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# Introduction to Indian Sociology

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Sociology is a relatively young discipline in India, with formal university teaching beginning in 1919 at the University of Bombay. Early pioneers like L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer and Sarat Chandra Roy contributed significantly to the development of sociology and anthropology in India, often working without formal qualifications but with great dedication. Indian sociology had to address unique questions related to the country's colonial experience, ancient civilization, and diverse social groups. The discipline evolved through the efforts of scholars who adapted Western sociological ideas to the Indian context, shaping the study of society in India.

## Exam Question

**Q:** Who were some of the early pioneers of sociology and anthropology in India, and what challenges did they face?

**A:** Early pioneers included L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer and Sarat Chandra Roy. They often worked without formal qualifications and had to develop sociology in India from scratch, addressing unique social and historical contexts such as colonialism and India's diverse cultures.

## G.S. Ghurye: Founder of Indian Sociology

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Govind Sadashiv Ghurye (1893–1983) is considered the founder of institutionalized sociology in India. He headed the first postgraduate sociology department at Bombay University for 35 years and founded the Indian Sociological Society and its journal, *Sociological Bulletin*. Ghurye's work covered caste, race, tribes, kinship, family, religion, and social integration. He emphasized the importance of combining teaching and research and merging sociology with social anthropology. His doctoral thesis, "Caste and Race in India," critically examined dominant racial theories of caste and provided a comprehensive definition of caste based on six key features.

### Govind Sadashiv Ghurye(1893-1983)

G. S. Ghurye was born on 12 December 1893 in Malvan, a town in the Konkan coastal region of western India. His family owned a trading business which had once been prosperous, but was in decline.



1913: Joined Elphinstone College in Bombay with Sanskrit Honours for the B.A. degree which he completed in 1916. Received the M.A. degree in Sanskrit and English from the same college in 1918.

1919: Selected for a scholarship by the University of Bombay for training in a broad discipline of sociology. Initially went to the London School of Economic Studies to study with L. T. Hobhouse, a prominent sociologist of the time. Later went to Cambridge to study with W. H. R. Rivers, and was deeply influenced by his diffusionist perspective.

1923: Ph.D. submitted under A.C. Haddon after River's sudden death in 1922. Returned to Bombay in May. *Caste and Race in India*, the manuscript based on the doctoral dissertation, was accepted for publication in a major book series at Cambridge.

1924: After brief stay in Calcutta, was appointed Reader and Head of the Department of Sociology at Bombay University in June. He remained as Head of the Department at Bombay University for the next 35 years.

1936: Ph.D. Programme was launched at the Bombay Department; the first Ph.D. in Sociology at an Indian university was awarded to G.R. Pradhan under Ghurye's supervision. The M.A. course was revised and made a full-fledged 8-course programme in 1945.

1951: Ghurye established the Indian Sociological Society and became its founding President. The journal of the Indian Sociological Society, *Sociological Bulletin* was launched in 1952.

1959: Ghurye retired from the University, but continued to be active in academic life, particularly in terms of publication — 17 of his 30 books were written after retirement.

G.S. Ghurye died in 1983, at the age of 90.

## Exam Question

Q: What are the six features of caste according to G.S. Ghurye?

A: (i) Caste is based on segmental division decided by birth; (ii) hierarchical division with unequal status; (iii) restrictions on social interaction and food sharing; (iv) differential rights and duties; (v) hereditary occupation; (vi) strict restrictions on marriage (endogamy and exogamy).

# D.P. Mukerji on Tradition and Change

Dhruv Prasad Mukerji (1894–1961) emphasized the centrality of society in India and the importance of studying Indian social traditions as living traditions that maintain links with the past while adapting to change. He argued that Indian society is oriented towards group action rather than individualism, with traditions transmitted through collective experience. Mukerji highlighted the role of internal, non-economic causes of social change and the cyclical process of rebellion and transformation within tradition. He cautioned against uncritical adoption of Western ideas and advocated a balanced approach to tradition and modernity.

## Dhruv Prasad Mukerji (1894-1961)

D.P. Mukerji was born on 5 October 1894 in a middle class Bengali brahmin family with a long tradition of involvement in higher education. Undergraduate degree in science and postgraduate degrees in History and Economics from Calcutta University.



