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**ASPECTS OF MAJUMDAR'S PERSON AND
HIS ANTHROPOLOGY: A RETROSPECT**

I

The creation of Majumdar Endowment Fund has been a laudable step by the University of Lucknow as Majumdar was one of the most outstanding teachers this University ever had. His sudden demise in 1960 at a comparatively early age of 57 years came when he was doing his best to develop his decade old department and enriching anthropology. I deem it a great honour to being called upon to deliver the 9th D.N. Majumdar Memorial Lecture by my almamater. And, for this honour I am thankful to its organizers.

My association with D.N. Majumdar had continued for about ten years as his student, a researcher, and then a junior colleague in the department. Even after leaving Lucknow for Delhi in 1957, Majumdar always during his frequent visits to Delhi kept in touch with me. I recall with some nostalgia his last visit to Delhi in April 1960 when he had stayed in my small flat which provided me an occasion to know him better. Subsequently when I retired and settled down in Lucknow, I was called upon to resume close association with the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society which is Majumdar's creation, with the charge of D.N. Majumdar Museum for folk life and culture and also with the Departments of Anthropology, as well as Sociology, taking up lectures in some courses and participating in the seminars, etc. Later, the Society resolved to appoint me as an editor of *The Eastern Anthropologist*, and this privileged association still continues. Majumdar took a constant personal interest in his students and thus developed a bondage with them, and also always advised and encouraged them to develop and retain close ties with each other. This was how he was able to create outstanding institutions like the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society and *The Eastern Anthropologist*, apart from the university department.

In his obituary on D.N. Majumdar, Fürer-Haimendorf had described the department of anthropology 'as the most active department' in South Asia. And, this remark was more than true as Majumdar had created a vast network of research studies in different branches of anthropology, some of which were

visionary and well ahead of his times, exploring areas totally neglected by Indian anthropology. And he was active in his academic pursuits till the last day of his life, at the end of May, 1960.

A personal trait of Majumdar was that he seldom brings any autobiographical glimpses in his writings. But at the same time the debt, he felt he owed to his teachers and mentors, is repeatedly voiced. The most prominent among them were S.C. Roy and Bronislaw Malinowski. He had joined Malinowski's seminars at London and also laboratory work with G.M. Morant and Ruggles Gate, in order to bring himself abreast in social and physical anthropology, respectively while he was working for his Ph.D. at Cambridge in 1933-35. In his classes he often referred to the personal qualities of Malinowski which endeared him to his students and he himself seemed to have a similar closeness with his students. In fact, retrospectively remembering Majumdar as a teacher, I feel that he followed Malinowski in ways more than academic orientation. Kuper (1973: 34-35) has described Malinowski's charisma:

Malinowski would recruit people from all over to attend these seminars, and perhaps, to be converted; and those students soon became an integral part of his world. A Chinese student once remarked, 'Malinowski is like an Oriental teacher – he is a father to his pupils. When he moved.....in the summer some students would go with him.....taking part in informal seminars in the evening.....he demanded their complete loyalty. He came increasingly to see himself as engaged in a battle for truth.....

This reminds us, who were his students, of Majumdar's closeness with his students. His relationship with his promising students was like a devoted parent's concern for their work and career; and this charisma triggered their 'conversion' not so much to him but to anthropology. Majumdar was regularly accompanied by some students during his stay at Chakrata during summer vacations. He oriented them in field work in Jaunsar. He was appreciative of the 'loyalty' of his students and this is reflected in his dedicating *The Matrix of Indian Culture* (1947), "to my pupils of the M.A. final class in anthropology, 1947 whose love and loyalty I sincerely reciprocate". D.P. Mukerji, his friend in the University of Lucknow, says:

..... he succeeded in enlisting them for the different colleges and universities of India, and also for his journal, I think very few men in India have produced a better set of research workers than he had done. He was a friendly man and his students were devoted to him..... I have hinted above that he was a fighter, but he fought for causes, for the principles he cared for..... (1962: 10)

And, therefore, it is not surprising that no less than three festschrifts were posthumously published in his honour, as appreciatively noted a rarity by Peter Berger, a Dutch anthropologist. Also, the first three scholars selected for the prestigious scholarship in the Australian National University in early 1950s were his students. This relationship was also the cornerstone in

Majumdar's successfully building up enduring institutions. It is reflected best in some of the letters he wrote to his students and the way in which some students have warmly described this relationship, in their communication to me or elsewhere.

His first research scholar was Kunwar Indrajit Singh who was from Akaltara, a Gond princely state of central India. Unfortunately he died at a rather young age and there is a gold medal instituted in his memory for the best dissertation at the Master's level in anthropology. In his book *The Gondwana and The Gonds— A Study in Primitive Economics* (1944). Singh describes Majumdar as his:

teacher and friend who initiated me into the methods and techniques of firsthand field surveys and had accompanied me in several ethnographic tours in the Gond country to equip me with the scientific pre-requisite of intensive anthropological studies.

This statement is also indicative of how Majumdar guided intensively his doctoral candidates. Professor N.S. Reddy writes in a letter to me, thus:

I did my M.A. in the late forties and my doctoral research in the early fifties, was during what may be described as the golden age of Lucknow University. It was my good fortune to have been associated with stalwart teachers like Dr. D.N. Majumdar and Professor Radhakamal Mukerjee..... If any one asks me the question as to why I became a teacher my simple answer is that it was my teacher Dr. D.N. Majumdar who was solely responsible for it. Dr. Majumdar was not just a teacher, but he was also a preacher and a proselytiser. Whenever he discovered promising students, he would go all out to baptize them and ensure that they would carry forth his scholastic torch. He belonged to the noble tradition of teachers whose ambition was to be excelled by their own pupils.

The late Dharani Sinha, who made a name in exploring anthropological dimensions of management, in a letter to me, described his former teacher:

D.N. Majumdar was a general anthropologist in the true sense of the term.....believed anthropology was a holistic discipline and he demonstrated it in his own scholarly work..... Majumdar was a rare breed of professionals having contributed to different facets of anthropology..... D.N. Majumdar believed that anthropology has to be relevant, it has to assist in planned social change. Village studies contributed to this challenge.....he demonstrated that it was necessary to understand social fabric of even an urban conglomerate in order to bring about planned change..... Majumdar positioned anthropology as an applied discipline..... This stance of his brought me intellectually close to him..... Majumdar taught me the art of participant observation, the skill of meticulous and vivid description.....when I shifted from anthropology to management, this basic approach lived with me and gave me my identity as a management professional with anthropological perspective.

Here Sinha underlines an overwhelming aspect of Majumdar's personality where he combined in him an anthropologist stressing thorough field work and ethnography and a teacher. Several of his students who worked with him

in the projects which he conducted during the 1950s, shared a feeling that Majumdar became a 'changed person' in the field, informal, friendly and caring. He helped his field workers in every way but at the same time got annoyed whenever he found them leaving the field without any adequate reason or performing poorly.

This reminds me how Majumdar strongly felt that the students should not marry before they had completed their stretch of field work. He got very upset when he heard that one of his most promising students who was preparing for field work under a foreign fellowship, had married. However, the news was only a rumour. When my father went to invite him for my wedding, his first reaction was that, "I would have preferred if 'Horshai' (as he pronounced my name) could have finished his doctoral work....." Thus, his fatherly concern for his students tolerated no diversions and compromise in the quality of ethnographic fieldwork. Incidentally, S.C. Roy, Majumdar's teacher and mentor, "compares field work to meditation (*dhyana*) of self-forgetting absorption" and Srinivas felt that the best field works are done by "single individuals without family obligations". (Madan 2011: 245)

I would also like to recall the advice that Majumdar gave me when I was preparing to join the central services. Majumdar had asked me to remember two things – that I should always remain in touch with my seniors as well as juniors from the department and treat them like elder or younger brothers, and to continue my interest in anthropology and keep abreast with its development, even when I was in an administrative job. These points go a long way to show how his students always felt an affinity with their fellow students of Majumdar and the Department. And, then, also extended the reach of anthropology, 'converts' (Kuper) or 'proselytisers' (Reddy).

And Majumdar's own sentiments as reflected in a letter of November 1957 from London to R.K. Jain.

..... trying to finish my work by February, so that I may come back a month in advance of your examinations- I do not think, my presence would have benefited you all for most of the time I am out of Lucknow, but as you have said, it would give you some satisfaction to be with me. I am always thinking of you all and I shall always do, and you know, nothing does please me better than the achievements of my pupils. I did not have all the opportunities you have of books, of library, and the advance(d) knowledge that anthropologists today can command, and I grew like wild exotic creeper- I have my limitations, but also I possess an optimism and love for work.....

It appears that in harmony with his professional personality he had made plans for his post retirement engagement. Having worked intermittently for long among tribals of Dudhi, his plans were:

For many years I have been thinking of a suitable plot of land.....situated as near Rihand Dam site as possible..... acreage of the spot should be such that I can grow a little produce for consumption, and be also near the tribal

people to carry on my field work side by side.....(Letter to Chandra Sen, Supervisor of the Dhanaura research team, dated 19 January, 1957).

