The paper situates Ghurye’s thought within its intellectual and political context in order to reflect on the framing of a sociological discourse about Indian society by the first post-colonial generation of Indian academic sociologists. While Ghurye incorporated the Orientalist rendering of Indian history in his work, he turned this discourse around to develop a nationalist sociology that rejects some of the premises of colonial knowledge. However, Ghurye’s brand of sociology, by building itself around a particular understanding of Indian civilisation, emerges finally as an elaboration on a narrow Hindu/brahminical nationalist ideology that advocates cultural unity and nation-building rather than political and economic emancipation. Thus Ghurye may be held partially responsible for the development of one stream of mainstream Indian sociology in which cultural continuity and ‘tradition’ as embodied in the classical texts are emphasised, an approach that ironically produced an ahistorical perspective rather than the historical anthropology envisioned by him.
G.S. Ghurye, often considered the ‘father’ of Indian sociology, is an enigmatic figure both in his persona and his writings. In spite of his prolific output (31 books and 47 papers and other publications written over a span of fifty years), his thirty-five years as Head of the Sociology Department at Bombay University, and the large number of his Ph.D. students who became noted members of the profession, the evolution of his thought and his influence on the discipline have not been assessed in a comprehensive manner. While there are several books books and articles on Ghurye and his work, most are short on analysis.¹ This shortcoming perhaps reflects an overall lack of reflexivity within Indian sociology and anthropology, a deficiency that this workshop hopes to correct. In this paper I attempt to place Ghurye’s thought within its historical, intellectual and political context in order to reflect on the framing of a sociological discourse about Indian society by the first non-British and post-colonial generation of academic sociologists.

Recent work on colonialism in India has focused attention on the colonial production of knowledge about Indian society and its reproduction within post-colonial ideologies and practices. Although 18th century Orientalism and 19th century empiricist surveys of Indian society influenced the development of the academic disciplines, a critique of Indian social sciences from this perspective has not really taken off. Specific continuities between colonial and post-colonial sociology and anthropology, for example in the conceptualisation of the basic categories of ‘caste’ and ‘tribe’, are quite obvious, but to understand the trajectory of postcolonial social thought it is hardly sufficient just to point to the reproduction of colonial discourses. Rather what is required is a comprehensive mapping of the reconstitution of the modern social science disciplines as they emerged in the context of colonial and post-colonial social, political and economic processes, and especially in relation to the overarching ideologies of nationalism and economic development.

The sociology of Ghurye provides an ideal case through which to examine this issue, for at first glance he appears to incorporate wholesale the Orientalist gaze as well as the empiricism and mania for classification of the British ethnologists. Yet it can be argued that he turned this colonial discourse around to develop a nationalist sociology that rejects many of the premises of colonial knowledge. Finally, however, this nationalism emerges as a narrow Hindu nationalism that takes little account of the various strands of the freedom struggle as well as of diverse struggles against indigenous forms of oppression before and after independence. Ghurye’s failure to recognise domination, exploitation and conflict as
fundamental features of Indian society may be attributed to the influence of 18th and 19th century Orientalist discourses of Indian civilisation, reworked within mainstream nationalist ideology with its stress on unity and nation-building. His analyses of caste, tribe, regionalism, communalism, and many other social phenomena are all framed by a specific understanding of Indian civilisation and nation, which is remarkable for its persistence over many years of research and writing.

The first section of the paper outlines the intellectual and political currents that appear to have influenced Ghurye: British Orientalism, late 19th and early 20th century nationalism, and diffusionism. In the next section I discuss his approach to the study of civilisation in general and Indian civilisation in particular, and in the third section try to draw connections between this historical understanding and his conception of the nation. Finally I suggest some of the implications of Ghurye’s work for the development of Indian sociology.

**Intellectual Antecedents and Political Context**

Ghurye’s initial training was in Sanskrit, and it was only after attending Geddes’ lectures at Bombay and being selected for a scholarship that he went to England where he studied anthropology at Cambridge under Rivers and Haddon (1920-1923). Because of this academic background, most analyses of Ghurye’s sociology identify Indology and diffusionism as the two major influences on his work. However, as I attempt to show in this section, the genesis of Ghurye’s thought is not so simple. In part this is because what are now referred to as ‘Indology’ and ‘diffusionism’ had more complex histories than what we are usually taught, histories that are in fact closely connected to one another. Also, Ghurye has been accused of absorbing colonial Orientalism and empiricism into his analysis of Indian society (Bose 1996), but on close reading we find that his use of available anthropological data and theories was critical and selective. If we are to understand Ghurye as more than a passive sponge who uncritically reproduced colonial knowledge, we need to look more closely at the trends of thought which shaped his approach to sociology, and at their connections with the political and social context of empire and the anti-colonial struggle.

**British Orientalism**

The first major influence on Ghurye is clearly the tradition of British Orientalism that developed in the 18th century. The Orientalists produced a theory of Indian history and society that had far-reaching consequences for the development of both nationalist and
academic thought. The most important theme that emerged from their writings and that runs throughout Ghurye’s work is that of the antiquity and unity Indian civilisation. Eighteenth century social thought in Europe was obsessed with the nature and origin of ‘civilisation’ and especially with what were thought to be the earliest civilisations, Greece and Egypt. After the ‘discovery’ of India and its long past, the study of India was absorbed into an extant discourse about antique civilisations. The early British Orientalists sought to reconstruct ancient Indian civilisation through the study of Sanskrit texts, and with this knowledge to place India within various universal schemes of human history (Trautmann 1997:3). This reconstruction was oriented to an overarching concern with the origins of civilisation, then defined as the cultivation of the higher arts and sciences. India’s civilisation was regarded as one of the oldest and most highly developed, as demonstrated in the complexity of ancient Indian knowledge and culture and the perfection of the Sanskrit language.

In seeking India’s place in the history of world civilisations, links were first made on the basis of language and culture. Some scholars 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). Ancient writings in Sanskrit came to be considered as repositories of the primitive religion of the human race, hence the “enthusiasm for those Sanskrit writings as the key to the universal ethnological narrative” (Trautmann 1997:97). Thus, the Orientalists identified ancient Indian civilisation with Hinduism, and Sanskrit was regarded as the vehicle of Hindu civilisation. In this discourse, Muslims were seen as foreign conquerors and despotic rulers who were responsible for all current social evils, while the virtues of traditional Hindu government, laws and customs were upheld: “The enthusiasm for India … was above all an enthusiasm for Hinduism” (Trautmann 1997: 64).

As several scholars have pointed out,3 this image of Indian society was not simply invented by British scholars, but was ‘dialogically produced’ through interaction with brahmin pandits. Therefore it is not surprising that in the Orientalist understanding of Indian society, brahmans were posited as the dominant group, at the centre of the social order. Similarly, the idea that contemporary society had degenerated from a pristine and glorious Vedic past was derived from both the brahminical notion of the ‘kalyug’ and the European search for the roots of civilisation in the ancient past. Through this scholarship, brahminical knowledge received new legitimacy, and religion came to be regarded as the guiding principle of society. Because Indian society was seen as static and monolithic, the ancient texts could be taken as authentic guides to the study of Indian civilisation and even to the
organisation of contemporary society, for example in the production of ‘Hindu law’. “Indian society was seen as a set of rules which every Hindu followed” (Cohn 1987:143). By reconstructing Hinduism and Hindu law, positing the distant past as normative, and drawing an unbroken connection between past and present, Orientalist scholarship had a lasting effect on the understanding of Indian society and history (Rocher 1994:242), an understanding that is reflected clearly in the work of Ghurye, among many others.

The great 19th century German Orientalist, Max Muller, a product of the German romantic movement, played a major role in the popularisation of knowledge about India and in the glorification of ancient Indian religion, especially of the Vedic period. He collected and published the full text of the Vedas for the first time, because he believed that they were the only “natural basis of Indian history” (quoted in Chakravarti 1990:39). Like the earlier Orientalists, Muller wanted to reveal to Indians the knowledge contained in their ancient tradition, and he believed that the Vedas were the root of Hindu religion, law and philosophy (Chakravarti 1990:39).

As Trautmann tells the story, this period of ‘Indomania’ was followed by a longer phase of ‘Indophobia’ corresponding to the consolidation of British rule, in which British writers influenced by Utilitarianism and Evangelicism constructed a negative image of Indian civilisation in order to provide a moral basis for empire. James Mill was the most prominent representative of this trend; in his History of India he attempted to downgrade the place allotted to India on the scale of civilisation by the early Orientalists by deprecating all that the latter had glorified. Where the Orientalists looked backwards to the ancient wisdom of India, Mill and the English Utilitarians looked to the future, drawing upon the idea of progress: “Exactly in proportion as Utility is the object of every pursuit, may we regard a nation as civilized” (Mill, quoted in Trautmann 1997:123). The British had a civilising mission to modernise India, to ‘liberate Indians from their own past’ (Trautmann 1997:129). Thus the ancient wisdom of India, earlier seen as a fount of western civilisation through its connections to ancient Greece and Egypt, became opposed to western civilisation, which stood for progress in contrast to the stagnation and backwardness of the east.

