



Sociologist Dr Irawati Karve Contribution to Indian Society

Pravin Mansing Kamble¹

¹Department of Sociology, MVP SamajKrt Arts and Commerce college vani, Nashik, Maharashtra, India

ABSTRACT

Irawati Karve was a sociologist and anthropologist. Karve becomes globally renowned for her writings in sociology and anthropology, she became famous in Maharashtra for her literary works. Her first book titled, *Kinship and Organization in India* were published in the year 1953. The most famous of Karve's works was *Yuganta*, originally written in Marathi and then later translated into English by herself. This book won her the Sahitya Akademi Award in the year of 1968. The book is a literary piece on the main characters of Mahabharata with a historical, rather than a mythological approach. The major works of Karve on caste can be seen in her book called *Hindu Society: An Interpretation* (1961). The second one is the ethnological tradition that could be seen in the widespread surveys that she undertook for her works. The third is that of German physical anthropology, which is basically tracing the genetics of various groups under study to state their origins. The final one is that of socio-economic research and archaeological explorations, all of which were results of Karve's passion for research. The influence of Ghurye could be widely seen in her works as both believed that it is important to study the family, caste, religion, and kinship to understand the basis of Indian society and also on her reliance on broad survey data to state facts. As an Indologist, Karve belonged to the classical orientalist Indologists, who relied on ancient Sanskrit texts to decode the present. Dr. Irawati Karve's valuable Contribution for the Indian Society.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian sociologist **Irawati Karve** was born in 1905 in the country of Burma, also known as Myanmar, and died in 1970. Karve received a master's degree in sociology from Mumbai University in 1928 and a doctorate in anthropology from a university in Berlin, Germany in 1930. Karve served for many years as the head of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Deccan College, Pune (University of Pune). She presided over the Anthropology Division of the National Science Congress held in New Delhi in 1947. She wrote in both Marathi and English on

topics pertaining to sociology and anthropology, as well as on nonscientific topics. Irawati Karve was a sociologist and anthropologist. Karve becomes globally renowned for her writings in sociology and anthropology, she became famous in Maharashtra for her literary works. Her first book titled, *Kinship and Organization in India* were published in the year 1953. The most famous of Karve's works was *Yuganta*, originally written in Marathi and then later translated into English by herself. This book won her the *Sahitya Akademi Award* in the year of 1968. The book is a literary piece on the main characters of Mahabharata with a historical, rather than a

mythological approach. The major works of Karve on caste can be seen in her book called *Hindu Society: An Interpretation* (1961). The second one is the ethnological tradition that could be seen in the widespread surveys that she undertook for her works. The third is that of German physical anthropology, which is basically tracing the genetics of various groups under study to state their origins. The final one is that of socio-economic research and archaeological explorations, all of which were results of Karve's passion for research. The influence of Ghurye could be widely seen in her works as both believed that it is important to study the family, caste, religion, and kinship to understand the basis of Indian society and also on her reliance on broad survey data to state facts. As an Indologist, Karve belonged to the classical orientalist Indologists, who relied on ancient Sanskrit texts to decode the present. Dr. Iravati Karve's valuable Contribution for the Indian Society.

II. IRRAWATIKARVE EARLY LIFE

Iravati Karve, named after the famous Burmese river Irrawaddy was a prominent Indian sociologist, anthropologist, educationist, and a prolific writer. Born in Myanmar where her father Mr. G.H. Karmarkar worked in a cotton mill, Karve did her schooling at Huzur Paga boarding school in Pune. She went on to complete her BA honors in philosophy from Fergusson College and obtained her graduation in the year of 1926, after which she finished her masters in the subject of sociology from Bombay University under G.S. Ghurye, one of the pillars of Indian sociology. The title of her thesis under Ghurye was 'The Chitpavan Brahmans-An Ethnic Study', a study that she undertook on her own caste. She married Dhinakar Dhondo Karve in the meantime who was a chemistry teacher. Dr. Karve was the second son of Dhondo Keshav Karve, who was a social reformer advocating widow remarriage and women's education in Maharashtra. Thereafter, Karve went to

Germany to obtain a Ph.D. in 1928 and returned after two years. Ironically, her father in law who was known in advocating women's education was against this move pointing that there is no need for further studies and a job can easily be set up. Karve and her husband were both firm in their stand that Karve would be going to Germany. To quote Nandini Sundar, "while Dinakar Karve may not have been a public proponent of social reforms or women's rights like his father, his daughters argue that he was the perfect supportive husband, recognizing his wife's exceptional intellectual abilities and doing his best to encourage her".