In a lighter vein I would also like to add a few words here about Majumdar and the India Coffee House, Hazaratganj, Lucknow. Actually in his remarks about the Coffee House of the 1940s and 50s and D.P. Mukerji's person (2013: 372-73, 375-376 note 8 and 9) by Visvanathan, Madan has rightly criticized his describing Mukerji "asa Coffee House intellectual....." (2006: 244). The intellectuals of Lucknow in those days and the Coffee House can under no circumstances be 'derisively linked'. A number of senior faculty members, from the Arts, Art and Architecture, Law and Medical faculties of the University of Lucknow, as well as intellectuals from other walks of life, journalism, politics, etc., used to frequent the India Coffee House in the evenings and Sunday mornings. Majumdar's visits there were frequent. Since 'Ganj' then was a place for leisurely strolls, he used to go first to the Universal Book Store, the largest stockist of quality books as also the publisher of the books of the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society, and Ram Advani, the book shop always displaying the best collection of books in social sciences. Before leaving Hazaratganj, Majumdar was particular about having a *pan* (betel leaf) from a stall near Universal. He used to sit with prominent faculty members, some juniors as well, authors like Yashpal, editor Chalapathi Rao and often his academic guests. Here, the discussions were not only about current events but also their creative plans and progress. I remember being introduced to at least three distinguished anthropologists at Majumdar's table in the Coffee House. S.C. Dube has referred to these gatherings in the Coffee House, thus:

Beyond the academics, there was lively political interchange, meetings in the Coffee House with important public figures, representing a range of political persuasions, from Communists to Lohiaites to Congressmen, including the occasional presence of a charismatic parliamentarian, Feroze Gandhi. (Saurabh Dube 2007: 457).

Madan gives this place of gathering a very apt intellectual description, as 'a public space', 'and a place of communicative action'.

II

In the past decade or more, there has been a realization on the part of social scientists that they have been creating something of an 'academic amnesia' and even 'erasers' in documenting the varied views, methodologies and writings from the earlier generation of social scientists. This trend has been bitterly commented upon by Madan (xii-xiv: 2013) and earlier B eteille has expressed it thus:

"In India.....each generation of sociologists seems too eager to start its work.....with little or no attention to the work done before. This amnesia about the work of their predecessors....." (B eteille 1997: 98).

Perhaps, this tendency has been developing not only to show off originality but also under the sway of homogenizing the development of Indian sociology and social anthropology, as Thakur (2014) points out. For instance, I think, in the case of tribal development, Nehru's Panchshil model and Elwin's roadmap therefore, which even in his later transformation NEFA phase suffered from an 'isolationist' colonial hangover has been overemphasized ignoring the other voices. However, a closer reading of the earlier works must be accorded its due importance to enable us to flash out the critical interplay between shaping of social sciences and the making of national consciousness and policies. They also throw light on the kind of society the earlier generation wanted to bequeath (Thakur 2014: 422), explore the socio-cultural milieu of their times and a more systematic reflection of the issues. Any attempt in this direction would contribute, inter-alia, to contextualization of these writings, help a more diachronic analytical appraisal and also in developing a better methodological rigor through a comparative approach.

Majumdar too has been no exception to this fate of 'amnesia'. His perceptive writings have been forgotten almost in their totality and the limited pedagogy on his 'thought' does not often go beyond his tribal ethnography. A Senior Fellowship awarded by the India Council of Social Science Research enabled me to plan a study of the entire range of Majumdar's vast writings, (about 200 papers, published from 1923 onwards and more than a dozen books some of which were published posthumously) in-depth, and then, present his views and contributions for the benefit of the later generations of anthropologists and sociologists. Thus, to use Madan's phrase (2013: 365) it was an attempt to 'make audible' his 'lost word', and, additionally, my quest was to explore and hear 'echoes', so to say, if any, of his voice. This project also aimed at rediscovering Majumdar in his various roles – as a person, a teacher, an institution builder, a pioneering anthropologist, and broadly assessing or discovering how his 'lost word' had reverberated in the anthropology of his times. Further, it was also an attempt to delineate whether any of his views and suggestions were reflected prognostically in the later day developmental programmes and government policies and approaches, as Majumdar always stressed the applied aspects of anthropology. This attempt has enabled me to find several significant examples of his prescience and understanding of the cultural situations and its implied issues, as seen by him then and extant even now – examples of what I have called as 'echos' of his voice. These instances also give us hints of the kind of society he was visualizing and, obviously, provide pointers for further efforts in, pedagogy and research.

Majumdar's tribal studies were carried out right from his student days to around 1950. The dynamics of culture change through cultural contacts became a running theme in his ethnographic work for which he is known. As different kinds of problems emanate from such contacts specially when these are cultures at uneven levels and also certain benefits which Majumdar never

failed to document, his views on what was needed for bringing a better future for the tribal people of India and how anthropologists could play a positive and helpful role in this national endeavour are very significant. Majumdar's papers on the Ho culture began appearing from 1923 and one of his papers published in 1925 – "Cry of Social Reforms among the Aboriginies" clearly voices his 'concern' to use Madan's phrase, for study of change and search for the reasons of change as well as the result of two or more cultures coming into contact. He documents needs for change in the Ho way of life as felt by the leaders of the community themselves and his own observations, thus:

The social progress which we meet with in different parts of India suggests to the most casual observer a warning which every anthropologist in the land should beware of. The influence of social culture has reached the most neglected nook of our land and it is no wonder that the aboriginal people who supply us a clue to the evolution of primitive society and who even now present us with a culture more or less stagnant and traceable to the very early period of their existence should receive the light of culture to some extent are fast lighting the candle of civilization and with the help of Christian missionaries (*ibid*: 285) and further.....

Here Majumdar has clearly discerned the situation he was witnessing between a primitive culture and an advanced one, the *diku* or Hindus living in the area and a number of missionaries and Christian converts. It has to be noted that this article, which also includes a brief description of the Ho culture had appeared in the *Modern Review*, then a very widely read English monthly published from Kolkata.

It is apparent that Majumdar took to a study of culture and social change almost from his very initiation into anthropology. Further on he had kept himself abreast of the advance of the functional approach of Malinowski which had discredited the evolutionary and diffusionist thought reflected in his earlier papers. Keesing in his epitomical reference source, *Culture Change: An Analysis and Bibliography of Anthropological Sources to 1952* variously documents Majumdar's abiding interest in the dynamics of culture process, and observes (1953: 30-31):

Malinowski's students went particularly into the British African areas.....mostly including a strong acculturation emphasis and often applied anthropology dimensions. But others worked elsewhere, e.g. Firth and Piddigton in the Pacific area, Fei in China and Majumdar in India.

Contextually, Keesing mentions along with Firth, Eggan and others, Majumdar working on culture change situations in India as presenting rich and varied materials on cultural dynamics. But, as Madan (2013: 32) points out Majumdar had 'anticipated' the formulation of the nature of the dynamics of culture change by Malinowski which came in 1940s. Not only that, he also criticizes Malinowski's approach to the study of social change in Africa because it took into account only the Euro-American or Western influence determining change but ignored the inter-tribal contacts which also contributed to various levels

of social change. And, this is also the case with tribal India. In this context, Majumdar observes that the three column approach for the study of social change charted out by Malinowski (1945: 37) “ignores some of the most important two-way sources of culture change” (*ibid*: 8). Majumdar, therefore found his mentor’s methodology and approach to change untenable in India where inter-tribal contacts and also tribal contacts with the mainstream Hindu culture had been there since times immemorial and there were no cultures in a zero contact situation. This observation underlines what Majumdar has to say about how India anthropology needed a modified methodology which he advanced in his writings.

Majumdar’s Ho ethnography of 1937 was titled as *A Tribe in Transition* because it is a penetrative and emic narrative on the changing life of the Ho of Chhota Nagpur. Here he has dealt with the changes in the Ho as a result of the mining and industrialization apace in their area. This is regarded as a pioneering note of caution on the impact of industrialization on tribals. In his subsequent Ho study *The Affairs of A Tribe*, he further analyses the impact and comes up with prescient observations and suggestions. He emphatically observes that the process of industrialization in the tribal areas which seems to have been introduced without considerations of local conditions and planning has also produced complications particularly in tribal cultures though, it is a fact that many of the Indian industries depend entirely on tribal labour. Discussing tribal labour engaged in the mines and industries of Chhota-Nagpur, Majumdar stresses that the labour from certain tribes is found to be efficient and quick in learning, and they have so far never added to the labour problems. But, this is no reason why their case should go by default in matters such as lower wages for contractual labour, lack of housing, health and educational facilities, etc. Majumdar makes out a very strong case for certain long-term measures, as well, viz., the training of tribals as skilled labour, by opening technical training centers and, assigning a certain percentage of the fabulous profits being made by the industry for rural welfare activities. Subsequently, Majumdar (1950: 292-98) again emphasizes that:

The managers tell us, that the tribal labourers are quick of perception and quite competent to follow instruction and their skill develop probably quicker than that of other communities, but what they acquire they lose in no time and most of the labourers end where they started, as coolies. The health of the people in the mines is never satisfactory. (*ibid*: 295-96)

Moreover, since the management employs people from outside among their technical staff and high-paid labourers, the tribals are discontented. It may lead to labour unrest. He says that the tribal labour would perform far better if their social environment can be secured. Thereby the tribal communities will depend much more on the industries and this would encourage their specialization and acquisition of skills and also check detribalization. He also mentions that the traditional knowledge and skills of certain tribal communities, which are on wane, would make a firm bases for their technical training.