Aryan invasion theory of Indian history

Debates about the value of Indian civilisation were overshadowed in the early 19th century by the development of comparative philology, through which the Indo-European or ‘Aryan’ language family, encompassing the classical languages of Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin, was constructed. With the discovery of these linguistic connections, Indians came into the
“ethnological big picture as kin of Europeans and founders of civilisation” (Trautmann 1997:133). Max Muller was largely responsible for broadening the term ‘Arya’ to apply to all speakers of Indo-European languages, popularising the notion of the Aryan race, and promoting the notion of ‘Aryan brotherhood’ (1997:172). In order to convince the British rulers that Indians and Europeans were close kin, he emphasised the glorious achievements of Hindu civilisation and propagated a “racist Aryan version of the Orientalist Hindu golden age” (Chakravarti 1990:42).

The term ‘Aryan’, which gained great currency under Muller’s influence, has had a complex career. Trautmann points out that terms such as ‘race’, ‘nation’ and ‘stock’ were used interchangeably in the 18th century, but with the advent of race science as well as European nationalism in the later 19th century, they began to take on political meanings. In the theories of the early ethnologists, race or physical features were not immutable, and it was thought that civilisation could lead to physical regeneration or lightening of colour. Late in the 19th century the focus of ethnology shifted away from language to racial classifications, and race began to be seen as fixed and determinant (Stepan 1982). With the growth of knowledge about ‘primitive’ peoples around the globe, the central problem for Victorian anthropology was the classification of human variety based on an opposition between the dark-skinned savage and the fair-skinned, civilised European. Within this scheme, the placement of Indians was problematic, because by language they were related to Europeans while by race (colour) they appeared to be different. Hence India became the centre of a raging debate between ethnology and philology, or between race science and the Sanskritists, regarding the appropriate mode of classification of human groups (Trautmann 1997:182-3). In this debate, the earlier taken-for-granted connection between race and language was finally broken, and this delinking allowed the notion of kinship between Europeans and Indians to be refuted.5

The debate regarding language and race in ethnological classifications, and the growth of ‘racial essentialism’, underlay the emergence of what Trautmann terms the ‘racial theory of Indian civilisation’ (Trautmann 1997:191). He argues that the earlier work of the Sanskritists on language groups converged with the racial classifications of the ethnologists to produce this theory about the growth of Indian civilisation, that by the end of the century became the settled truth.6 It is the same theory that we find reproduced in the writings of Ghurye and many other intellectuals of the early to mid-20th century, and indeed that persists till today in various forms. According to this theory,
... the constitutive event for Indian civilization, the Big Bang through which it came into being, was the clash between invading, fair-skinned, civilized Sanskrit-speaking Aryans and dark-skinned, barbarous aborigines. It was a local application of the double binary that guided all nineteenth-century European ethnologies, the double binary of the fair and the dark, the civilized and the savage [Trautmann 1997:194].

The Aryan invasion theory was most clearly articulated and popularised by Max Muller, who converted the originally linguistic categories of ‘Indo-Aryan’ and ‘Dravidian’ into racial categories (Trautmann 1997:196-7). Muller 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” (Muller, quoted in Chakravarti 1989:40). India was invaded by civilized Aryan tribes who conquered and then either destroyed or assimilated the 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” (Muller, quoted in Trautmann 1997:175). Muller also attempted to interpret Vedic references to the ‘Dasyus’ and varna in terms of European racial theory, which at that time centred on skin colour, identifying the aboriginal population of India with the ‘dasas’, the ‘dark-skinned’ and ‘savage’ enemies of the Aryans (Trautmann 1997:206). Thus the Vedic texts were reinterpreted through the lens of race, and the ‘Aryan’ identity was constructed by absorbing language classifications into the newly substantialised notion of race (1997:206). Here we find the beginnings of the idea that Indian civilisation was consolidated through the slow assimilation of non-Aryan groups to Aryan or Vedic culture.

**Nationalism and Indian civilisation**

The Orientalist theory of Indian history was absorbed in diverse ways into an emerging nationalist discourse of the 19th and early 20th centuries. This complex structure of ideas centred on the notion of a glorious past, drawing upon the Orientalists’ positive construction of the Indian past as well on the Evangelical and Utilitarian attacks on Indian culture (Chakravarti 1990:27-30). Nationalist intellectuals such as Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay redeployed Orientalist knowledge against the ‘Indophobes’ to assert India’s true place in human history. They attempted to counter European racism by valorising the past and positing the superiority of Hindu/Aryans over European/Aryans, claiming that everything in Europe had already been invented in the Indian past, that the discoveries of western science had been anticipated by ancient Aryans, and so on (Raychaudhuri 1988). These supporters of the Aryan theory also accepted the view that the Vedas were the source of all knowledge.
(Thapar 1997). Nationalist reformers such as Rammohun Roy adopted the Orientalist appreciation for ‘Hindu’ scriptures and promoted ancient texts such as the Gita as symbols of Indian civilisation. The translation and popularisation of these texts had an enormous influence on the development of a sense of culture and history among the emerging Indian elite (Rocher 1994:227-29). These efforts fed into the growth of cultural nationalism in the 1830s, when a number of indigenous popular works of history glorifying the past achievements of Indian civilisation were published (Chakrabarti 1990:36-7). For nationalist reformers, the idea of the golden Vedic Age suggested that Indians had a culture that had been “organically disrupted by historical circumstance but was capable of revitalisation” (Rammohun Roy, quoted in Chakrabarti 1990:32). In response to the negative perception of modern Hinduism by missionaries and others, some reformers also criticised Hinduism as degenerate and ritualistic, and looked to the Vedic past to locate the ‘true’ religion of the Hindus.

History … came to occupy a key position in the cultural conflict between the ruling power and the colonized subjects. This was the context for the obsessive concern with cultural questions in the reconstruction of the past [Chakrabarti 1990:34].

The development of nationalist consciousness was given great impetus in the 1860s by the activities of Max Muller, whose popularisation of the term ‘Aryan’ left a “permanent impress upon the collective consciousness of the upper strata of Indian society” (Chakrabarti 1990:39). Indian-Aryan identity became an important component of 19th century historical consciousness; it was especially appealing to the emerging newly educated middle classes as well as to the upper castes who consolidated their domination under British rule, who could identify with Aryans as the bearers of an advanced civilisation in India. Thus while the Aryan theory emerged out of Orientalism, its wide circulation and success in colonising the consciousness of the educated middle classes can be attributed to its appropriation by nationalist ideology. But this brand of nationalism was caught within the same civilisational discourse that gave rise to Orientalism in the first place, in which national identity is premised on a unitary history, language and culture. In this discourse, Indian culture was equated with Vedic culture, Indian philosophy with Vedanta, and Indian religion was defined as Hinduism. While one trajectory of this obsession with culture and history led to Savarkar’s notion of ‘hindutva’, another led into the Indological school of sociology.

The colonial discourse on Hinduism fueled a growing cultural nationalism, and reform as well as revivalist movements focused on the need for Hindu unity. Mainstream
nationalists viewed dalit and lower caste liberation movements as casteist and therefore divisive. As an alternative, oppressed groups became the subjects of paternalistic ‘uplift’, shuddhi (purification), sanskritisation and other reform efforts aimed at reducing inter-caste tension and building national and Hindu unity (Sarkar 1996:281-86). 9

The construction of Indian society and history as Hindu hinged critically upon the demonisation of the Hindu’s Other, the Muslim, and the later history of India came to be written as a contest between two monolithic and antagonistic communities (Hasan 1996; Ludden 1996; Pandey 1990). Nineteenth century nationalist intellectuals accepted the British version of history that viewed the Muslim intrusion as a break in the continuity of brahminical traditions. Because these histories ignored all evidence of syncretism and did not acknowledge the specificity of Islam in the sub-continent, the culture of Muslims was regarded as entirely separate from that of Hindus. Indian Muslims were regarded as part of a foreign, monolithic religion, and were therefore inherently communal and separatist. The image of Indian Muslims as outsiders and aggressive invaders in the past, and as communal separatists in the present, became a central theme of nationalist thought. The creation of Hindu nationalism based on a new aggressive Hindu identity depended upon the exclusion of impure ‘foreigners’, as in the writings of Tilak and Bankim (Chakravarti 1990:50; Hasan 1996:198-99). The theme of medieval Muslim tyranny was common in 18th and 19th century tracts and novels and was linked in middle class consciousness to the idea of the burgeoning Muslim population and the ‘dying Hindu’ (Sarkar 1996:290).