- 1924: Appointed Lecturer in the Department of Economics and Sociology at Lucknow University
- 1938-41: Served as Director of Information under the first Congress-led government of the United Provinces of British India (present day Uttar Pradesh).
- 1947: Served as a Member of the U.P. Labour Enquiry Committee.
- 1949: Appointed Professor (by special order of the Vice-Chancellor) at Lucknow University.
- 1953: Appointed Professor of Economics at Aligarh Muslim University
- 1955: Presidential Address to the newly formed Indian Sociological Society
- 1956: Underwent major surgery for throat cancer in Switzerland and died on 5 December 1961.

## Exam Question

**Q:** What does D.P. Mukerji mean by a 'living tradition' and how does it relate to social change?

**A:** A living tradition maintains links with the past but incorporates new elements, adapting over time. Social change occurs through collective experiences that challenge and transform tradition without breaking it.

# A.R. Desai and Marxist Perspective on Indian Society

Akshay Ramanlal Desai (1915–1994) was a Marxist sociologist involved in political activism. He analyzed Indian nationalism, peasant movements, rural sociology, and the state from a Marxist viewpoint. Desai critiqued the concept of the welfare state, arguing that capitalist welfare states fail to provide adequate social security, reduce inequality, or ensure stable development. He emphasized the importance of democracy and political liberties even under socialism and highlighted the limitations of both capitalist and communist states.

## Akshay Ramanlal Desai (1915 - 1994)

- A.R. Desai was born in 1915. Early education in Baroda, then in Surat and Bombay. 1934-39: Member of Communist Party of India; involved with Trotskyite groups. 1946: Ph.D. submitted at Bombay under the supervision of G.S. Ghurye.
- 1948: Desai's Ph.D. dissertation is published as the book: *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*.
- 1951: Joins the faculty of the Department of Sociology at Bombay University
- 1953-1981: Member of Revolutionary Socialist Party.
- 1961: *Rural Transition in India* is published.
- 1967: Appointed Professor and Head of Department.
- 1975: *State and Society in India: Essays in Dissent* is published.
- 1976: Retired from Department of Sociology.
- 1979: *Peasant Struggles in India* is published.
- 1986: *Agrarian Struggles in India after Independence* is published.  
Died on 12 November 1994.

## Exam Question

**Q:** What are the key features of a welfare state according to A.R. Desai, and why does he consider it a myth?

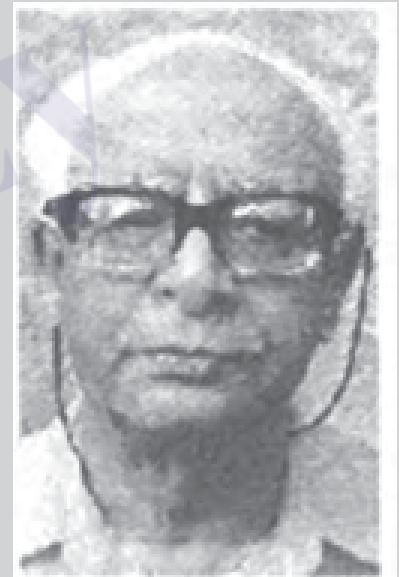
**A:** A welfare state is interventionist, democratic, and involves a mixed economy. Desai considers it a myth because capitalist welfare states often fail to eliminate poverty, reduce inequality, provide employment, or ensure stable economic development.

## M.N. Srinivas and Village Society

Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas (1916–1999) was a prominent sociologist and anthropologist known for his ethnographic studies of Indian villages. He emphasized the importance of the village as a social unit and challenged views that prioritized caste over village identity. Srinivas showed that villages were dynamic, interconnected with regional economies and politics, and central to understanding social change in India. He helped establish sociology departments and research institutions, training many future sociologists.

### Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas(1916-1999)

M.N. Srinivas was born on 16 November 1916 in an Iyengar brahmin family in Mysore. His father was a landowner and worked for the Mysore power and light department. His early education was at Mysore University, and he later went to Bombay to do an MA under G.S. Ghurye.