This analysis of the situation and the well focused suggestions coming in late 1930s and later in 1950 are far ahead of his times. It may be added that the Task Force and Working Groups for the development of tribal areas and tribal communities during the Fifth Plan, had laid great emphasis on similar measures. The Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, wrote that:

Therefore, the concept of industrialization will have to be some what broader and diversification of the tribal economy will have to be one of the important facets. Thus, assimilative capacity of the local community will be an important 'given condition' in the industrial planning of a tribal region. (Sharma 1976: 5-6)

The issues, Sharma analyzes in this context, include advance preparedness of the local community. The strategies therefore were expected to be interwoven with the area-based tribal sub-plans starting mid-1970s.

In his ethnography Majumdar firmly brings out that some primitive cultures are dynamic. He also focuses on the ways which help to hold their own against heavy odds and discovers that there were a large number of more or less important elements in their culture which support them in their change. Therefore, he felt that the strategy for tribal development lay in conceptualizing a creative or generative adaptation and counter wholesale cultural invasion from outside. His approach to industrialization among tribals firmly points out that there was no inherent incompetence among tribal people to absorb or assimilate technological advances and the problem actually 'rests firmly and squarely on the inadequacy of the base'. The 'base' he has in mind here is one of the elements which has helped the tribals to hold their own, and which should spell out a more acceptable and smooth approach to the impact of industrialization so as to curb its disintegrative effect. In the introduction to *Affairs* he comes out with suggestions for a more acceptable and smooth approach to change. He writes about the base of a culture which he finds to be the resultant of the interaction of four crucial variables which, arranged in the order of importance, were Man, Area, or Resources and Cooperation (MARC). The Area is terrestrial, Resources is made up of animal and plants, soil, environment, etc., Man is organism with basic needs and through Cooperation produces human culture and derived needs arise. Hence, MARC as an interdependent functional unit provides the base of a culture and it is an *elastic* concept to a point. He puts the relationship of these factors to Base and the resultant K as,

$$B = K = f \text{ MARC.}$$

In his discussion he analyses how changes in C, and also R which includes technology as variables, can bring about desirable adjustments or maladjustments in B (base). The implied approach here is that adjustments in these variables, if they are based on intensive studies can smoothen the path of change. He had also indicated that these factors could be measured

and thereby adjusted or readjusted, using statistical methods. However, Majumdar has nowhere further elaborated this strategy which presumably included in its methodology the D^2 formula of Mahalanobis statistical factorization. Thus, this approach has only been broadly laid out and not empirically worked out. Perhaps he would have done so later - as a part of developing 'anthropological theoretical framework based on his enormous data', in M.K. Gautam's words.

Among the various outstanding issues among tribals even today is the position of converted Christian tribals, and those who follow their own religion and beliefs which as a matter of course incorporates the 'little traditions' of the Hindu civilizational mainstream. A piece of significant writings from Majumdar comments meaningfully on this sensitive aspect of tribal change, its problems and their likely remedies. In his paper (68: 1938) Majumdar analyzes the cause for rising numbers of Christian tribals in certain districts of Chhota-Nagpur and also the numbers of Christian population declining in United Provinces, as per 1931 Census. He finds that the most important cause of the decline (in U.P.) is 'the comparative difficulty of providing economic assistance by the missionaries' (*ibid.*: 513). Therefore, groups, specially from among the lower castes which 'embrace Christianity for *secular rather than spiritual benefits* retrace their steps'. In the context of Chhota-Nagpur, he points out to the following trends:

- In locations where the tribals live in compact areas and are numerically preponderant, and are also provided a protectionist administrative system, they, generally do not convert to Christianity.
- But, in areas where they are in a minority, they have either accepted Christianity or return themselves as Hindus.
- Detailing the Munda case, Majumdar points out that the colonial policy of supporting Hindu zamindars, restricting access to forests, taxation and entry of Hindu population in larger numbers in the area, the tribals were in a rebellions mood. And the Christian Missions exploited this situation. (*ibid.*: 514).
- The missionary organizations also on their own and with encouragement from the administration extended 'wonderful services for the aboriginal converts'.

In this backdrop, one would expect Christian tribals to be far more progressive, economically stable and educated. However, the actual conditions of the aboriginal converts' now 'do not show a very high standard compared to their erstwhile brethren'. Their religious life and other practices also 'do not appear to be fundamentally different' (*ibid.*: 516), and so is the case with their living standards. Elsewhere he has also discussed how the non-official organizations, particularly, those connected with mainstream religion could pursue a role in the manner of the Christian missions.

Majumdar repeatedly stresses the view that certain cultures provide proof of a wonderful capacity for acculturation without abandoning their indigenous cultural contents. In some areas, even where they have been subjected to ordinary laws and systems of administration, the aboriginals have made progress 'entirely due to their association with advanced section'. Hence there is a need to assist various categories of tribals in their struggle for adaptation, as such. Therefore he pleads for creating positive measures specially in matters relating to education, health and economic systems. In this context he takes note of the controversy relating to the continuance of the excluded areas, since the Simon Commission had expressed the view that such areas should remain out of the partial democratic process which was intended to be introduced in the 1930s. Majumdar observes that:

Whether exclusion will help the aboriginal tribes or special provisions in the Constitution by *earmarking certain percentage of the Provincial revenues on the basis of population* for the development of the tribal areas and for welfare work among them would meet the situation is a matter of opinion. But it is imperative that the primitive tribes of India who form 7% of the total Indian population and who even to-day *represent a vigorous and sturdy stock* capable of adjusting and adapting themselves under *careful supervision* should be protected from indiscriminate exploitation by advanced social groups and their rights and privileges should be adequately safeguarded till they can feel that they are a part of a larger political whole and are able to take their place by the side of their compatriots of the plains. (56: 1929)

The suggestion that a certain percentage of funds from the provincial revenues should be *earmarked*, on the basis of the tribal population *for the development of the tribal areas and welfare work* among them, demonstrates how Majumdar was very much ahead of his times in planning for tribals. No references from either anthropologists or social workers or administrators of those times contain any suggestions on these lines. Majumdar is positive about the development of these areas which would of course imply communication, education and health services. Thus, he also spells out a strategy to eliminate isolation. It may now be recalled that his suggestion was concretized much later in 1972. The Task Force on Development of Tribal Areas set up by the Planning Commission to thoroughly review approach to tribals and tribal areas and to suggest a perspective for their development for the Fifth Plan, suggested that:

The State departments concerned should surrender a proportion of their budget provision, depending on the size of their tribal population in an area, to be merged with the special provision under Backward Classes sector.....flow of funds to the tribal areas at least in proportion to the tribal population in a district (Home Affairs 1975: 100).

L. P. Vidyarthi, a student of Majumdar, was the Chairman of the Task Force. Thus, in a way, Majumdar suggests an alternative to certain areas being declared as excluded areas or partially excluded areas. Notably, these views were published in the *Modern Review* which had a much larger circulation in general and among intellectuals as compared to technical journals.

The study of urban India, specially cultural aspects of the urban life and its ramifications for a better development of cities, identifying their problems has now become an important branch of study both in sociology and social anthropology. Generally, this growth of interest in urban anthropology/sociology is traced to the Planning Commission's decision in 1952 to sponsor 'field investigations and analytical enquiries for effective planning and suggesting solutions' (Vidyarthi 1978: 79). However, the important paper on 'acculturation' presented by Ralph Beals in the Wenner-Gren Foundation International Symposium on Anthropology which was organized to take a thorough look at anthropology in 1953, makes no reference to the potentialities of the anthropological approach to urban studies and none of the theme papers (Kroeber 1953) too which discuss methodology, research and application of anthropology in different fields, touch upon urban problems and their studies. In fact Beals had earlier (1951: 1-10) rather concisely yet comprehensively commented on the state of such studies vis-a-vis sociology and social anthropology and to 'reexamine our discipline and its relations with the field of social science'. Broadly, he had pointed out that anthropology despite its 'asserted broadness of our interest' has not been hospitable as compared to sociology, to such studies'. Majumdar, participating in the session on 'anthropology as a field of study', in the Symposium, was the only participant who emphasized how 'anthropological knowledge must be applied to the creation of wider scope and opportunity'. Mentioning some such areas receiving the attention of anthropologists in India, Majumdar had stated:

The first anthropological study of the pattern of Indian city life has been undertaken in Lucknow, financed by the municipal board of Lucknow, and sociologists, psychologists, and statisticians are working with anthropologists on this project. The need for such collaboration has been fully recognized in India (Tax 1953: 345).