Thus, the Aryan invasion theory of Indian history took on a major political role in the context of nationalism. In this ideological framing of history as a continual contest between Aryans and dasas, and later between Hindus and Muslims, language, culture and race were closely equated. Because race and language commonly are understood to be ingredients of national identity, the idea of the Aryan race easily fed into the idea of the Indian nation (Thapar 1997). Indian nationalist discourse of the 19th century completed the development of the Aryan idea by equating the Aryan with Hindu and the Hindu with the Indian. In some strands of this discourse, which we find also in Ghurye, the Aryan also was equated with the higher castes, especially brahmmins. As we shall see below, Ghurye never questioned this construction of history nor the sources upon which he drew for his work. On the contrary, the idea that India is Hindu is reinforced by his sociology.
Diffusionism enjoyed a brief but intense period of popularity in England during the period 1910 - 1930. It emerged as a critique of late 19th century evolutionism, which was based on the theory of the ‘psychic unity of mankind’. Evolutionism held that every society eventually will advance towards civilisation, passing through definite stages, which means that every human group is capable of the ‘independent invention’ of higher civilisation (Kuklick 1983:65). Darwinism and the discoveries of paleontology pushed back the frontiers of human history and revealed the relative stability of physical types, thus privileging race over language as the main explanator of human variation. This in turn led anthropologists to argue that biological make-up and culture were intrinsically linked and that culture was carried by race (1983:67). These assumptions also underpinned the basic propositions of diffusionism:

... geographical dispersal would not modify the behaviour of members of a single race; cultural diversity within an area was prima facie evidence that its inhabitants were a racially diverse collection of migrant settlers; the global distribution of races reflected the inherent migratory propensities of members of different stocks, not the effect of the environment [Kuklick 1983:67].

Following this logic, diffusionists such as W.J. Perry, G. Elliot Smith, A.M. Hocart and W.H.R. Rivers surmised that civilisation had been invented only once, in ancient Egypt, from where it had been carried by migrants who, by conquering inferior races, civilised them in turn (Kuklick 1983:68). All innovations associated with advanced civilisation derived from this culture complex, known as ‘Archaic Civilisation’, which was spread by migration of the ‘Armenoid Race’ who became rulers wherever they went (Kuklick 1991:125-27). The basic diffusionist idea that superior people or races would dominate inferior ones, thereby transmitting civilisation, clearly resonates with the Aryan invasion theory of Indian history; obviously this idea did not originate with 20th century diffusionism. The idea that caste originated from a ‘collision between the races’ is also echoed in the diffusionists’ argument that class divisions in society resulted from interracial competition within the social hierarchy formed by conquest (Kuklick 1983:68).

Ghurye was greatly influenced by Rivers during his stay at Cambridge and was deeply affected by his death in 1922, which he regarded as the ‘biggest tragedy’ of his life (Srinivas 1996:3). Because of his connection with Rivers, diffusionism is usually identified as Ghurye’s major theoretical orientation. However, a more detailed look at his biography suggests that his basic ideas and interests were already in place as a result of his academic
background in Sanskrit and Orientalist thought, and that the influence of diffusionism was primarily to provide a theoretical framework for his views. According to Pramanick (1994:4), Ghurye’s intellect was shaped by his education at Elphinstone College, Bombay, where the European classical past was emphasised but where nationalism also took root as students were encouraged to examine their own past, especially through Sanskrit religious texts. “The emergent intellectual community in Bombay … endeavoured to know India’s social history and also contemporary customs, practices and institutions of the Hindus” (1994:4).

In the following sections I attempt to point to connections as well as disjunctures between these intellectual currents and Ghurye’s sociology. His conception of Indian history and civilisation, his notion of culture, and his emphasis on acculturation or assimilation as the source of social change show clear continuities with the Aryan theory and with diffusionism. Here I focus only on two major themes in Ghurye -- his textual, Indological perspective and his nationalism -- leaving aside other characteristic features of his work such as his empiricism. These two orientations -- the historical/civilisational approach to sociology and cultural nationalism -- are closely interrelated, and together they form the framework that structures most of his writing.

**Civilisation, Culture and History**

A central theme of much of Ghurye’s writing is the antiquity and integrity of Indian civilisation and its connections with the present. Although his extensive reference to ancient texts is often attributed to his academic training in Sanskrit, it is also a function of his overall theoretical perspective. Judging from references in his books and his ‘favourite books’, his intellectual interests appear to have developed under the influence of the broader post-Enlightenment European discourse about ‘civilisation’ as such -- its origins, characteristics, links among various ancient civilisations, and so on.¹¹ The affinities between Orientalism and diffusionism noted above suggest that Ghurye’s approach was not moulded entirely by Rivers, and that an already partially formed theoretical perspective was reinforced by his Cambridge experience. Given his inclinations, it is probably not fortuitous that he developed a deep devotion for Rivers after rejecting the guidance of the New Liberal L.T. Hobhouse at London (Ghurye 1973a:45; Kuklick 1983:70).¹²

Ghurye’s civilisational perspective partakes of the diffusionist idea that culture always has a history that needs to be discovered, and that cultures or culture traits have an external rather than autochthonous origin. According to M.N. Srinivas, Ghurye was interested in
sensing him to study the Coorgs because he had read that they had ancestral tombs, which he thought might be due to the influence of ancient Egypt (1996:3). In fact, Ghurye’s first published paper (1923, one of the papers for his Cambridge Ph.D.) was entitled ‘Egyptian affinities of Indian funerary practices’ (Pillai 1997:77). Srinivas writes that Ghurye was “in the grip of diffusionist ideas even as late as the 1940s” (1996:3), and that he defended Rivers’ support of Elliot-Smith and Perry on the Egyptian origin of certain widely dispersed cultural phenomena (Srinivas 1973:135, cited in Shah 1974:439). The diffusionist influence can be seen in works such as *Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture* (1955), in which Ghurye analyses the ‘history of the human family’ through kinship terms and ‘behavioral data’ drawn from three ‘ancient cultures’, the Indo-Aryan, the Greek and the Latin.

Ghurye’s interest in the history of civilisation appears in several works. One of his first books, *Culture and Society* (1947), looks at Britain during the period 1800-1930 as an attempt by a nation-state to build a civilisation, a ‘quest for culture’. Here Ghurye considers culture and civilisation as two facets of the same phenomenon: “Culture is civilization assimilated and made operative in individual minds and practices” (1947:191). Culture is defined more in the Arnoldian sense of ‘high culture’ rather than the anthropological sense: it implies a “large knowledge-content and constitutes essentially an intellectual attitude” (1947:80). He reviews theories of civilisation and culture in the writings of Clive Bell, Whitehead, Laski and others, and concludes that civilisation is a ‘collective endeavor’.

The theme of civilisation as ‘collective endeavor’ appears also in *Occidental Civilisation*, an analysis of western civilisation from 1300 to 1925. In this work Ghurye gives an account of various intellectual and artistic achievements of this period, arguing that a coherent cultural pattern can be discerned, the product of a ‘collective civilisational endeavour’ with its roots in Graeco-Roman society (Pillai 1997:233-34). Ghurye later returns to the question of civilisation in *Cities and Civilisation* (1962), in which he criticises Toynbee’s thesis on the relationship between capital cities and civilisation by comparing the growth and decline of cities historically in China, Egypt and India.

**Racial thought and Indian history**

While Ghurye was interested in the comparative study of world civilisations, his primary focus was of course on the Indian case. The first expression of Ghurye’s civilisational perspective is found in his best-known work, *Caste and Race in India* (1932), in which he reproduces almost in toto the Orientalist theory of the Indo-Aryan invasion and the 19th century ethnologists’ racial theory of caste. From his review of the existing textual and other
evidence, Ghurye concludes that the Indo-Aryans belonged to the larger Indo-European stock that dispersed from its homeland after 5000 B.C. The branch that entered India about 2500 B.C. carried with it the early Vedic religion, and the ‘Brahmanic variety’ of the Indo-Aryan civilisation developed later in the Gangetic plain, along with the caste system.¹⁶

Ghurye also reiterates the racial interpretation of varna as colour and the idea that the ‘dasas’ described by the Aryans were the ‘dark’ and ‘snub-nosed’ natives they encountered when they entered India (1969:165). Caste derives from the varna classification of the early Vedic age, which referred to skin colour and differentiated the ‘Arya’ and the ‘Dasa’. The caste system originated as an endogamous institution as the Indo-Aryan Brahmans attempted to maintain their purity by keeping themselves apart from the local population (1969:125).