1942: M.A. thesis on Marriage and Family Among the Coorgs published as book.

1944: Ph.D. thesis (in 2 volumes) submitted to Bombay University under the supervision of G.S. Ghurye.

1945: Leaves for Oxford; studies first under Radcliffe-Brown and then under Evans-Pritchard.

1947: Awarded D.Phil. degree in Social Anthropology from Oxford; returns to India.

1948: Appointed Lecturer in Indian Sociology at Oxford; fieldwork in Rampura.

1951: Resigns from Oxford to take up Professorship at Maharaja Sayaji Rao University in Baroda to found its sociology department.

1959: Takes up Professorship at the Delhi School of Economics to set up the sociology department there.

1971: Leaves Delhi University to co-found the Institute of Social and Economic Change at Bangalore.

Died on 30 November 1999.

## Exam Question

**Q:** Why did M.N. Srinivas consider the village an important unit of social analysis?

**A:** Srinivas argued that villages serve as a unifying identity, experience social and economic change, and are interconnected with wider regional systems, making them relevant for sociological study.

## Conclusion: Indian Sociology Pioneers and Their Legacy

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The four sociologists—G.S. Ghurye, D.P. Mukerji, A.R. Desai, and M.N. Srinivas—each contributed uniquely to the development of Indian sociology. They adapted Western sociological theories to Indian realities, addressed social traditions, political economy, and social change, and helped institutionalize sociology in India. Their work laid the foundation for future generations to critique and expand the discipline, ensuring its continued relevance to Indian society.

### Exam Question

**Q:** How did the pioneers of Indian sociology contribute to the development of the discipline?

**A:** They adapted Western theories to Indian contexts, studied social traditions and change, critiqued political and economic structures, and established academic institutions and research programs in sociology.

### Solved Examples

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**Example 1:** Explain the significance of G.S. Ghurye's work on caste.

**Answer:** Ghurye provided a systematic definition of caste emphasizing its segmental, hierarchical, and hereditary nature. His work helped sociologists understand caste as a complex social institution influencing social interaction, occupation, and marriage in India.

**Example 2:** Describe D.P. Mukerji's view on the role of tradition in Indian society.

**Answer:** Mukerji viewed tradition as a living process that maintains continuity with the past while adapting to change. He believed social change in India occurs through collective experiences that transform tradition without destroying it.

# Practice Set

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## Easy

- Who was the founder of the Indian Sociological Society?
- Define endogamy as per Ghurye's caste features.

## Moderate

- Explain the debate between protectionists and nationalists regarding tribal cultures in India.
- What are the three principles of change recognized in Indian traditions according to D.P. Mukerji?

## Challenging

- Critically analyze A.R. Desai's critique of the welfare state.
- Discuss M.N. Srinivas's argument on the importance of village studies against Louis Dumont's view.

## Answer Key

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- G.S. Ghurye
- Marriage only within the same caste group.
- Protectionists wanted to preserve tribal cultures to prevent exploitation; nationalists wanted tribes to assimilate and develop.
- Shruti (heard), Smriti (remembered), and Anubhava (experience).
- Desai argued welfare states fail to provide social security, reduce inequality, and ensure stable development, making the welfare state a myth.
- Srinivas argued villages are dynamic social units with historical significance, while Dumont prioritized caste over village as a social institution.

## Quick Reference

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- **G.S. Ghurye:** Founder of Indian sociology, caste and race studies.
- **D.P. Mukerji:** Tradition as living, social change through collective experience.
- **A.R. Desai:** Marxist critique of Indian society and welfare state.
- **M.N. Srinivas:** Village studies, social change, and Indian sociology institution building.

## Glossary

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- **Administrator–anthropologists:** British officials who conducted anthropological research in colonial India.
- **Anthropometry:** Study of human physical measurements used in racial classification.
- **Assimilation:** Process where one culture absorbs another, losing distinct identity.
- **Endogamy:** Marriage within a specific social group or caste.
- **Exogamy:** Marriage outside a specific social group or kinship.
- **Laissez-faire:** Economic doctrine advocating minimal state intervention.