The pioneering study he mentions could be traced by me with great difficulty, published in 1951 by the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society. Its methodology shows careful framing of questionnaire, their revision on the basis of preliminary enquiries and the presence of young students both males and females among investigators. The analysis is also notably well done. And, mentionably, it includes an empirical investigation of some salient 'gender issues' and also the marginalized groups, as they are called today. Among the urban surveys sponsored by the R.P.C., Majumdar's study of Kanpur survey too has been favourably noted by Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1979) thus:

And 'urban study' (354); the latter also earning the credit of perhaps being the first comprehensive survey of a town in India on a sociological (instead of a purely economic) base. Majumdar dealt with 'culturology' to begin with, and the problems of urbanization, communication, and the role of Indian sociologists in later years.....fall into the category of emphasizing the 'how' question in a thorough going manner :.....(*ibid*: 68-69).

After the Lucknow urban survey, Majumdar had also initiated an issue based urban study on the problem of educated unemployment. This limited survey was conducted by S.K. Anand and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Centre for International Studies, also obtained it for publication as it highlighted a fast emerging problem. The study pinpointing the need for social responsibility in this field, states:

Unemployment is a curse..... In a welfare state, the social loss resulting therefrom is an intolerable enervation of society's vital lifeblood Without a guarantee of the right to work, democracy is devoid of its essential economic nucleus. Hence there is a clear shift of stress today from a vague concept of democracy to that of a planned social order the essential core of which is full utilization of human resources (1957: 1).

Here he brings forth the desirability of a 'guarantee' for the right to work which was enshrined in the Constitution only as a Directive Principle of the State Policy, as Article 40.

A pattern or policy for tribal welfare and development had assumed greater importance when the country attained independence and the framing of its Constitution was taken up towards the end of the 1940s. A debate about the issues had arisen between two sides, 'social scientists specially anthropologists' and social workers. The discussion was around the 'isolationist' approach which was being attributed to the entire community of anthropologists by the social workers in advancing a largely assimilistic policy. This school was led by Thakkar Bapa, and also driven by the strong plea for it by G.S. Ghurye and the Congress Party's view point. In fact the writings of Verrier Elwin in early 40s specially his book on the Baiga and his pamphlet, *The Aborigines*, were the cause for anthropologists being called isolationists, totally ignoring the view point of the trained anthropologists who had been engaged in their studies of tribal societies for decades. Majumdar, rather disturbed by this controversy, had tried to create communications between the two schools, by publishing a special tribal number of *The Eastern Anthropologist* in 1949. It contained papers on various aspects of the tribal life and their problems from a number of anthropologists and social workers including A.V. Thakkar who in the lead article seems to have shed off his earlier ire regarding anthropologists.' Majumdar's article, inter alia, stresses the need for suitably trained officers in tribal areas as officers not understanding the tribal ethos could spoil the situation. Majumdar also throws up here what are now called gender issues and says that certain tribal areas have 'a contingent of able bodied, intelligent and hard working women' and this work force should not be wasted and they should be educated and trained to work usefully for the society as nurses, teachers, etc. In his 'notes and comments' column, Majumdar points out how "there has been considerable serious and non-serious scientific and sentimental writings relating to tribal or aboriginal problems". Briefly mentioning the special provisions in this regard contained in the Draft Constitution of India, Majumdar points out that in

India, for coordinated social planning, we need a scientific attitude towards this vital problem”, and ‘we need not have one tribal policy but several’ (*The EA*: 3: 1: i).

III

Majumdar’s village studies came last into his anthropological ken during the 1950s. Of course, its national importance and his own life-long focus on holistic studies motivated him in taking up several such studies. He was also made a member of the Research Programme Committee of the Planning Commission and remained so till his death.

Earlier village studies

The history of the study of the Indian village in an effective fashion begins with the intensive survey work connected with the British attempt to collect land revenue in the late 18th century. The view about the village in India articulated in the colonial narrative mainly by Metcalfe and Maine was that India was a land of ‘self-sufficient’ ‘little village republics’ imbued with an ethos of intensive ties to the village and within the village; and an overall stagnancy as they had existed in this state from the days of Manu. Moreover, its economic system combining agriculture with manufacturing had also contributed to ‘restraining the human mind within the smallest possible compass’. Marx too accepting these assumptions lamented this stagnant state of an oriental social system and held the colonial rule responsible for it, and this was true to a great extent because of their agrarian and economic policies.

Thus, the specific characteristics of the Indian village were its autonomous existence, its self-sufficiency in the economic systems of production and consumption; homogeneity and smoothness in mutual relationships; and a collective consciousness about the village as an entity. The immutability or resistance to change attributed to village communities offered a kind of theoretical base or rationalization for the colonial administration which claimed to stand for change and modernity. As Edward Said points out, the orientalist project ‘generated authoritative and essentialising statements about the East and was characterized by a mutually supporting relationship between power and knowledge’ (Said 1979). Thus, the Indian village together with its panchayat system and a system of economic production based on traditional caste occupations presented a scenario of absence of free market, lack of competition and such other characteristics which were more or less a contrast to the attributes of a modern society, the West, and, therefore, the ‘other’. This structure was supposed to be uniform all over the sub-continent, thereby ignoring the vast diversities in different regions. In fact, this kind of an imagination of the Indian rural society contributed to form the bases of the nationalist notion, as well, and a part of the ideology of the freedom movement, as pointed out by Srinivas, Dumont, Jodhka and others.

'Rural reconstruction' was therefore adopted as policy and development goals after independence and certain measures like the abolition of zamindari, along with tenurial rights were the steps which had been initiated on the eve of independence. The community development programme through block based projects was initiated in October 1952. As the authorities needed a feedback on this endeavour in order to expand it and improve its impact the Programme Evaluation Organization was also set up in the Planning Commission for the evaluation of this programme, its administration and impact. Pilot work for this programme was done in collaboration with American scholars and rural life experts. The methods of holistic cultural studies in little communities initiated by Robert Redfield and the interest of that school in Indian researches provided the tools for gathering comprehensive baseline data on cultural contours of the village scene. Anthropology had methodologically equipped itself through its role during World War II in providing knowledge which could be applied. Several American universities had started taking keen interest in the study of cultures and civilization of India by the late 1940s. As Majumdar points out anthropologists and sociologists with their experience of micro-cosmic field studies had much to contribute. For anthropology, it was "a natural extension of his interest in tribal studies, for the emphasis that he placed on the total approach and micro-cosmic studies puts him easily in an advantageous position with regard to rural assignments" (1956: 95). And 'the anthropologist genuine field of studies is *Gemeinschaft*' (1955: v).

Thus, the 'young' discipline of social anthropology (Jodhka 1998) undertook studies of Indian villages during 1950s and 1960s in a big way. And Majumdar always open to new vistas for anthropology took up this work with great vigour and élan. He was the lone anthropologist taking up several village studies with the selected villages located in an entire spectrum of culturally variable conditions. Probably, Majumdar's continuous and life-long interest in culture changes specially the change resulting from the contacts between cultures of differential levels motivated his selection of the villages. The first village study he took up was Gohana-kalan, a suburban village near Lucknow. Then, the other village was on the outermost fringe or border of Uttar Pradesh located in an area which was inhabited both by castes as well as a large number of tribes, the latter being the original inhabitants of the area. In the last, he took up three villages as samples for the study of a region which was a part of a much larger polyandrous belt characterized by not only polyandry but also a culture having both differences and commonalities with the adjoining plains areas of the state. Thus, he contributed a very wide range of micro level, holistic rural studies exploring rural urban, tribe-caste and regional contexts as also the impact of directed change through community development programmes. Exploring the later aspect he also published a number of papers focusing on the quality of programmes, reasons for their being rejected or accepted, quality of personnel and the manner of the governance of this expansive programme for rural development and two special

number of *The Eastern Anthropologist* which later appeared as *Rural Profile I & II*.

In 1952-53 Majumdar was a Visiting Professor in Far Eastern Studies in the Cornell University at the invitation of Morris E. Opler. An ambitious collaborative project between the Cornell University and Lucknow University was initiated and started functioning at Lucknow University in 1953 with Opler as its director and Majumdar as co-director. The Cornell University had undertaken this collaborative endeavour towards the end of 1953 for an intensive three years study of the community development projects in several areas of Uttar Pradesh aimed at developing detailed guidance on the methodology of evaluation.