It may be taken to be an historical fact that people calling themselves ‘Arya’ poured into India through the north-west somewhere about 2000 B.C. It is equally clear … that an institution closely akin to caste has been very often described in Sanskrit books, which are the work of either the Aryans or the Aryan-inspired aborigines … We have seen that the Brahmans, who were the moral guides and legislators of the immigrant Aryans, tried to keep their blood free from any inter-mixture with the lower classes … [Ghurye 1969:117-18].

The Aryans invaders entered India with three exclusive classes and absorbed the indigenous inhabitants who “accepted the overlordship of the Indo-Aryans” at the lowest level as Sudras (1969:172). They practiced some amount of ritual exclusivity but also displayed ‘tolerance’ by assimilating diverse peoples. The mechanism for this assimilation was caste:

The Indian Aryans as later Hindus not only tolerated both beliefs and practices not harmonizing with their central doctrines but also assimilated a number in their own complex. Partially at least, on the social organizational side caste system was the modus operandi accommodating diversity of faiths and practices [1969:165-66].

Because caste was maintained by endogamy and hypergamy, there is a correspondence between caste and physical type, or race (1969:173).

While the question of race appears prominently in the first edition of Caste and Race, it was not a major theme of Ghurye’s work.¹⁷ However, it is my argument that race continued to play a subtle though not explicit role in Ghurye’s thought. The great influence that racial thought exercised on the fledgling discipline of anthropology in the early 20th century is often glossed over in standard histories, and its connections with diffusionism in particular have
been ignored. Therefore it is important to look more closely at this intellectual trend to better understand Ghurye as well as the ideological position he represents.

By the end of the century, race had come to be defined in terms of physical and genetic constitution and was considered to be relatively immutable. Only certain races -- those with highly evolved brains -- were considered to be capable of achieving civilisation (Bayly 1995:171; Stepan 1982). Race doctrine posited a fixed association between intelligence and physical form (especially facial features and brain size), and races were constructed by ranking various strands of humanity on a civilisational scale. Thus races became substantialised entities that could be physically measured, and the early 20th century witnessed the emergence of the ‘science’ of anthropometry.

This theoretical shift is seen also in the history of Indian ethnology. With the growing influence of racial thought, earlier classifications of Indian peoples on the basis of language gave way to racial classifications which included manners, customs and religion as well as physical appearance (Trautmann 1997:162). In fact, India became a crucial testing ground for theories of race, partly because the caste system was thought to have prevented intermixing. Early 20th century ethnologists engaged themselves in extensive anthropometrical measurements for this purpose. The hierarchical view of race was grafted onto the emerging ethnology of India, such that various groups were seen as representative of ‘high’ and ‘low’ races, the high castes, with their Aryan origins, of course being the civilised ones, and the low castes and ‘tribals’ representing the lower races.

The racial theory of Indian society was promoted most notably by Risley, the first Director of Ethnography for India., who took the nasal index as an indicator of the proportion of Aryan blood, which supposedly varies along the caste gradient (Trautmann 1997:183). Risley’s racial theory of caste simply elaborated the earlier two-race theory of Indian history, in which the dark, ‘snub-nosed’ and primitive Dravidians were conquered by, and partially mixed with, the ‘tall, fair, lepto-rhine’ invading Aryans (Risley, quoted in Trautmann 1997:202), producing the caste system. This theory was encapsulated in Risley’s famous formula: “The social position of a caste varies inversely as its nasal index” (quoted in Trautmann 1997:203).

In Caste and Race Ghurye examines Risley’s theory in great detail through a re-analysis of the anthropometrical data. He finds that outside the core area of Aryan settlement, ‘Hindustan’, physical type does not conform to caste rank, and that there is greater similarity between brahmins and other castes within a region than among brahmins across regions. His conclusion is that the “Brahmanic practice of endogamy must have been developed in
Hindustan and thence conveyed as a cultural trait to the other areas without a large influx of the physical type of the Hindustan Brahmins” (1969:125). While Ghurye criticises specific features of Risley’s theory and methodology, he accepts the overall framework of racial categorisation and in fact proposes new racial categories for the Indian population based on the nasal and cephalic indices (1969:125 ff.). He bases his argument on the same assumptions employed by the Aryan race theory: that the ‘Aryan type’ is long-headed and fine-nosed, represented by the people of Punjab and Rajputana, while the ‘aboriginal type’, represented by the ‘jungle-tribes’, is broad-nosed (1969:118).\(^9\) In his argument Ghurye does not distinguish clearly among race, language and culture, although he does add a diffusionist element to his argument by suggesting that brahminism and caste spread throughout India as cultural traits rather than through large-scale physical migration of Aryan brahmins.

The diffusionist influence is evident also in Ghurye’s attempt to find ‘elements of caste’ outside of India. Cultural similarities among various offshoots of the Indo-European stock, such as the ancient Greeks and Romans, are taken as proof of the Aryan origin of Indian culture. He argues that status distinctions, restrictions on inter-marriage, and fixed occupational specialisation are a “common characteristic of the mental background and social picture of the Indo-European cultures” (1969:159). He also suggests that the relation between the Greeks and the Egyptians was similar to that between the ‘Aryas’ and the ‘Dasas’, except that the Vedic people had more reason to show their ‘pride and exclusivity’ because the Dasas were non-Aryan and of dark colour. ‘Exclusivity’ and a tendency to social stratification are Indo-European cultural traits that were more highly developed in India, in the form of caste:

… the Indo-European people, of whom Vedic Aryans were but a branch, had early developed the exclusive spirit in social behaviour and had cultivated a partiality for ideas of ceremonial purity [1969:171].

Ghurye concludes that “caste in India is a Brahmanic child of the Indo-Aryan culture, cradled in the land of the Ganges and the Jamna and thence transferred to other parts of the country” (1969:176).

**Indian cultural history**

Ghurye’s search for the roots of Indian culture in the Vedic age is reflected in several of his later books including *Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture* (1955), *Two Brahmical Institutions: Gotra and Charana* (1972), and *Vedic India* (1979). It is also evident in the fact
that much of his work centres around traditional Hindu or brahminical knowledge systems, religious practices, social organisation, and law, as reflected in the classical Sanskrit texts. Ghurye made extensive use of these texts in his studies of phenomena as divergent as caste, costume, religion, and sexuality. In many of his books, references to ancient texts are brought in side by side with discussions of present-day practices, suggesting continuities between the present and the distant past.

In *Gotra and Charana* (1972) Ghurye investigates the origin, history and spread of these ‘brahmanical institutions’ of exogamy through an exhaustive study of Sanskrit literature and inscriptions from different periods, ending with contemporary information on exogamous practices in several communities. By comparing similar cultural traits among ancient Greeks and Indo-Iranians, he develops the theory that *gotras* originated in the “cosmographical and astronomical view and knowledge gained by Aryans in their new home in India.” Here we see the influence of the Aryan invasion thesis, in which cultural elements have their ultimate origin in the original Aryan race, combined with the diffusionist tracking of culture traits across time and space. But at the end Ghurye puts on his anthropologist’s hat again to test Durkheim’s theory that exogamy arose from a religious complex of beliefs about menstrual blood. He also explores the phenomenon of menstrual taboos in India by drawing on recent ethnographic accounts of beliefs and practices surrounding menstruation and menarche ceremonies, as well as textual sources.

In several other works Ghurye attempts to trace the origin of contemporary social practices to their Indo-Aryan roots. Although he rarely draws explicit connections, the trend of the argument is clear. For example, through a close analysis of the Vedas, Brahmans and other texts in *Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture* (1955), Ghurye tries to reconstruct ancient Vedic-Aryan family and kinship structures. He concludes that the family in ancient times was joint in form, with four generations living under one roof, sharing food and property (1955:47)! In other words, the ideal Hindu family, as constructed by British ‘Hindu law’ and reinforced by Indian sociology, has its origin in ancient India. He also finds evidence in the ancient texts for certain contemporary kinship practices, such as father-in-law - daughter-in-law avoidance (1955:48).

Ghurye outlines the history of particular kinship rites, such as different forms of ancestor worship, from the time of the *Smritis* to the present, arguing that the *shraddha* “has remained the standard type of Hindu (Indian) ancestor-worship throughout the ages till today” (1955:62). In the conclusion of this chapter, he clearly states that present practices must be understood through their connections with the ancient past:
We may conclude that the ancestor-worship of the Indo-European age that developed in India during about two thousand years and that has continued to be the pattern for about thirteen hundred years is very different from all other ancestor-worship in its content, extent and time-spread. The close connexion which has subsisted between it and the family organization has sustained the Indian family unit [1955:68].