III. IRRAWATI KARVE MAJOR WORK AND CAREER

After obtaining her doctorate, Karve returned to India to join as a registrar at SNDT Women's University that was set up by her father in law. In 1939, she left this post to join as a lecturer in sociology in the Deccan College in Pune where she went on to become the head of the department of sociology and anthropology. Karve then went on to become the pillar in the subject of anthropology in India. Iravati Karve was a stalwart of Indian sociology when it had just been institutionalized in the country. Making her mark in a male-dominated discipline was not an easy feat, but Karve's prowess in her subject helped her find her footing. She was also a prolific writer whose works won several accolades in the course of her career. She pioneered the use of Indology for the study of Indian society. Her works on kinship have been canonized in Indian sociology and her ability to create a multi-disciplinary corpus of knowledge has been marveled at. She was the first female anthropologist of India. Having studied Philosophy at *Fergusson College* in Pune, she went on to receive the *Dakshina Fellowship* awarded by the government of Maharashtra. This grant allowed her to study sociology under GS Ghurye in 1928 at the *University of Bombay*. GS Ghurye proved to be an

excellent mentor for her Karve and his academic competence gave her an impetus, both in the ideology she worked with and the topics she chose to investigate. Under his guidance she published an essay on the 'ChitpavanBrahmins'. In the interim, she had married Dinkar Dhondo Karve, who belonged to the illustrious Karve family that setup educational institutions. Irawati's father-in-law, Dhondo Karve, had established the *SNDT Women's University* in Bombay which was the first women's university in India. With her husband's support that Irawati Karve studied abroad at the *Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics* in Germany. Here, she was exposed to the studies of race, human anatomy, and genetics. Her experience in Germany was instrumental in shaping her school of thought in later years.

She worked on kinship using **Indology** (the study of Indian history, culture, literature and philosophy). This method was a departure from the greatly anglicised research being conducted in India. She never lost sight of India as her object of study and attempted to use the indigenous **epistemological tools** available to her.

1) Methodological Perspective:

Irawati Karve was India's first woman anthropologist at a time when anthropology and sociology were still developing as university disciplines. She was also the founder of Anthropology Department at Poona (now Pune) University, an indologist who mined Sanskrit texts for sociological features, an anthropologist, serologist, and palaeontologist, a collector of folk songs, a translator of feminist poems, and a Marathi writer and essayist of no mean repute whose book *Yuganta* transformed our understanding of the Mahabharata. The indological tradition that Karve subscribed to was of very different from Dumont's in that there was no attempt at building or eliciting an underlying model of social relations. Instead, she was an indologist in the classical Orientalist sense of

looking to ancient Sanskrit texts for insights into contemporary practice (Cohn, 1990: 143).

Ghurye's influence is apparent in much of Karve's work. They shared common belief in the importance of family, kinship, caste and religion as the basis of Indian society, and also a broad equation of Indian society with Hindu society (Sundar, 2007).

2) Works/Writings:

Karve wrote in both Marathi and English on topics pertaining to sociology and anthropology as well as on non-scientific topics. Irawati Karve has the honor of being India's first female anthropologist in addition to her many other accomplishments. One of her greatest contributions to the field of sociology was her study of kinship, which she published in a book titled *Kinship Organization in India* in 1953.

3) The Following are some of her books :

1. Kinship organization in India (1955)
2. The Bhills of west khandesh (1958)
3. Hindu society: An interpretation (1961:1968)
4. Group relation in village community (1963)
5. The social dynamics of a growing town and its surrounding area (1965)
6. Maharashtra : Land and People (1968)
7. Yugantha : The end of an epoch (1968)
8. Gangajal in Marathi (1972)
9. Paripurti in Marathi (1949)

IV. RACING INFLUENCES

Nandini Sundar, who did a phenomenal work on the biography of Karve, states that her works are majorly influenced by four intellectual traditions. The first was an ideological tradition that she imbibed from her mentor G.S. Ghurye. The second one is the ethnological tradition that could be seen in the widespread surveys that she undertook for her works. The third is that of German physical anthropology, which is basically tracing the genetics of various groups under study to state their origins. The final one is that of archaeological, socio-economic research

and explorations, all of which were results of Karve's passion for research.