Majumdar's approach

At this juncture Majumdar was the foremost social anthropologist who had been extensively studying and commenting on processes and results of social change in the tribal context, as well as the interface between the tribal society and the Hindu castes. He had in fact already postulated the process of there being a tribe caste continuum and transformation and tried to unravel the factors that changed certain tribal communities otherwise seen as stable, stagnant and even declining, generally. Mukherjee (1979: 68-69) aptly comments on Majumdar's contribution on this entire process:

D.N Majumdar was engrossed by the 'how' question, but not on the basis of a superficial rendering of the structural-functional approach. This is attested by his 'village study' (*Caste and Communication in an Indian Village*).

Addressing the Conference on Anthropology and Sociology under the joint auspices of Madras University, M.S. University of Baroda and the Chicago University, in November 1955, Majumdar iterated his wide ranging views on the problems and prospects of rural analysis (176: 1955-56: 92-103). Among the issues, he made out were: firstly, that the research assignments in our country were not, to say the least, problem-oriented and how indefinite and aimless our research projects had been; secondly, this situation needed more of cooperation and coordination between individuals and research bodies and better distribution of research funds; and it also needed far better communication between research workers and those needing it as they were in a position to use the results.

Of course, he emphasized how such studies should be made more and more applicable for furthering the actual work. In this regard, Majumdar's stand differed from the position taken by Srinivas (1960: 13) and later on by B eteille (Jodhka 1998) who saw the relevance of studying the villages only for a scientific understanding of Indian society. A number of Western and Indian scholars, Epstein, Lewis and Dube, for example, were actively participating in honing the developmental process.

Touching upon the strength of anthropological approach of a total or holistic study, Majumdar remarked that often the micro-cosmic studies of rural life failed to do justice to the total structure that we aimed to observe. Giving examples of such a shortcoming, he commented that:

The functional approach made pretentious claims to study linkages, mutualities and reciprocal responses within a given milieu, but no functionalist has studied a tribe or a community with a complete coverage of the network of interrelationships. It is not possible, however penetrating our tools are. We must refrain from making a fetish of microcosmic or total approach, for no rural community is a closed unit today or was so before. A historical perspective is necessary to understand linkages and rural relationships, for the village has been built up or settled by people and has not preceded settlement by the people. (*ibid*: 96)

Thus, in a way, Majumdar emphasized the need to explore and document, in-depth, the links and relationships which the community either on the whole or its constituent castes or certain individuals maintain with certain urban areas, villages or collectivities beyond their own village. This data would, in more than one ways, enrich not only to the totality of the 'little community' studied but also correlate its important institutions to the outer world and also explore the communication networks as carriers of change by way of development, awareness and education. Thereby, this input would expand the applied utility of such studies. He has also pointedly commented on the deficiency of a historical element in the structural-functional approach underlying the anthropological village studies in respect of Indian village, and in his brief mention of the Gohana Kalan's oral historical traditions unfolded the links between 'little communities' and the Indian civilization. Majumdar also expressed the view that:

Almost all users of research, in this case, the administration and the welfare organizations, think 'that research will be critical of their methods or policy (and therefore) it has become customary to dub social research as 'academic'.....In order to make the practioner aware of the possibilities of research, our approach and findings must be competent. (*ibid*: 100-101)

He was also critical of producing quick results through rural analysis. Commenting on the methodology of rural analysis he emphasized proper formulation of hypothesis for researches and creation of better baseline data to add to the quality of research specially in the context of suggesting definite and specific establishment of priorities for taking steps towards social amelioration. The research techniques emphasized by him in this regard were direct participation-observation, structured interviews and case studies rather than the questionnaire method. He cautioned particularly against the use of close-end questions as they were not comprehensible to the mostly illiterate subjects. Further on, he deals with a far more specific aspect in methodology which were vital for good research, viz. the need for inputs of quantification.

In conclusion, he labels some of his comments as being ‘unduly provocative’, and lays stress on the quality of investigations, his constant concern:

I would any day prefer to work alone, if I have the slightest doubt about the competence of my investigator or informant. What I shall sacrifice in time, I shall gain in accuracy. This is true both for base line studies as well as for the study of cultural change. (*ibid*: 103)

Majumdar’s firm belief that social anthropology and sociology could play a significant role in what he called ‘rural reconstruction’ and ‘development’ was voiced repeatedly. His address as the General President of the second All India Sociological Conference (December, 1956) is devoted largely to this thought, with ‘the almost breathless title’ (Madan 2013: 233). “What the Sociologists can do....What they must do.....How they can do....and, How they should do it.....”, he says:

.....the whole outcome of developmental planning here depends in a way upon the success or failure of the vast, revolutionary programme of rural reconstruction. Aimed at bringing about a transformation in the outlook of the people, so as to make them desire progress and feel needs, and welcome new knowledge by which to achieve it, inculcating in them a spirit of self-reliance and habits of cooperation, this programme involves vital stakes.....

Change in any socio-cultural system implies a correlated resistance, whose nature depends upon the given culture pattern and the type of change. It is, therefore, idle to think of effecting any successful change without a reliable knowledge of the varying effects and resistances of a given change in its relation to different culture patterns....(*ibid*: 4)

In ultimate analysis the utility and productiveness of the community development programme will be judged by lasting and permanent changes it succeeds in bringing about in rural India....

For any change in the social attitudes of the backward, rural and tribal groups, it is necessary to start with a change in their cultural environment: that is to say, technical improvement at the material productive level, and rather than any piecemeal attempt at converting, reforming or educating individual. Approach through the individual *foci* is atomistic and in so far as a traditional tribal or rural society is a web of institutional relations, this approach is not likely to yield any lasting results in the shape of community development.... (*ibid*: 5)

Community planning, like all other planning, is a question of priorities, in whose selection knowledge of the cultural matrix of the community is very important. (*ibid*: 7)

Majumdar’s views on the need for inter-disciplinary work

Majumdar also perceived clearly how anthropologists and sociologists complement and in a way correct the role of economists. He argued:

Indeed, the work of the economists is greatly valued; but about the social matrix of the villages, they appear to have merely scratched the

surface.....There is a complete lack of first-hand studies of our rural life and the cultural setting that provides the stage for rural action. We, therefore, think merely in terms of the economic approach, of raising the levels of living, of reorganizing the employment structure, cottage industries, seasonal labour and co-operative societies. Not that these are not important, or that we have not spotted the right maladies, but the approach to rural life has not been a total one.....Anthropologists particularly have been interested in macrocosmic studies, unlike the economists whose interests are macrocosmic, so that the net-work of exchanges, social and cultural, that determine rural life, its attitudes and fulfillment, can be viewed in the context of the cultural matrix and of social ecology. This approach enables us to understand the basic structural patterns, and integrative factors of rural economy which certainly cannot be ignored in any ambitious scheme of planning or action therapy. (ibid: iii-iv)

Majumdar felt that for achieving the goals of economic and social development, anthropology which had long been involved in providing advice to the colonial regimes could vitalize sociology which had not grown because of being subordinated to economics. He also stressed a need for more 'fundamental research' in this area.

Majumdar's three village studies

The variety of composition, and other features of the five villages taken up by Majumdar test his conceptions about communities (village in this case). In his field view he has tried to focus on the distinctive features of each of the studied communities. As a part of this manner of presentation he has used certain concepts developed by contemporary social anthropologists, both Indian and western. However, this conceptual orientation — structural-functional, little community, rural-urban continuum, sanskritization, dominant caste and so on— when applied into his perceptive ethnography often prove inadequate and, therefore, he critically discusses some of the inadequacies of these concepts and attempts to develop some new concepts. This becomes apparent when we look at the way Majumdar uses Redfield's conceptual frame of a "Little Community" as applicable to Gohana, its way of life, internal and external links and boundaries and so on. The study titled *Caste and Communication in an Indian Village* ethnographically explores the challenges of communication in urban-rural process and intra-village and inter-caste relations, which was a pioneering effort.

Majumdar viewed the village as "the pulse of India" that can be felt in the villages in spite of the fact that the villages did not offer "one social pattern; there are great variations in climate, topography and in population and, therefore the Indian village as we often speak of it is a misnomer" (1958: 1) and emphasis most necessarily be on regional patterns. However, he asserts:

The village can be seen either as a unit of territorial organization, in social or political alignment, as a symbiotic grouping of castes, high and low, or as

a cultural background, of familial relationship, all of which have developed corporate living and factional jealousies. (*ibid*: 3)

Mentioning the two contrasting views about the village being “a matrix of colossal disharmony and factional intrigues”, he says that both the stereotypes are “partially true, particularly when we see the village at a distance or for a short period” (*ibid*: 3).

The last chapter of *Caste and Communication in an Indian Village* is entitled “Village: A Concept, A Way of Life”. Elucidating this label, he says:

A village is a way of life, because the people still live more or less as they did before—in spite of contact and communication. We can not ignore this way of life, if we want to level it up. It is through intimate knowledge of our rural life that we can discover the ethos and aspirations of our rural life. (*ibid*: 328)

Then, the village is not merely a way of life, it is also a concept — it is a constellation of values and so long as our value system does not change, or changes slowly and not abruptly, the village will retain its identity, and so it has done till today. The continuity that one finds in other parts between rural and urban living— a ‘continuum’, as a noted anthropologist has described it— does not necessarily exist between villages and towns in India (*ibid*: 329). In other words, he is, after initially elaborating the ‘defining qualities’ (Redfield) of a little community and finding them useful for defining Indian village adequately, points out the differences along with similarities and thus, empirically, brings out the realities; and in this process never forgets to highlight the changing elements in the communities’ organization and potentialities for structural change.