In *Family and Kin* Ghurye offers a rare general statement of his perspective, suggesting that Indo-Aryan culture is

... known for formulation of its ends and for prescription of means for the guidance of society and its components in a clear and definite manner. The Indian theory and practice of life, its social philosophy, its laws and its customs have centred on the four social categories of varna, caste, asrama, stage of life, purusartha, purpose of life, and rina, debt [1955:54].

As in the Orientalist view, religion is the guiding principle of Indian society, and specifically brahminical religion as given in the sacred texts provides the moral principles and prescriptions for the organisation of society.

In *Vedic India* (1979) Ghurye tackles directly the question of the origins and socio-cultural characteristics of the Indo-Aryan people of the Vedic period. He begins with a description of several cultural elements of the Indo-Europeans, such as the horse-complex, and then traces their evolution within Vedic culture. He also investigates cultural similarities and differences among different branches of the Indo-Aryan family such as the ancient Greeks, the Avestan Iranians, and the Hittites, in order to map their ethnic affiliation. Here Ghurye refers to the Indo-Aryan immigrants as ‘ethnic units’ rather than as a racial group; but while eschewing a purely racial conception of the Indo-Aryans, he does tend to equate language with culture. Cultural similarities together with linguistic affinity are sufficient evidence for Ghurye that different groups descended from the same ‘ethnic stock’:

We thus see that some ethnic unit or units among the Vedic Indo-Aryans must have been of the same ethnic stock as that of the ancient Greeks, when the ancestors of the Vedic Indo-Aryans and those of the Greeks were living in their original domicile; and must have formed one or more of the ethnic units among the Indo-Aryans that entered India and created the Vedic-Indian culture [1979:366].

He concludes that there were several waves of migration: some Indo-Aryan ethnic units (the ‘eastern peoples’) arrived earlier than the ‘Rigvedic’ units, and the brahminical culture of the ‘post-Vedic age’ was produced by the interaction of these two sections (1979:368-69).
Ghurye’s view that Indian culture was formed by the progressive spread of Vedic Aryan or brahminical culture is also illustrated in his *Indian Acculturation: Agastya and Skanda* (1977), in which he argues that the sage Agastya and the god Skanda were carriers of Vedic Aryanism to South India.

A significant feature of Ghurye’s cultural history is the almost complete neglect of economic/material content in his analysis (Desai 1984). In his vast body of work we find few references to agriculture, crafts, trade, and so on, except in discussions of caste-based occupational specialisation. This is in stark contrast to the work of D.D. Kosambi, for example, who also reproduced the Aryan invasion theory but reworked it through a materialist perspective. Ghurye’s understanding of culture and civilisation dwells in the realm of ideas, beliefs, values and social practices — ‘culture’ in the narrow sense — and hardly encompasses questions of livelihood, control over resources, or ecological adaptation, which are so central to the modern anthropological understanding of human history and civilisation. In *Family and Kin*, Ghurye offers a rare explicit statement of this theoretical perspective when he states that his studies prove the “primacy of beliefs and ideas” (rather than material conditions) in bringing about social change (1955:224). Similarly, he takes the survival of gotra exogamy over 2500 years as an example of the ‘tyranny’ of an idea, demonstrating the “role and power ... of certain ideas and beliefs in human behaviour and the social process” (Pillai 1997:128). Within the ideational level, Ghurye emphasises religion and religious consciousness as the foundation of culture (see Ghurye 1965).

**Civilisational unity**

Like the Orientalism on which he drew, Ghurye’s perspective on Indian society was intensely brahminical. For him, Hinduism is at the centre of India’s civilisational unity, and at the core of Hinduism are brahminical ideas and values, which are essential for the integration of society (Pramanick 1994). Venugopal describes the underlying theme of Ghurye’s work as ‘normative Hinduism’, defined as an “idealised version of Hinduism serving as a means to judge or analyse diverse social phenomena in Indian society” (1986:305). Brahmins are seen historically as the leaders of Indo-Aryan society and as the “standard bearers of Hindu civilisation” (1986:307); they were the “moral guides and legislators of the immigrant Aryans” (Ghurye 1969:118). As in the Orientalist understanding, society is understood as a set of rules to be followed, and to be a Hindu is to obey brahminical prescriptions. Brahmin-centred Hinduism served as an ‘acculturative model’ for other groups because it provided an integrative value system. For Ghurye, ‘acculturation’ meant vertical integration into the
“social structure dominated by Indo-Aryanism in general and brahminical Hinduism in particular” (Venugopal 1986:306), i.e., the caste system. The same vision of the absorptive power of Hinduism explains his argument that tribals are ‘backward Hindus’ (see below). For Ghurye as for the early Orientalist writers, Indian social history is essentially the history of Hinduisation or the assimilation of non-Hindu groups into Hindu society.

If Hinduism and brahminism are the norm for Indian society, other religious groups ipso facto are regarded as deviations from the norm. As in Hindu nationalist thought, Ghurye believed that the continuity of Hindu civilisation was broken by the Islamic ‘invasion’, and he adopted uncritically the colonial construction of Indian history and society as a struggle between Hindus and Muslims. He also echoed the assumption that Muslims have a culture that is entirely separate from that of Hindus. Evidence of religious syncretism at the level of everyday practices was ignored by Ghurye, who argued against the secularist idea of Indian culture as a ‘fusion’ of Hindu, Muslim and other elements (Pillai 1997:144). Instead he regarded Indian culture as the product of acculturation between Vedic-Aryan and pre-Aryan cultural elements and argued that Muslims in India had always practiced separatism, except for short periods of attempted integration. In his terminology, although Hindu-Muslim ‘syncretism’ occurred in some contexts, this should not be construed as ‘synthesis’ or ‘fusion’ (Pillai 1997:144). In Social Tensions in India, Ghurye states that the “presence of Islamic cultural elements in the basic ancient Indian culture-fabric shows the process of syncretization, not fusion” (Pillai 1997:144). Hindus and Muslims have remained distinct communities “... though there have been some meeting points across religious boundaries at certain stages of history” (Pillai 1997:313).

Though there appeared to be some commingling across religious boundaries for military purposes, the main currents kept the two communities separate and distinct, the native Hindu endeavouring to keep himself alive with honour and even to regain his lost dominion, and the incoming Muslim, albeit with a large influx of native converts, strenuously countering the moves, drawing upon his native store-house in foreign lands. There was hardly any rapprochement between the two cultures, the Hindu and Muslim, in spite of co-existence [1968b:viii, quoted in Pillai 1997:164].

Similarly, in Caste and Race he writes:

The impact of Islam was too strong to work as a leaven in the Hindu community. The culture and religious practices of its followers were so different that ... the Hindus and the Muslims looked upon each other as contraries and natural enemies ... The two cultures were too separate to settle down to a great rapprochement in times, when a
death-struggle was being fought by the valiant sons of Ind for self-preservation of a cultural entity [1969:110].

This denial is echoed in his writings on architectural styles (in Rajput Architecture [1968a] and Social Tensions [1968b]), where he argues that Hindu and Muslim styles remained firmly separate and that wherever there were influences, they should be seen not as ‘fusion’ but as syncretism:

...whenever the Hindus attempted to follow the Muslim style they either floundered or created structures which demonstrated its blasting effect on the Hindu ideas of religious atmosphere and of aesthetic values [Ghurye 1968b:240-1, quoted in Pillai 1997:145].

Thus Ghurye believed, like some of the British Orientalists, that Hinduism and Islam are fundamentally incompatible religious systems.

Ghurye’s understanding of Indian society as essentially Hindu society, and his negative view of Muslims in particular, is reflected in the almost complete neglect of non-Hindu communities within the extensive body of sociological writings that he produced, as well as those of his many students. In the exhaustive ‘dictionary’ of Ghurye’s work compiled by Pillai (1997), there is no entry on Muslims, Christians, or Sikhs. There is one entry on ‘Jain studies’ and one on ‘Jainism’, which refer to two doctoral dissertations guided by Ghurye (Jainism was considered as an offshoot of Hinduism rather than a deviant religion). Among the eighty M.A. and Ph.D. theses produced under him, there is one on a Christian community, one on Muslims of U.P., and one on Hindu-Muslim relations, while there are several on various tribal and ‘untouchable’ groups (Pillai 1997). This neglect of non-Hindu religious communities is all the more surprising considering that Ghurye encouraged his students to take up fieldwork on diverse regions, communities and topics, and that one of his main interests was the sociology of religion. References to Islam in the ‘Dictionary’ are found only in a few entries such as ‘Islamic View of Bhakti Cult’, ‘Islamic View of Indian History’, and ‘Islamic “Influence” (?) : On Guru Worship’ (Pillai 1997:174-77). Wherever Islam is mentioned, it is usually discussed in relation to some feature of Hindu society rather than as a religious system in its own right, and the major thrust the discussion is to deny Islamic influence in the development of various aspects of Indian culture.