The influence of Ghurye could be widely seen in her works as both believed that it is important to study the family, caste, religion, and kinship to understand the basis of Indian society and also on her reliance on broad survey data to state facts. As an Indologist, Karve belonged to the classical orientalist Indologists, who relied on ancient Sanskrit texts to decode the present. This group also believed in the post-independence period that the Indian unity with its diversifying caste institutions essentially was found in its Sanskrit texts.

V. IRAWATIKARVE: KINSHIP AND THE FAMILY

Kinship groups play a significant role in Indian culture. She studied kinship patterns through the idea of caste, language, and how the family is structured in specific regions of India and discovered differences between how kinship is organized from region to region.

1. Northern India: Kinship is mostly determined based on blood and relatives that are related by marriage. Kinship is characterized by territoriality, ancestry, shared taboos, and marriage to individuals from outside groups
2. Central India: Kinships include shared languages related to Sanskrit
3. Southern India: Kinship groups do not distinguish between the family a person was born into and those who are related by marriage. The southern portion of India has both matrilineal and patrilineal kinship groups
4. Eastern India has a blend of kinship patterns with some organized according to linguistics paired with matrilineal and patrilineal lines

VI. CONCLUSION

"Irawati Karve saw science as her vocation. Almost the equivalent of social service in the university arena perhaps she was not wrong. A life of research extending over 40 years in an intellectual climate that must often have been arid and dry "the attempt to provide an independent academic perspective on the problems of contemporary citizenship, language, the status of women, caste, kinship, the ability to pursue her own interests in Sanskrit epics and the diversity of local customs. When academic fashion had changed and the ability to chart new paths in the understandings of contemporary development. Surely all this important in the professionalization of the discipline and in giving it multiple roots in the country. At the same time however that concerns that informed the major part of her work help to institutionalize Indian sociology in a particular Indological direction for many years. This was coupled with the various social base of recruitment of university positions which she represented but which also continued beyond her. In the end then the professional forms that the discipline of sociology and anthropology took in past colonial India were not related organically to the broadcast need of society and remained the preserve of what Gramsci called the traditional intellectual.

VII. REFERENCES

- [1]. Irawati Karve (2007). Anthropology for archaeology: proceedings of the Professor Irawati Karve Birth Centenary Seminar. Deccan College Post-graduate and Research Institute. p. 19.
- [2]. Patricia Uberoi; Nandini Sundar; Satish Deshpande (2008). Anthropology in the East: founders of Indian sociology and anthropology. Seagull. p. 367. ^ Sundar (2007), pp. 367-368, 377

- [3]. Sundar, Nandini (2007), "In the cause of anthropology: the life and work of IrawatiKarve", in Uberoi, Patricia; Sundar, Nandini; Deshpande, Satish (eds.), Anthropology in the East: The founders of Indian Sociology and Anthropology, New Delhi: Permanent Black, ISBN 978-1-90542-277-7
- [4]. Iravati Karve (1928)Chitpavan Brahmins-An Ethnic study:Masters thesis in sociology ,University of Bombay
- [5]. Iravati Karve (1932)TheParshurama Myth ,In the journal of the University of Bombay,vol.I(I):115-139:
- [6]. Iravati Karve (1938) Kinship Terminologyand kinship usages in Rgveda and Atharvveda (Part I)Annals of Bhanarkar oriental Research Institute 20:69-96
- [7]. Iravati Karve (1939)b some folk songs of Maharashtra,In Bulletin of the Deccan college Research Institute (henceforth B.D .C.R.I.) VOL.I :79-95
- [8]. Iravati Karve (1947) c Racial Conflict New Delhi :Indian council of world Affairs
- [9]. Iravati Karve (1953)a kinship organisation In India,Poona :Deccan college Monograph Series no II
- [10]. Iravati Karve (1957)a social education of the scheduled tribes ,In Vanyajati,5(4):164-169
- [11]. Iravati Karve (1958) The Bhils of Khandesh ,Bombay:The Anthropological society of India
- [12]. Iravati Karve (1964)The family in India ,in contempararay India ,Asia publishing house
- [13]. Iravati Karve (1958)What is caste ?The economic weakly vol10(12):491-407
- [14]. Iravati Karve (1969)Yuganta-The end of an epoch .Poona :Deshmukh and com.