Inter-caste relations and change

Majumdar’s ethnography of life-cycle rituals documents a change in the entire gamut of inter-caste relations in the village. Since the Chauhan Thakurs had been enjoying both prestige and power, inter-caste relations in the village and the changes therein have been perceptively brought out through socio-grams focusing on their lifecycle rituals. These clearly bring out the services and supplies provided by service and artisan castes and the gifts in cash and kind, traditionally reciprocal, given to them as also the changes which were observed during a period of nearly two decades. Ten castes, in all, figure in this documentation of reciprocal ties. This has been complemented with the details of relationships among other castes vis-à-vis the Thakur as well, in matters of food participation wherein the change during about 25 years has been depicted through two socio-grams. This documentation and the pattern of quantum of gifts, compensation for services and the beliefs connected with *daan* given to different functionaries and also in general, later formed the bases for Raheja and others to theorize on *daan*/gifts being given to ward off any future calamities. Commensal relationships or food participation by

different castes indicate that during the last 25 years a noticeable change has occurred in this regard.

Communication and its ramifications

Significantly, communication features in the title of the study, and the opening remarks in this chapter indicate that in spite of Gohana being only eight miles from Lucknow, it is "still a secluded place." To many of its residents "Gohana is almost their whole world". The mechanics and channels of communication of ideas from outside or mainly urban world and its ramification are well documented. These are: a few people who visit the village officially, some villagers who go to Lucknow daily or frequently for selling their products, similarly some villagers also go occasionally for fairs, religious gatherings or festivals, and also the students who go for study in the Higher Secondary School. These are the media for dissemination of information. Glimpses of the world outside or even abroad have come to the village through two or three of its residents who were enlisted as soldiers in the world war and also a foreign scholar who stayed in the village for a few months.

Even though the villagers had established a primary school in 1942 through their own efforts and its teachers try to inculcate habits of cleanliness, tidiness, honesty and punctuality among the children, the attitude of the villagers particularly the higher castes is not receptive for education. In fact, the Thakurs and Brahmans have an attitude that education would lead to their children becoming "degenerated city youths", while in the case of lower castes it would "improve their status, and consequently (they) would claim equality with the higher castes". Noticeably, gambling, smoking and petty stealing are commonly prevalent vices among the youth and children. By and large, even though, there is curiosity for knowledge about the happenings in the areas of closer proximity, there is a critical attitude that these bring awareness which has baneful influence. The general elections and the visits of outsiders like party workers in that connection have had the effect of increasing social awareness and consciousness of political rights.

Summing up, Majumdar's first village study comprehensively presents all the three aspects of the community, from its historical context to inter-caste relations and power-play upto the then held democratic general elections. It explores the areas where change was needed as also the process through which the changes perceived had been coming about. It was intended as a baseline study for the introduction of C.D. Programme and other planned changes and its rich ethnography has a whole range of such data. A.C. Mayer in his review quite appropriately comments:

Written to provide us with an ethnographical survey of an Indian village near Lucknow, as a basis for the evaluation of rural problems and social change in India. It is addressed not only to anthropologists, but also to a wide audience of administrators and development workers.....A wealth of

material is contained in these accounts. Inter-caste cooperation is described in great detail, for instance, as are the changing attitudes of village caste groups to one another.....A book of this kind by its wide coverage invites readers to ask for more in their areas of particular interest (1960: 96).

As regards 'caste and communications' aspect of this study, it finds a mention as a 'pioneering study of communication' done by any South Asian anthropologist. The graphic presentation of caste distances and how these have undergone changes during the last decades are one of its most 'fascinating aspects' (Agrawal 2009: 423). Thus, it also facilitates an understanding of inter-caste relations and social distances maintained by the village people, specially for the benefit of agents of planned change. Such village studies have been appreciated as 'significant contributions to communication anthropology' and the development of communication research. Even though, it may not have directly touched upon the study of communication as it has now developed, the value of the book lies in its ethnography even though it may not be having some aspects as graphic or quantitatively enriched as some other studies made later on may have been.

Dhanaura: A tribe-caste village

Majumdar selected Dhanaura, a village near Duddhi, a tehsil headquarter of Sonbhadra district, for his second village study. The village was a tribe-caste village with a mixed population and situated in a remote area touching the predominantly tribal districts of Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh. This study which was published posthumously in Hindi as *Chhor Ka Ek Gaon*, reflects his keen interest in promoting the study of social sciences in Hindi medium. He wanted that it should be published in Hindi first. Its English version never came out as the manuscript had been lost. Therefore, this work, which I find to be a very comprehensive and analytical study, never received any attention from the world of social sciences even from Lambert, whose bibliography includes some village studies in Hindi.

It is, broadly speaking, a rich ethnographic account as well as an evaluation of the impact of Community Development Programme undertaken in the Duddhi block since early 1950s. Thus, it is a study of the village life and its social dynamics, documenting the cultures of the tribes and the old migrant Hindu castes in this area, acculturation and symbiotic living as also the changes envisaged and actually achieved by C.D. Project. Its title *Chhor* is synonymous with 'fringe', which connotes clearly certain features, viz., its geographical location on the farthest 'border' of the state and therefore far from the normal administrative reach, ethnic composition of the population of the district with tribes and castes, the latter generally old migrants from the adjoining districts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh, difficult communications such as no railway line, absence of vital bridges on rivers and streams, poor agricultural conditions due to the hilly terrain and lack of irrigation and almost no avenues of employment other than agriculture even a decade after

independence. Trading in the local produce and agricultural produce was also negligible and, according to a member of the field team stationed there in mid-1950s, the tribal and other poorer sections were ignorant of the monetary values of their goods. The term 'fringe' has been used in social sciences since long but in different contexts. It is 'relative to the expanding metropolitan city' and a village in the 'fringe' today may be engulfed by the developing metropolis tomorrow. ".....villages.....of the 'fringe' exhibit certain common features" (Rao 1991: 392).

Among Indian village studies, there are hardly any which cover such a multifaceted dimension. Bailey's *Caste and the Economic Frontier* (1957) does share some of these features. He uses the term 'frontier' and the 'advance of frontiers' is focused on economics and administration in his in-depth study of Bisipara, the mixed village. Majumdar's *Chhor*, on the other hand, is a holistic village study observing the dynamics of the relevant cultural traits of the tribes and castes and thus documenting the cultural changes brought about by the process of a peaceful kind of interface and what he calls 'trans-culturation' and thus, creating, more or less, a continua. Thereby, the parameters of a 'chhor culture' as a concept for the cultural study of this region have been developed by him, identifying some distinguishing characteristics. How far the ethnography documents and reflects the characteristics attributed to the 'chhor culture' would show the quality of Majumdar's perceptive ethnography and his developing the concept of "chhor culture" therefrom.

The ethnography of the village has been presented broadly into three themes. Firstly, the social and economic organization, inter-caste relations, kinship and family, life cycle rituals and religious beliefs and practices; historical account of migrants and the exploitation of tribal people at their hands. Leadership and panchayats and village factions is the second aspect; and planned change, evaluation of Community Development Programme and reformist movements among the people is the third theme.

The leadership and emergence of factionalism in Dhanaura after Nanku Manjhi's death has been analytically discussed. Nanku Majhi, son of the founder of the village, was its first *supurdar* and a sagacious leader. How there occurred intra-caste and inter-tribal splits as also the roles of different castes having substantial numbers. Thus, emerged a near equilibrium-less situation with shifting roles and supports of different castes-tribes to the emergent intra-caste factions among Brahmans and Thakurs. The last *supurdar*, who not only carried the more important factions with him but also had better leadership qualities, was elected as the gram-pradhan and also the pradhan of the Nyaya Panchayat when these statutory institutions were setup in 1950s. This discussion concludes with two observations: intense caste consciousness of the residents of Dhanaura and tribal groups also assuming more and more the behaviour pattern of castes and flaunting a Hindu identity specially after the influence and spread of the Rajmohini Devi movement

during the first half of 1950s which was reformist and gave an impetus to the process of detribalization and syncretization of popular Hindu traditions or 'little traditions' with the magical and other ritualistic features of the tribes.

Chhor or fringe culture

The first characteristic of 'chhor culture' indicates the near absence of dominant leadership in the village community. What Majumdar describes as "a near equilibrium-less situations and shifting roles and supports of different castes tribes" was perceived even in a later study on extensive displacement and indifferent rehabilitation scenario in this area about 40 years after Majumdar's study by Saksena and Sen (1999):

Broadly speaking, leadership.....in an area inhabited by a large number of tribal groups mixed with a substantial proportion of emigrant non-tribal population, leadership in the sphere of economy and secular interests of the community is found to be segmentalised, diffused and oft-changing. Here, the growth of any cohesive leadership is also hampered by a lack of education and awareness.