Thus, it appears that Ghurye adopted almost wholesale the Orientalist vision of Indian society as the product of Vedic civilisation and ultimately of the ‘Aryan invasion’, and of Indian civilisation as Hindu, brahminical civilisation, although he was somewhat more
selective in his arguments about the connections between present India and the Vedic past than were Orientalists such as Muller. However we cannot attribute this perspective purely to the hegemony of colonial discourse (Bose 1996). More important perhaps is the influence of cultural nationalism, an orientation that is never explicitly stated but which becomes apparent in Ghurye’s writings on contemporary affairs.

**Ghurye the nationalist**

Ghurye’s brand of sociology, especially as reflected in *Caste and Race in India* with its distinctive blend of racial, linguistic, cultural and historical data, is not simply a derivative of 19th century ethnology and Orientalist scholarship. Rather, his narrative of Indian civilisation, history, and society in which diverse processes are understood as part of a single overarching movement, fits neatly into the strand of late 19th - early 20th century nationalist discourse discussed above. The close connection between nationalism and Ghurye’s sociology works at several levels. Most broadly, nationalist ideology employs the same categories, such as race, culture, and language, that became central to anthropological theory; hence it is difficult to disentangle ideological and academic discourses about history, the ‘nation’ or culture. More specifically, nationalism drew heavily upon the Aryan invasion theory of history and the idea of an ancient civilisation in formulating a sense of nationhood. The construction of this national identity in opposition to an Other, the ‘foreign’ Muslim, is also reflected strongly in Ghurye’s work. His nationalism can be discerned indirectly in his historical/anthropological writings and more directly in the three books that he wrote on post-independence political problems (1968b, 1974, 1980).

As a strong nationalist, Ghurye wanted India to be well-integrated. The failure of the secularists’ idea of integration was demonstrated in continuing communal riots, demands for separate states, and other such divisive tendencies. Ghurye had no faith in the official ideology of secularism promoted by Nehru, nor in the idea that a composite, plural nation could be politically created. He hoped instead for the emergence of an ‘integrated’ nation, which he saw as the solution to ‘social tensions’ (Ghurye 1968b). Ghurye defines social integration as

... a state in which individuals and groups have common values. This calls for, or is preceded by, psychological integration, which can take place only through communication ... Social integration when combined with its political aspect becomes national integration [Ghurye 1968b:40, quoted in Pillai 1997:310].
While he believed that some degree of tolerance is necessary for social integration, his study of the European experience convinced him that granting cultural autonomy to minority groups does not solve the problem of inter-group tensions. Hence he was opposed to the ‘appeasement’ of minorities in the name of secularism (Pillai 1997:313-14).

For Ghurye a major source of division in the nation is the presence of Muslims. Because Islam failed to be absorbed into Hindu culture, Hindu-Muslim relations are fraught with tension, as is evident from the frequent recurrence of ‘Hindu-Muslim riots’ (Pillai 1997:145). “The mutual incompatibility of some religious practices of the two communities generally has been the proximate cause of these clashes” (Ghurye 1968b.ix, quoted in Pillai 1997:145). Ghurye also explains communal tension by reference to the history of razing of Hindu temples by Muslim rulers (Pillai 1997:146). According to him, other groups recognised the tolerance of Hinduism and adapted themselves to it, but Muslims never managed to integrate themselves into Indian society and hence have remained a threat to national unity.

Ghurye’s stress on assimilation of diverse religious and ‘backward’ groups to mainstream Hindu society as the basis for national integration is reflected in a paper entitled ‘Untouchable classes and their assimilation in Hindu society’ (1973b), first published in The Aryan Path in 1933. He argues that the remedy for untouchability is the ‘assimilation’ of Untouchables into Hindu society. Temple entry is only one of the means by which this can be achieved, because the ‘orthodox section’ of society must first be influenced to grant social equality to other castes. In the meantime, he argues, trained persons should be employed to

… create public opinion among untouchable classes for cleaner and more moral living, the essentials of which may have to be conveyed to them through the medium of stories about Hindu epic characters and saints [1973b:320].

Ghurye also recommends that schools offer

… scientific training in all such crafts as have been the traditional occupations of the untouchable classes. Such training will offer an object lesson in the art of personal cleanliness even under the special conditions of those occupations and may help these classes … to enhance their earning capacity. The other sections of the Hindu society will realize that these occupations can be carried on by all without attaching to them their traditional ideas of impurity [1973b:320].

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Similarly, scavengers can be taught to carry on their work without coming into contact with dirt! While Ghurye apparently did not envision breaking the occupational mould of caste, he does recommend that members of these classes should be employed in government offices as clerks, postmen, etc, in order to ‘accustom’ the people to ‘social intercourse’ with them (1973b:321-22). For complete assimilation to occur, the ‘exclusivist spirit of caste’ must be eradicated (1973b:323).

Although Ghurye understood the caste system historically as the means by which diverse groups were integrated into Hindu society, he was critical of caste in its modern avatar. He was probably the first to point to the politicisation of caste groups as a result of colonial policies and practices, an insight that he complains was ignored by reviewers of the first edition of Caste and Race (Ghurye 1969:337-38). Ghurye condemned Risley in particular for the consolidation of caste groupings and for promoting the emergence of caste associations through his work as Census Commissioner (1932:157). The result of the increasingly elaborate enumeration by caste and ranking of castes in the census was a “livening up of the caste-spirit” (1932:158). Ghurye quotes the following observation of Middleton, a Superintendent of Census Operations in 1921, with regard to the effects of British administration on caste in Punjab:

Government’s passion for labels and pigeon-holes has led to a crystallization of the caste system, which, except amongst the aristocratic castes, was really very fluid under indigenous rule [1932:160].

Although Ghurye argues that the case of Punjab should not be seen as typical of the rest of India, he agrees that the

… process of pigeon-holing and thus stereotyping has undoubtedly counteracted whatever good results might have ensued from the dethronement of caste as a unit of the administration of justice. The total effect has been … to keep caste-solidarity quite intact [1932:160-61].

Ghurye’s opposition to enumeration by caste in the census, like his stress on the ‘assimilation’ of Untouchables, stemmed from his belief in the need for national unity based on cultural unity. Because of government policies, caste was becoming a divisive force in society, and this had to be opposed in the interest of national integration. Caste associations, reservation of posts and seats by caste, and even caste-based movements for equality are criticised by Ghurye on the same ground. Opposing the non-brahmin movement, Ghurye
suggested that brahmin domination can be eradicated more effectively through education and social reform. Like several contemporary sociologists, he argued that reserved representation is

... harmful in so far as it tends to perpetuate the distinction based on birth. Co-operation in the satisfaction of the needs of common social life through the machinery of Government is one of the potent factors that have dissolved tribal bonds and created nation-communities ... Special representation for some castes ... means the negation of such co-operation [1932:169].

Reservation of seats will induce more and more castes to ‘clamour’ for individual representation, reducing national life to an ‘absurdity’ (1932:170).

Similarly, Ghurye argues that the burgeoning of caste associations has led to an increase in ‘caste-consciousness’ and strengthened the ‘community-aspect’ of caste, creating a vicious circle (1932:179). “The feeling of caste-solidarity is now so strong that it is truly described as caste-patriotism” (1932:179). This, together with adverse economic conditions and competition for jobs, has led to ‘caste-animosity’, and contemporary society “presents the spectacle of self-centred groups more or less in conflict with one another” (1932:181). In order to kill ‘caste-patriotism’, the government should not recognise caste in any way. Instead, national feeling should be nurtured through inter-caste marriage, since “[F]usion of blood has been found to be an effective method of cementing alliances and nurturing nationalities” (1932:185). As another strategy for increasing social integration, Ghurye recommends that the priesthood, which traditionally has been a cohesive force in Hindu society, should be reformed and revitalised by doing away with brahmin monopoly and the distinction between Vedic and non-Vedic rites, and by training enlightened priests (1932:187).

