caste and Race in India (1932, 1969)
2. Culture and Society (1947)
3. Indian Sadhus (1953)

4. Bharatnatyam and Its Costume (1958)
5. Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture (1955, 1961)
6. Cities and Civilization (1962)
7. Gods and Men (1962)
8. Anatomy of a Rural-Urban Community (1962)
9. Scheduled Tribes (first published as The Aborigines So-called and their Future) (1943, 1959, 1963)
10. Religious Consciousness (1965)
11. Indian Costume (1966)
12. Social Tensions in India (1968)
13. I and Other Explorations (1973)
14. Whither India (1974)
15. Indian Acculturation (1977)
16. Vedic India (1979)
17. Bringing Cauldron of North East India (1980)

## **METHODOLOGY OF G.S GHURYE**

Ghurye's rigour and discipline are now legendary in Indian sociological circles. In the application of theories to empirical exercises or in the use of methodologies for data collection that legendary rigour is not somehow reflected. To put it differently, Ghurye was not dogmatic in the use of theory and methodology.

He seems to have believed in practising and encouraging disciplined eclecticism in theory and methodology. Despite his training at Cambridge under W.H.R. Rivers and his broad acceptance of the structural-functional approach, Ghurye did not strictly conform to the functionalist tradition when interpreting the complex facets of Indian society and culture, which he chose to investigate. The pioneers were 'armchair' or 'lecture-ism' sociologists. Even Ghurye had conducted village, town and community studies. It was said that "Ghurye insisted on fieldwork, though he himself was an armchair scholar" (Srinivas and Panini, 1973: 188). This was not

intended as a pejorative comment (Srinivas, 1973), but it reflected the tremendous premium placed on single-handed 'anthropological fieldwork'.

Therefore, it may be said that although trained in the craft of Indology, Ghurye was not averse to the fieldwork traditions of social and cultural anthropology. His field survey of Sex Habits of Middle Class People in Bombay conducted in the 1930s and published in 1938 and the monograph on the Mahadev Kolis (1963) demonstrated Ghurye was far from promoting an armchair textual scholarship. He was an empirical field worker also. Later generations of Indian sociologists and social anthropologists used Ghurye's inexhaustible themes for their researches. It would be appropriate to characterize Ghurye as a practitioner of 'theoretical pluralism'. Basically interested in inductive empirical exercises and depicting Indian social reality using any source material – primarily Indological – his theoretical position bordered on laissez-faire. Similarly, when Ghurye conducted survey-type research involving primary data collection, he did not conform to accepted methodological canons.

He often ventured into generalization on the basis of scanty and unrepresentative evidence, e.g., *Social Tensions in India* (Ghurye, 1968). It is also likely that Ghurye's flexible approach to theory and methodology in sociology and social anthropology was born of his faith in intellectual freedom, which is reflected in the diverse theoretical and methodological approaches that his research students pursued in their works. Ghurye also used historical and comparative methods in his studies which have also been followed by his students.

Ghurye was initially influenced by the reality of diffusionist approach of British social anthropology but subsequently he switched on to the studies of Indian society from indological and anthropological perspectives. He emphasized on Indological approach in the study of social and cultural life in India and elsewhere. This helps in the understanding of society through literature. Ghurye utilized literature in sociological studies with his profound knowledge of Sanskrit literature, extensively quoted from the Vedas, Sbastras, epics, and poetry of Kalidasa or Bhavabhuti to shed light on the social and cultural life in India. He made use of the literature in vernacular, e.g., Marathi, and cited from the literature of modern writers like Bankimchandra Chatterjee as well.

## **Caste and Kinship**

G.S. Ghurye's *Caste and Race in India* (1932), which cognitively combined historical, anthropological and sociological perspectives to understand caste and kinship system in India. He tried to analyse caste system through textual evidences using ancient texts on the one hand and also from both structural and cultural perspectives on the other hand. Ghurye studied caste system from a historical, comparative and integrative perspective. Later on he did comparative study of kinship in Indo-European cultures.

In his study of caste and kinship, Ghurye emphasizes two important points:

1. The kin and caste networks in India had parallels in some other societies also.
2. The kinship and caste in India served in the past as integrative frameworks.

The evolution of society was based on the integration of diverse, racial or ethnic groups through these networks.

Ghurye highlights six structural features of caste system as follows:

1. Segmental division
2. Hierarchy
3. Pollution and purity
4. Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections
5. Lack of choice of occupation
6. Restrictions on marriage

Besides the above characteristics, Ghurye laid particular stress on endogamy as the most important feature of the caste system. Any effective unit of the caste hierarchy is marked by endogamy. Every caste had in the past segmented into smaller sub-divisions or sub-castes. Each of these sub-castes practised endogamy. For example, Vaishya (Baniya or Mahajan) castes are divided into various sub-castes such as Agrawal, Maheshwari etc. Caste is also linked with kinship through caste endogamy and also clan (gotra) exogamy. Gotra has been treated as thoroughly exogamous unit by the Brahmins and later by the non-Brahmins. The basic notion here is that all the members of a gotra are related to one another, through blood, i.e., they have rishi (sage) as their common ancestor. Therefore, marriage between two persons of the same gotra will lead to incestuous relationship. It will lead the lineage of the gotra to near extinction.