The second characteristic of little difference being perceived in the living standards of different castes and tribes is reflected roughly by the ethnographic details relating to housing, ownership of livestock, household utensils and other material culture. The process of "continuous and not easily perceptible kind of a trans-culturation" which is the third characteristic, is documented in the ethnography relating to a large range of institutional and ritual practices. In the economic field, specially agriculture, the role of the village Baiga who comes from the Chero tribe is seen universally (222: 1960: 20-21).

The fourth feature of fringe culture – government patronage and role in the formation of leadership instead of wealth and social status – is perceptible in the two chapters on Panchayats, factionalism and leadership patterns. When the 'frontier of administration' moved to Dhanaura, Nanku Majhi who was appointed the *supurdar* by the colonial administration emerged as an undisputed village leader with influence over the community's social economic and religious life. Subsequently factions grew with changing loyalties and leadership around the office of *supurdar*.

The fifth characteristic of the Chhor culture, namely, that the migrants (generally higher caste groups) coming into the villages founded by tribes initially orient themselves to the value system of the tribes by making caste norms elastic, thus, leading to a symbiotic living has been amply illustrated through aspects of economic, religious and ritual practices and festivals.

Characteristic seven– comparatively more of tolerance– is seen in the social behaviour, rituals, religious beliefs, etc., which brings about some intensity and width of participation on social occasions; and the last one that, acculturation does not lead to a loss of tribal identity because there are no

dominant castes to impose caste norms on the tribals is also well mirrored in the ethnographic accounts.

Restudy of Dhanaura – 1990s and 2013

The significance and applied utility of re-study of villages has been rightly stressed by Epstein, Chauhan, Atal and others. With a focus on the tenability of the concept of fringe culture and also the long-term changes, I made field visits to Dhanaura and adjoining areas during 1990s and then in February 2012. In field trips an attempt was made to identify how the village had changed since Majumdar's study in mid 1950s. The Chhor narrative was broadly found to be a stable and realistic benchmark, it also appeared to have some prescience.

Duddhi as a town has expanded vastly as a result of increasing government activities and becoming a trade/business centre. It has contributed to a suburbanization effect on Dhanaura. The layout of Dhanaura has not changed much. However, concentration of certain communities in different *tolas* has made parts of the village congested.

The first trait of 'chhor-culture' indicates the absence of a permanent power-clientele relationship among different castes and tribes as different communities assume importance at different times. A limited critical analysis of these relationships as seen in the case of panchayati raj, agricultural labour, and relationships of contacts and communication confirmed its presence, continuance and even reinforcement. Characteristic six that highlighted the changing pattern of relationships between migrant castes and original tribal residents, where the initial importance/respect given to the tribes and/or their leaders changes in the course of time to an exploitative link is not much in evidence now because of the election strategies and the impact of widespread outside links and other factors on the subaltern. Also the progress of tribes and scheduled castes in government jobs and other benefits has had its own role in the equations. It cannot be said that exploitation has been eliminated but a good deal of freedom from it has achieved with the creation of new leadership and social capital among the marginalized.

The second characteristic that living standards of different castes and tribes do not have much difference is only partly-true now. A general rise in the incomes of both tribes and castes has made its impact.

Characteristic three which emphasizes a gradual and silent kind of a trans-acculturation has assumed a wider and greater visibility as now seen in the cult of Nanhe Majhi and various other practices including the worship of Shiva and other Hindu gods by the entire village.

Characteristic four points out to a comparative absence of contribution by wealth, social status, etc., to village politics and an upper hand for

government patronage. Presently, a general observation is that the panchayat politics, government policies and their agents have considerably diminished the role of social status but wealth is important.

The seventh characteristic, of more tolerance and social participation between tribals and others continues to be of salience. It was observed that both the tribal and caste people in the village now have a far better interaction with the outside world as well due to their mobility.

As regards the eighth characteristic, of the tribals retaining their cultural configuration in spite of adopting certain customs and rituals from the old migrant caste population (Hindu), the process continues in spite of the fact that their identity and its configuration has been underwritten by government policies.

Fringe culture – the concept

Majumdar argues that the 'chhor-culture' therefore, presents a significant reference point in living together, expressing a high level of inclusiveness and universalisation. Disputes between the villages are not taken to courts or police but settled in the village itself, and the extent of social distance seen between tribes and castes and even among the castes in the interior villages is much less. All the communities share the natural resources amicably. In the process, all of them also get to be vocal which is absent in non-fringe villages where certain castes and tribes, if any, are voiceless, more or less. Thus, in Majumdar's opinion the fringe villages and 'fringe-culture' offer some kind of a solution to the 'meaningless caste-based complexities' in community life seen elsewhere and thereby presents a model for 'rural rehabilitation'. Majumdar optimistically opines that his concept of 'fringe-culture' would facilitate further evaluation of the potentialities for change and, thus, facilitate the climate for cultural changes for the better both planned and from within.

Since the ethnography emphasizes the first characteristic of fringe culture viz. lack of stabilized relationships among castes and tribes creating a system lacking in equilibrium, this aspect requires some discussion vis-à-vis the functional approach. Kuper (1973: 191) thought that such situations present a problem to the functionalist, whose basic premise was that the system he was studying was well integrated and in equilibrium. Leach offers an alternative thesis that "all societies maintain only a precarious balance at any time, and are really in a constant state of flux and potential change. The norms which exist are neither stable nor inflexible" (Leach 1960: 191). Majumdar's ethnography of the situation in *Chhor*, however, does not support any of the two views and emphasizes that such changes are rather imperceptible and a smooth kind of loss of equilibrium and its resumption has been the process.

The concluding parts of *Chhor* discuss the pattern of planned change, effect of reform movements on the basis of village culture and an evaluation of the work done under the C.D. Programme. Evaluative comments on important schemes therein indicate their strength and flaws. Shramdan (voluntary labour contributions) were to be taken up for various works of public benefit. Initially, it was a success but subsequently it came to be seen as a revival of the practice of *begar* by the poorer people, Chamars and tribals who also opposed certain works chosen for some personal benefits. The general evaluation of C.D.P. also brings up certain basic issues which contributed to its achieving only a limited success and often becoming unpopular. Firstly, its functionaries created a climate of high expectations among people which they could not sustain because of their own working and government procedures. Another factor was the frequent absence of functionaries from their duty or vacant posts for substantial periods, and transfers after short tenures. Similarly, some of the programmes which became popular could not be sustained because of either budgetary constraints or transfer of popular and active personnel. Corruption and diversion of materials was another cause of widespread complaints, and all this was compounded by the delays in processing of applications for benefits. Ignorance of most of the personnel about the felt needs of villagers and their priorities and the cultural conditions of the area were also acutely resented by the people. A few suggestions have been made to remedy the deficiencies, and a proper orientation of the personnel is held out as important. In conclusion, Majumdar observes that in spite of many shortcomings, the programme has created an awareness for a better life and also their political rights, among the long-neglected people.

Jaunsar-Bawar – a study of tribe-caste and village-region

The third study by Majumdar has three villages as a sample of a cultural, geographical region of the Himalayan U.P. (now Uttarakhand). The distinctive features of the area are a polyandrous family and society, a religious cult, and a caste structure which has 'only a few stereotyped castes divided into three groups with well defined traditional status' along with intensive discriminatory practices against the lowest castes buttressed by religious cult and rituals. G.S. Bhatt calls it as Mahasudesh in his intensive study of the 'cult of Mahasu devata' (2010). Interestingly, Majumdar was made aware of this area and its peculiar social conditions by Bronislaw Malinowski and confesses that he had 'felt ashamed of my ignorance about Jaunsar-Bawar'.