Ghurye ends this work with a remarkable passage in which he employs the story of the Indo-Aryan conquest to exhort Indians to take up the tasks of social reform and nation-building:

The phenomenon of the conquering Indo-Aryans, who were passionate eaters of flesh and drinkers of intoxicating beverages, settling down as the upper castes of Hindu society and abjuring their coveted food and drink for centuries, is a moral triumph of the people of India, for which there is hardly any parallel in human history. The same people, now called upon to throw off caste, would rise to the occasion and achieve a still greater triumph [1932:188].
Ghurye on the tribal question

Ghurye’s argument about the need for assimilation of diverse groups into Hindu society is best illustrated by his well-known criticism of Verrier Elwin on the question of tribal policy. The background to this exchange was the scheduling of tribes and the debate that ensued between government anthropologists, who favoured a protectionist policy, and nationalists who viewed the creation of ‘Excluded’ and ‘Partially Excluded’ areas as yet another attempt to ‘divide and rule’. In 1943 Ghurye published The Aboriginals, So-called and their Future (republished as The Scheduled Tribes [1959]), in which he attacked Elwin for his advocacy of the preservation of the ‘tribal way of life’ through state-enforced isolation from Hindu society. Elwin’s writings on the Indian tribes, like Ghurye’s on Hindu society, reproduced the Aryan invasion theory, but his interpretation was geared to a different conclusion. Contemporary tribals are the descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of India, those who were not overcome by the Aryan invaders. The ‘tribes’ were marginalised and pushed into inaccessible forested and hilly tracts and therefore remained culturally distinct from Hindus. Elwin believed that contact with Hindu ‘civilisation’ invariably led to the exploitation of tribals and loss of their culture, hence the need for protection (Guha 1996, 1999).

This argument was challenged by Ghurye, who pointed to the complex history of migrations on the subcontinent as well as the close relations and cultural similarities between various tribal groups and their Hindu neighbours. He hotly contested the tribe/caste distinction itself and the view of tribes as culturally separate from Hindu society, preferring to designate them as “imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society” or “Backward Hindus” (1959:19) rather than aborigines. For him, the cause of the tribals’ immiseration was not contact with civilisation but the economic and legal changes ushered in by British colonial rule. He argued that tribals faced the same problems as caste Hindu cultivators: rapacious moneylenders, ignorance, short-sighted government policies and inefficient legal machinery together produced the typical pattern found in tribal areas of exploitation, land alienation, and bonded labour (1959, Chap. 7). The solution to this problem lay in “... strengthening the ties of the tribals with the other backward classes through their integration” (1959:207), not in separatism or isolation. Against Elwin’s plea for preservation of tribal culture, Ghurye maintained that the interests and welfare of the tribals would be better served by adaptation to the wider society, for example by giving up ‘wasteful’ shifting cultivation in favour of settled agriculture (1959:182-85). He also argued, in a surprisingly Marxian way, that the
administrative separation of tribal areas was motivated by imperial economic interests rather than any concern for the welfare of the people:

... even a cursory peep into the history of the exploitation of the natural resources of the region under survey and of the employment of some of these people in the process, creates a presumption that all that was being done was not necessarily in the sole interests of these people ... [1959:107].

He refers here to the exploitation of forests, opening of coal fields in ‘tribal’ areas, and recruitment of tribal labour for tea plantations and mines.

Calling Elwin a “no-changer and a revivalist” (1959:173), Ghurye argued against his proposal to codify tribal customs in civil matters on the ground that this would simply ‘fossilize’ them. Anticipating much of what anthropologists have only recently begun to understand about the ‘invention of tradition’, Ghurye pointed out that customs

... are plastic, and thus have an advantage over law which is rigid. Once we codify them we make them more rigid than law ... After the customs are codified, whatever little authority the tribal elders may have in their interpretation today will cease [Ghurye 1959:171].

Ghurye also criticised Elwin’s opposition to social reform movements among tribals. He believed that there were certain ‘customs’ such as drinking and sexual permissiveness that needed to be eradicated.

Because some of the so-called reforms are obnoxious to one, either because one thinks ... that they are likely to affect the vitality of the tribe adversely, or because one’s aesthetic sense ... is offended, it does not follow that the right of the people to mould their lives according to their light should be stifled by creating a ring-fence round them and by preaching through the schools stabilization of the tribal traditions and customs [Ghurye 1959:172-3].

While Ghurye was in favour of a certain kind of ‘uplift’, mainly economic, he believed that the promotion of cultural pluralism by certain anthropologists and through official policies would lead to social disintegration. He cited as proof of this danger the emergence of cultural revival movements among some tribal groups, and he opposed tribal and regional autonomy movements as divisive (Kapadia 1954:xvi).

Thus Ghurye in many ways had a more realistic and progressive understanding of the history and problems of ‘tribals’ than many of his contemporaries, and his critique of Elwin’s
paternalism is refreshing. It appears that his nationalism, despite its inherent conservatism, led him to be quite perceptive on some issues: he recognised the economic and political roots of the adivasi situation and was quite prescient to recognise the colonial origin of the caste-tribe distinction. But in the end, Ghurye’s own position was hardly more progressive than Elwin’s, for his understanding of the tribal ‘problem’ was based on his view of Indian history as an ongoing process of “… assimilation of smaller groups of different cultures into larger ones” (1959:xii). He regarded this as a natural process that was upset by colonialism: groups that had not been ‘properly assimilated’ appeared to the British to be different from the rest and were therefore designated as tribals. Here was the origin of the ‘tribal problem’, whose solution lay in assimilation rather than in the preservation of cultural diversity. In his approach to the tribal question Ghurye employed the same civilisational logic that framed the early anthropological discourses of Elwin and others, but he inverted the logic to fall in line with his nationalism. Elwin reproduced the 19th century ‘primitive’- civilised dichotomy wholesale, but with the signs reversed: primitive life and culture were glorified while civilisation was regarded as degraded and corrupting. For Ghurye, on the other hand, civilisation is what gives Indian history its structure and logic, and the spread of Hindu civilisation necessitates the absorption of diverse groups. The underlying cause of the ‘backward’ condition of the tribes, then, is not contact with Hindu culture but insufficient assimilation to it.

**Conclusion**

I have suggested that Ghurye appropriated colonial constructions of Indian history and society and reworked them to create a kind of nationalist sociology. In this endeavour he was influenced by a strand of cultural nationalism that itself drew upon the Orientalist story of a glorious Aryan past to assert the antiquity and authenticity of Indian civilisation and therefore of the Indian ‘nation’. It appears that Ghurye was caught up in the nationalist quest to recuperate Indian civilisation and its past by interpreting the ancient texts, which would also throw light upon contemporary society. His sociology revolves around the idea of Hindu civilisation, stretching back into the hoary past, and everything else is situated in relation to this grand movement. By taking the longest view, Ghurye could regard colonialism as a mere blip on the radar screen, another invasion that would not prove fatal to resilient Indian culture. At the same time, free India, in danger of disintegration due to divisions of religion, caste, language, and region, would have to seek its unity by rediscovering its true (Hindu)
past. Hindu civilisation, with some modest reforms, would be the foundation of the nation, and any movement that works against national integration (reservations, regional autonomy) must be opposed.

Thus it is easy to view Ghurye’s nationalist sociology, like nationalism itself, as a ‘derivative discourse’ (Chatterjee 1986), but this argument leads us nowhere except into an endless search for authenticity, which with regard to intellectual history is a chimera. In recent years we have heard much about the problem of postcolonial knowledge, especially within the writing of history. Indian sociology and anthropology also labour under the burden of their colonial past, and it is easy to find examples of the reproduction of colonial categories and modes of thought within these disciplines. Ghurye, who exercised such a profound influence on the development and institutionalisation of sociology, provides a prime example of this dilemma, and he has been justly accused of reproducing colonial narratives of caste and race as well as ‘Oriental empiricism’ (Bose 1996; Ludden 1994). But this view of Ghurye in particular and of Indian sociology in general reflects the Orientalist assumption that nothing can originate from within Indian society: social thought as well as social categories such as ‘caste’ and ‘tribe’ emanate from the colonial gaze and not from the actions or thought of the colonised.

This is not to support the conventional view that Ghurye was the father of an ‘authentic’ or indigenous Indian sociology. Clearly he, like everyone else, was a product of his milieu, and he utilised Orientalist ideas about Indian civilisation and history to produce what appeared to be an Indian and nationalist sociology. It is also true that he utilised uncritically the extensive data generated by British ethnologists and surveyors in his quest to ‘get the facts’. But instead of interpreting his work as a straightforward regurgitation of colonial knowledge, a close study of Ghurye suggests that we need to rethink the entire issue of the colonial production of knowledge (and of society) itself. The construction of colonial knowledge, like the construction of empire, was a complex collaborative project. Colonial and post-colonial sociology grew out of interaction among diverse discourses, agents and institutions and through numerous processes of production, appropriation, and redeployment of knowledge for diverse ends. A valid critique of this history must take into account this complexity and avoid reproducing the same discourse that it purports to deconstruct.