## **TRIBE**

Ghurye's works on the tribes were general as well as specific. He wrote a general book on Scheduled Tribes in which he dealt with the historical, administrative and social dimensions of Indian tribes. He also wrote on specific tribes such as the Kolis in Maharashtra. Ghurye presented his thesis on tribes at a time when a majority of the established anthropologists and administrators were of the opinion that the separate identity of the tribes is to be maintained at any cost.

Ghurye, on the other hand, believes that most of the tribes have been Hinduized after a long period of contact with Hindus. He holds that it is futile to search for the separate identity of the tribes. They are nothing but the 'backward caste Hindus'. Their backwardness was due to their

imperfect integration into Hindu society. The Santhals, Bhils, Gonds, etc., who live in South-Central India are its examples (Ghurye, 1963). There has been fierce debate between G.S. Ghurye and Verrier Elwin. Elwin in his book *Loss of Nerve* said that tribals should be allowed to live in isolation, whereas Ghurye argued that tribals should be assimilated into Hindu castes. Thus, Ghurye holds the view that a grand historical process of merger between two communities has almost been completed. Consequently, tribes, now, may be regarded as 'backward Hindus'. The incorporation of Hindu values and norms into tribal life was a positive step in the process of development.

The tribes in India had slowly absorbed certain Hindu values and style of life through contact with the Hindu social groups. Today, it is being considered a part of Hindu society. Under Hindu influence, the tribes gave up liquor drinking, received education and improved their agriculture. In this context, Hindu voluntary organizations, such as Ramakrishna Mission and Arya Samaj, played a constructive role for the development of the tribes. In his later works of north-eastern tribes, Ghurye documented secessionist trends. He felt that unless these were held in check, the political unity of the country would be damaged.

Ghurye presents a huge data on the thoughts, practices and habits of the tribes inhabiting the Central Indian region. He quotes extensively from various writings and reports to show that Kataris, Bhuiyas, Oraons, Khonds, Gonds, Korkus etc. have substantially adopted Hinduism as their religion. Ghurye suggests that the economic motivation behind the adoption of Hinduism is very strong among the tribes. They can come out of their tribal crafts and adopt a specialized type of occupation, which is in demand in society.

## **CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION**

There are two conflicting views about the growth and accumulation pattern of culture. One theory maintains that in any community culture grows quite independently of similar events happening elsewhere or predominantly with reference to local needs and local situation. The other group believes that culture grows by diffusion. A single invention or discovery is made at one place and ultimately this cultural trait diffuses throughout the world. Sir G.E. Smith was the most ardent advocate of the diffusion theory.

In one of his papers, "The Disposal of Human Placenta", published in 1937, Ghurye examines the practices of human beings with regard to the disposal of discard of human body like first out hair, nail pairing, first fallen teeth and the after birth. The purpose of this paper is, as he says, to compare the methods of disposal of the human placenta in the different regions of the world to see if they shed any light on the problem of diffusion of culture. Culture diffusion is essentially an anthropological theory, which is concerned with the nature of culture contact operating principally among the preliminary people. According to Ghurye, culture constitutes the central or

core element for understanding society and its evolution. In fact, culture is a totality involving the entire heritage of mankind. Ghurye's abiding interest was to analyse the course of cultural evolution and the nature of heritage which mankind has denied from the past.

Culture relates to the realm of values. It is a matter of individual attainment of excellence and creativity. Ghurye had a strong faith in the power of man to preserve the best of his old culture, while creating from his own spirit of new culture. He was more concerned with the process of evolution of Hindu civilization, which has been termed as a 'complex civilization'. And, Ghurye thought that for analyzing the dynamics of culture in such a long historical civilization. In this context, the process of acculturation is more relevant than the process of diffusion. He thinks that the challenging task of a sociologist is to analyse this complex acculturation process in India.

According to him, India has been the home of many ethnic stocks and cultures from pre-historic times. In his analysis of caste, Ghurye refers to how caste system was developed by the Brahmins and how it spread to other sections of the population. The operation of the process of Hinduization also provides the general backdrop of his analysis of the caste phenomenon.

Ghurye was motivated by the belief that there is a "common heritage of modern civilization" and that civilization is a "collective endeavour of humanity". He holds that behind the rise and fall of civilization, there has occurred a steady growth of culture. Cutting across the vicissitudes of civilization growth, there are certain values, which have been established as final. These values have been termed by Ghurye as the 'foundations of culture'.