The region, comparatively, does not show many pronounced linkages with Hindu and Indian civilizational complex mainly as a result of its geographical isolation and development of a strong regional socio-religious tradition-local tradition. As Majumdar points out:

Very little is known about the history of this region and of the local people, but the legends and archaeological evidence may well point to an ancient

date. The local Brahmans and Rajputs claim the earliest origin. They associate themselves with the Pandavas of the Mahabharata fame.....(220: 1962: 3-4)

The religious complex in Jaunsar-Bawar is largely centered around Mahasu devta. However, Mahasu temples also enshrine Hindu deities like Bishnu and Kali. Bhatt comments that:

Mahasu phenomenon gets linked to a wider cultural-philosophical space of religio-cultural accretions and accommodation; and, that is the framework of Hindu (Indian) civilization. (2010: 393)

Majumdar has explored the ethno-cultural affiliation of the different sections in order to decode the overwhelming dominance of the Rajputs and Brahmins, and finds that:

As regards racial affiliation, the high castes show general resemblance to their equals in the plains, with the characteristics popularly known as 'Aryan' features.....The lower castes, especially the Bajgis and Koltas, have been regarded as aboriginals or belonging to an earlier wave of immigrants. They often have the features from the Proto-Australoid strain, though mixed features are not uncommon. (220: 1962: 24)

Structural features of Jaunsar-Bawar society

This is a study of the region's 'structure, functioning and culture change'. Briefly, the basic structural features of the society are a hierarchal order, with social, economic and political dominance of Brahman and Rajput over the rest. A long history of more or less unchanging continuity in these relationships are a defining characteristic. This structural pattern reflects itself, *ab initio*, in the village settlements, their population composition and oral settlement history. Its well established and powerful organization is focused on the system of *khumri* and *sayana*, both having a territorial multi-tier structure. Territorially, the traditional political system was based on *khat* (a group of villages) and the village. Subsequently, in some *khats* a territorial sub-unit, *khag* with its own *sayana* has come up. Thus there are *sayanas* of the *Khat*, villages and also *Khag* where found. Another structural feature is the institution of *Khumri* which is like the panchayat. It continues, in spite of the statutory bodies as the most important and effective means of settling the affairs of the village community. The *khumris* have been formed on the basis of territory, castes and kinship, as *aal* is closely connected with system of *sayanas*. Caste *khumri* based on *aal* and *bhera* among higher castes generally overshadows the caste *khumris* of other castes in the village. Territorial *Khumris* function both as a judicial body to decide disputes and as an administrative organ to manage all kinds of public matters in their area. The caste *Khumris* decide intra-caste disputes. The sample cases documented in the study indicate how *khumris* function.

The system of family is of a joint family which is a union of all living male members of each generation in the patrilineal line, along with wives and

unmarried sisters and daughters. This polyandrous family in Jaunsar-Bawar also differs in the fact that even married women members frequently return and stay there for months and, further, the nuclear family is not stable as divorce is frequent. Thus, significantly, the family assumes a unilateral character and forms a unit of the lineage. Since all brothers marry together and have one or more wives in common, the family system is not only polyandrous but a 'combination of fraternal polyandry and polygyny'. Majumdar has termed it as 'polygynandrous'. The eldest brother is known as family *Sayana* and manages the family and represents it in the village meetings (*Khumri*).

The system has helped in consolidating the family unity as well as a cordial cooperation. Majumdar attributes a geo-economic cause for such a complicated polygynandrous joint family in Jaunsar. Their type of agriculture-cum-pastoral economy needs a large number of hands. Here, limited means and resources be marshaled to cope with the environment. This type of family is particularly found among landowners while its incidence among other castes is much lower. Landownership in this area, historically, had been restricted to Rajput and Brahman. Post-independence government interventions have lately changed this to some extent. The other impacting factors being the cultural influence of outsiders as well as opening of the area. The degree of change however varies from the interior to more accessible areas.

Lineage in the Jaunsari structure

Aal is a lineage and the *bhera* is a sub-lineage while the family is its basic unit. In addition, the *aal* also commands an extended membership through a local custom of 'fictitious kinship' tie from the same caste under the name of *daichara* which means 'brotherhood'. The kinship system and its terminology indicate the reciprocity of relationship as well as closeness among agnates centered round the polygynandrous marriage and family. Majumdar's analysis also reveals a dichotomous role for married women as daughters-in-law (*ryanti*) in their husband's houses and as daughters (*dhyanti*) in their natal homes with its singular behavioral pattern. After marriage, a *dhyanti* when in her father's house is allowed a lot of personal liberty and free life in the family as well as in her sexual alliances, while in her husband's house as a *ryanti* she has to observe decorum and sobriety expected from her. Majumdar comments that this sharp distinction between the two roles which also allows a *dhyanti* to stay in her father's house for long periods, functionally relieves the strain, the women undergoes in a polygynandrous family with her being treated as 'no better than chattel which can be sold and purchased'.

Inter-caste inequalities

Inequalities in inter-caste relations were firmly rooted in the strong bias of the customary law. The facets of discrimination were denial of

landownership; denial of participation to Koltas and Bajgis in the *Khumris* of different levels specially the village level *Khumri* which has a pivotal role in the day to day economic relations; and a large number of family members being in a state of hereditary bondage based on indebtedness due to the poverty of the subaltern groups. Exclusive control of the Rajput and Brahman over all celebrations of festivals, fairs; denial of access to inner parts of the temples and other civil rights through the dictates of village and inter-village *Khumris*, and so on. Any conflictual situations, which were perhaps infrequent, were also suppressed through the use of economic power to boycott and excommunicate. Denial, even of the benefits granted by the government by invoking the 'voice' of Mahasu *devota* have also been noticed (220:1962: 158; Bhatt 2010).

A closer reading of Majumdar's *Himalayan Polyandry* would however show that this 'cleavage', exploitation, serfdom and what one may call the 'structural devices in the socio-economic system of inter-caste relationship' were not projected with an emic view. Hasnain (1982/2012: xx) laments, "the paucity of any material on the Kolta, except for a pamphlet by Saksena (1960) and some pages in Majumdar's book (1960, 1962). Hasnain's study carries moving descriptions of certain facets, for example, dances at festivals explicitly exhibiting the ritualized, subordinate, serflike, status of the Kolta in the local social structure. This limited coverage of the 'other' view-point can also be attributed to the members of the research team being identified as 'high caste' persons and living in Rajput or Brahman areas. Srinivas (1976: 197-98) and Beteille (1975: 104) acknowledge this as handicap which prevented their 'viewing hierarchy from the bottom up'. Another reason seems to be the strong imprint of structural-functional approach and Majumdar's keenness to emphasize equilibrium, often underplaying conflict.

Functionalism has been variously commented upon for being conservative, evidencing a static bias and focusing on social order in its empirical or analytical narrative; generally stressing the equilibrium in the institutions and the interrelationships of individuals in a society. Even though Majumdar has in his writings described the low status, and other disabilities of the Koltas he hardly documented the high degree of economic exploitation, bondage, sexual exploitation and the humiliating customs and practices intended to perpetuate this relationships. The recent currents of resentment and the then nascent movement of unity of the Koltas were hardly ever documented— barring two instances of the Koltas and other artisan castes resisting the facilities for drinking water and irrigation not being extended to their areas, and Khasas monopolizing them (220: 1962). It can be said that Majumdar was under functionalist influence and his study has the deficiency of "ignoring attention to "revolutionary forces or does not take account of social change especially radical change" (Turner and Maryanski 1979: 116). Mair (1957: 231-32) has opined that Malinowski was concerned with 'the problems

of the imposition of the change by external authority' and Majumdar too was for change and the role of the state therein, which was yet to become effective. And even much later the field-view was as Hasnain observes:

True, the aspirational level of the Kolta has moved a little upward yet the means to achieve the goals have not increased proportionately. (1982/2012: xiv-xv).

Impact of the C.D. Programme and change

Majumdar in his analysis has identified some basic incompatibilities between the traditional cultural pattern and the programmes. This entails knowledge about their culture and resources, local needs. How the inadequacies of the programme have generated bitterness have been emphasized in the documented instances. He finds that it is essential for the authorities as well as the C.D.P. staff to reconsider many of the important issues on which there was much discord between the government and the villagers. A case in point is the Panchayat, which should be reformed in certain respects to suit the local set-up. It is only when the villagers find their proper position and their own role of importance in the programme or the organization that they will take active part in it. It need not be emphasized that the final aim of the C.D. Project should be to lead the villagers to not only economic prosperity but also to social stability and confidence. Significantly, in the comments about Panchayati Raj, Majumdar voices a prescient view which later on came to be adopted through the 74th Constitutional Amendment.

Concluding remarks

I have tried to put across how Majumdar through his three village studies variously explored certain features of the cultures of these villages holistically and thereby presented the plurality of the rural cultural scene in three far-flung areas or regions. One can, inter alia, also experience the vigour of the communities as well as their underbelly which may impede their achieving developmental goals and a better future. Majumdar was a strong positivist more strongly grounded in empirical bases than the other two members of the famed Lucknow triumvirate (Radhakamal, D.P. and D.N.) with an infectious confidence in being able to provide scientific and practical suggestions for bringing about the desired changes through application of anthropology. His Presidential Address of 1956 to the All India Sociological Conference ends with his usual optimistic note in this regard and even finds Majumdar as an 'activist-interventionist', a role which he was assuming during the last years of his life (Madan: 2014: 233). At the same time he had a vision, rather utopian which perhaps lay in Lord Raglan's words, 'we can not become civilized unless we are all civilized' (96: 1946: xii) which he has quoted more than once in his writings. Thus he aimed to 'civilize' those claiming to be civilized into an inclusive and plural society and thus 'savaging' them in Guha's (1999) words. And he calls this an 'axiom of social life'.

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❖ The serial numbers indicate the position of the writings in the exhaustive bibliography appended to my study, *Profiling D.N. Majumdar - Anthropology at Lucknow*, likely to go into print soon.