What is perhaps more important to understand than the origins of Ghurye’s ideas are their consequences. One consequence may have been the entrenchment of the notion of ‘Indian culture’ and ‘Indian civilisation’ as an ancient, unchanging and seamless tradition, which became a central organising concept for several disciplines. Without laying everything
at Ghurye’s door, it is significant that in the discourse of mainstream sociology that
developed after him, Indian ‘tradition’ was equated with Hindu norms, rituals and social
organisation. Tradition was opposed to modernity, and it could change only in two ways:
through ‘sanskritisation’ or the consolidation of ancient Indian tradition, and
‘modernisation’, imposed by colonialism and the west. Although Ghurye’s sociology is
apparently historical in orientation, the idea of Indian culture deployed by him (and many
others) is homogenising, hegemonical, and denies the historicity and fluidity of Indian
‘traditions’ (Niranjana et al. 1993:5-6). Thus Ghurye may be held at least partially
responsible for certain tendencies in mainstream Indian sociology in its early days: its
continual reference to ‘tradition’ as embodied in classical texts; its linear reading of history as
cultural heritage, that ironically produced an ahistorical rather than a historical sociology; its
stress on social structure and cultural continuity; and its consequent failure to recognise
conflict, oppression and hegemony.

Beyond the influence of Ghurye on the discipline of sociology, a more significant
question that needs to be addressed is the ways in which sociological categories and theories
have filtered into public and political discourses and ideologies. The ubiquity of caste-based
classifications, the environmentalists’ image of the primitive but ecologically friendly
adivasi, and school children’s notion of sanskritisation are examples of this process. Ghurye’s
brand of sociology tends to reinforce the claims of Hindu nationalism by asserting the
civilisational unity of India and centring it upon the culture of the Aryans, and by extension,
Hinduism and brahminism. While most of Ghurye’s work may no longer be read seriously
except by students required to know the history of Indian sociology, his Caste and Race in
India (which has gone through five editions and at least six reprints of the last edition) is
apparently still prescribed as a sociology text. It also seems to have had wide circulation
among those preparing for civil service examinations. To what extent does Ghurye’s
presentation of Indian history and society in this book lend authenticity and legitimacy to
already prevalent ideas and prejudices? As issues of academic freedom and control over
knowledge are becoming increasingly salient, this appears to be an appropriate moment for
academics to think seriously about such questions. It is not only the knowledge produced by
our intellectual ancestors that should be scrutinised, but also our own contributions to
contemporary ideological formations.
Notes

1 Good sources on Ghurye include Momin (1996), Pillai (1997), and Pramanick (1994).

2 Ghurye told Pramanick that he had worked out his plan of research and writing in the first few years of his career, and did not deviate from it.


4 “So great an influence has the Vedic age … exercised upon all succeeding periods of Indian history, so deeply have the religious and moral ideas of that primitive era taken root in the mind of the Indian nation, so minutely has almost every private and public act of Indian life been regulated by old traditionary precepts that it is impossible to find the right point of view for judging of Indian religion, morals, and literature without a knowledge of the literary remains of the Vedic age” (Muller, quoted in Chakravarti 1990:39-40).

5 It was out of this debate that the idea of a ‘pure’ white Aryan race emerged, which was opposed to the impure or mixed race Indians (Trautmann 1997:186).

6 Bayly (1995) gives a somewhat different version of this transformation, the details of which do not concern us here.

7 Trautmann clearly shows that these interpretations of ancient texts are shaky at best, and that the racial theory of Indian civilization is purely a late 19th century product, a projection of racial essentialism backwards onto a very different historical reality (1997:208).

8 However, abolition of the caste system itself was not a priority because most of the elite were of high caste.

9 Gandhi’s scheme for Harijan ‘uplift’ falls into the same mould. These efforts were resisted by leaders such as Phule and Ambedkar, who developed alternative versions of Indian history in which the Aryans were represented as foreign invaders, inverting the nationalist argument (Sarkar 1996:286-89).

10 Although Rivers is often remembered as a diffusionist, he was converted to the faith late in his career, in 1896, by Eliot Smith (Kuklick 1991:127). His more lasting work was in comparative psychology and kinship, subjects that Ghurye also took up. Ghurye wrote that with the publication of Family and Kin he had discharged a long-standing debt to his teacher Rivers, whose own work had inspired this one (1973a:156).

11 Srinivas (1996:6) mentions that one of Ghurye’s favourite books was Clive Bell’s Civilisation. When sociology was offered as a full subject for the first time in Bombay University in 1943, among the new papers introduced by Ghurye were ‘Civilisation and Culture’ and ‘Comparative Social Institutions’. It is interesting that he also introduced a paper entitled ‘Social Biology’ (Ghurye 1973a:109).

12 Although he apparently had little regard for Hobhouse, Ghurye requested M.N. Srinivas as a student to read his Morals in Evolution (Srinivas 1996:3).
Interestingly, in an earlier paper (1925) Ghurye defines civilisation in the broader sense to include food production as well as development of knowledge, urban centres, and so on.

In a note at the end of this book, Ghurye discusses the role of universities as creators of culture, and the mass media as disseminators of culture. In some ways, Ghurye was indeed ahead of his times.

Although this book was published in 1948, one year after Culture and Society, it was written earlier (Pillai 1997:64-5).

In this historical reconstruction, Ghurye draws mainly upon Orientalist sources -- the works of Muller, the Vedic Index, and so on.

The chapter on race was dropped in the second and third editions, which were 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). For this paper I have not attempted to review the substantive changes that were made by Ghurye between the various editions, although this would be a revealing exercise.

Risley concentrated on the nasal rather than the cranial index because the latter tended to disprove current racial theories of Indian society (Trautmann 1997).

Elsewhere he states that the Brahmin of U.P. is the “typical representative of the ancient Aryans” (1969:173).

Incidentally, this is a subject that was first treated analytically by Max Muller (Pillai 1997:342).

He also argues, against other Indologists, that this complex of knowledge, including gotra exogamy, fully developed only in the 8th century B.C., not in the Vedic period. Thus Ghurye was careful in marshalling his evidence and did not attribute everything Hindu to the invading Aryans. Similarly he maintains that charana was a “pure product of Indo-Aryan culture of the Brahmans”, which died out when the “ancient basis of it, the cultivation of Vedic studies”, disappeared, “almost before the full shock of the foreign Muslim invaders was felt” (Ghurye 1972:17-18).

It is remarkable that in a book published in 1972, Ghurye should be beating such dead horses as Durkheim’s 1898 thesis. Ghurye refers to the (by then discredited) theories of Frazer, Westermarck, and Briffault, but to none of the emerging literature in symbolic anthropology that would have been relevant to the question of menstrual taboos, or even to earlier functionalist theories. On the question of exogamy he refers with excitement to Robin Fox’s sociobiological theory, but there is no mention of Levi-Strauss, whose Elementary Structures of Kinship would surely have been the major reference point for any discussion of incest and exogamy in the 1970s. Is it too much to expect that a scholar of Ghurye’s stature should have kept abreast of the anthropological literature, especially given that even in the 1960s and 1970s, despite his advanced age, he was regularly visiting the University library and writing prolifically? Or was it a political choice on Ghurye’s part to ignore recent developments in western anthropology? His anti-Americanism was well known, but he was at
bottom an Anglophile (Narain 1996). According to D. Narain (1978), Ghurye was not ignorant of western theoretical developments after Rivers but was indifferent to them (Pramanick 1994:226).

23 This history also accounts for the relative dominance of ‘Islamic architecture’ and relative absence of Hindu forms in North India, where invading Muslims made their impact visible (Pillai 1997:146).

24 Ghurye makes the same argument in Chapter 8 of *Caste and Race* (1932).

25 Cf. Dirks (1992:73), who states that Ghurye quoted Middleton ‘approvingly’. According to my reading, Ghurye’s understanding of the effects of colonial administration on caste was more nuanced than Dirks’ interpretation suggests.

26 This rethinking should be along the lines of recent revisions of Indian colonial history, in which colonialism is not understood as the history of imperialism alone but as a complex interaction between various arms and levels of the state, Indian elites and others.

27 It is significant that this term was coined by Ghurye’s student Srinivas. It appears to be based on Ghurye’s view of Indian history as an ongoing process of Hinduisation. The idea of sanskritisation has become a rather dangerous hegemonic idea not only within Indian sociology but also in public discourse.
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