Professor Leela Dube

A brief bio-data

Date of Birth: 27 March 1923

Education: M. A Political Science, Nagpur, 1946; Ph.D. Social Anthropology, Nagpur, 1956.

Teaching and Research Assignments: 1998, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), New Delhi; 1992-94, National Fellow, Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR); 1984-85, Sree Krishnaraj Wodeyar Professor of Anthropology, University of Mysore; 1984, Visiting Professor, Banaras Hindu University; 1983, Visiting Professor, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong; 1982, Fellow, Japa n Society for the Promotion of Science, 1981-82, Senior Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur; 1980-81, Professor of Rural Sociology, Institute of Rural Management, Anand; 1979-80, Senior Fellow, ICSSR; 1978, Visiting Professor, Madurai Karnaraj University; 1977-79, Director (Sociology), ICSSR; 1975-77, Senior Fellow, ICSSR; 1976-75, successively Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Saugar; 1957-60, Honorary Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, University of Saugar. 1954-56, Research Associate, Comell University India Program, Saharanpur and Ithaca; 1952-53, Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Osmania University, Hyderabad. .

Field Work: Among Gond tribal group and rural populations in Madhya Pradesh; among rural communities of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra; in Kerala; and on a coral island of the Lakshadweep (Laccadive) group in the Arabian Sea.

Professional Affiliations :1988-93, Member, Executive Committee, International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES); 1976-93, Chairperson, IUAES Commission on Women; 1986-90, Member, Intemational Jury for the Unesco Prize for the Teaching of Human Rights; 198G-90, Vice-President, International Women's Anthropology Conference (IWAC), Inc.; 1984-90, Member, Executive Committee, Research Committee 32 ("Women in Socjety") of the International Sociological Association (ISA); 1984-88, Member, Steering Committee, United Nations University (UNU) project on Women's Work and Family Strategies in South and Southeast Asia; 1985-87, Vice-President, Indian Association for Women's Studies (lAWS); 1983-86, Organizing Secretary, Regional Conference for Asia on Women and the Household (New Delhi, 1985); 1982-84, Member, Executive Committee, lAWS; 1978-82, Member, Executive Committee, Program Committee and other committees of the ISA; 1975-81, Member, Advisory Committee for Programme on Women's Studies, . ICSSR; 1975-76, Member, Advisory Committee, Programme on Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai; 1971-74, Member, National Committee on the Status of Women, Government of India.

Consultancies: UNESCO 1978; ILO 1979; WHO 1982; ESCAP 1993; UNU; and various other organizations and institutions.

Publications: Edited professional journals, authored books, edited publications and contributed numerous papers in reputed journals.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
AND
SOCIAL RESEARCH

Leela Dube

It is an honour to be asked to deliver the Durgabai Deshmukh Memorial Lecture for this year. I 'have responded to the invitation with a feeling of gratitude to the Council for Social Development. It is in a spirit of humility that I seek to pay homage to one who rose above her times to become nothing less than a visionary.

I cannot think of anyone epithet that can adequately express the essence of Durgabai's personality and achievements. Perhaps no other woman in India evinced the capacity and the courage to take crucial decisions about her life at the early age of 11, and then had the conviction and the determination to take upon herself responsibilities that would have frightened even an adult. Both her protests and her constructive activities - in the form of a series of institutions and programmes - demonstrate Durgabai's keen sense of social justice, her vision, her deep sympathy with the disadvantaged, and her faith in purposive action.

The choice of the theme of today's lecture was inspired by two factors. The first is Durgabai's use of the term "social development", while setting up an institution to acquire the necessary understanding of social reality, so that conditions might be improved through well-thought- out schemes. The second is my conviction that the social sciences should have both human meaning and social purpose. My major concern here is to bring out the relevance of social research to effective social development.

In 1962, with Durgabai at the India International Centre, the need was felt for the integration of social with economic development. This resulted in the formation of a collective of social workers, social scientists, administrators and planners. It was this study group that grew into the Council for Social Development. Some of you might recall that in the 50s and a little after, there were strong misgivings and scepticism

about participation in research activities connected with planned change and with the evaluation of the community development programme. Such problem-oriented and time-bound research operations would, it was feared, encourage the rise of indifferent, ill-trained and self-oriented researchers and might eventually bring down the quality of the disciplines. It was argued that sound sociological research, objectivity, value neutrality and the development of theory, all would suffer a setback. It is creditable that the Council for Social Development was established when this derisive attitude was in the air.

Social development, which once used to refer to social evolution with a universal sequence of stages for all mankind, has now acquired a different meaning. More comprehensive than economic development, social development aims at wider objectives and ideals. When critically assessed, economic. development, though essential, was seen to have many undesirable consequences involving gross inequalities, consumerism and wealth coexisting with squalor and poverty, the advantaged and the disadvantaged facing each other. It has therefore to be geared to specific social objectives. Instead of GNP we should think in terms of GNW - Gross National Welfare.

At the very least, social development demands an emphasis on larger collectivities and defines social goals in terms of the satisfaction of human needs and of improvement in the quality of human life. It asks fur a growth that can be sustained, it questions existing social foundations with a view to restructuring them, it re-examines the objectives of planning, and it ponders over the eradication of social, cultural and economic inequality. It also looks at possibilities of alternative development in various spheres. Areas for the assessment of inequality and for needed planning include food, housing, education, health, public order and the growth of population. An important phenomenon that needs correction is the skewed distribution of power.

This is a brief outline of current thinking about social development. It is not exhaustive and it skirts many controversial issues. I would like to emphasize that the subjects for study and evaluation should largely grow from what is happening around. To name a few more: exploitation, environmental degradation, communal disharmony, child labour, gender relations, conflict within the family, the situation of the aged, violence, problems surrounding the question of reservations, gender issues, land alienation, caste conflict.

There is a cynical lack of human concern in the mighty hydel and irrigation projects, which wholly ignore the interests of tribes and of other marginal groups. These peoples are uprooted physically, economically and culturally. This uprooting is real, while resettlement remains a false promise. These are not disparate problems to be looked at in isolation: most are intertwined. For instance, women and children cannot be ignored either as actors or as victims. Quite a few problems are in fact essentially gender problems, although they might need to be understood in wider socio-cultural and historical contexts.

Social development implies a practical commitment to change in the right direction. Which direction is the right one? What are the conditions and limits of possibility? Besides planning, implementation, evaluation and the search for alternatives, one important aspect of social development is resistance. All these ask for a proper understanding of social reality - and from this arises our concern with social research.

Let me make a brief digression. The complex, multi- faceted field of social development necessarily contains interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary ventures. But this must not result in the dilution of anyone discipline's skills and knowledge. Grounded in one's own discipline, one may learn to make use of other disciplines - borrowing their methods, concepts and skills, or incorporating the results of work done in them. The human mind has limits, but it also expands under inspiration. We may even say that today we are in an age of multidimensional studies. Another point. This evening I will not talk about positivism, phenomenology, interactional analysis, post-structuralism, post-modernism and so on. I shall talk only about simple, relevant matters.

This brings us to social research geared to explorations in the area of social development. It needs emphasis that in the choice of themes it is not possible to be value neutral. However, once the choice is made, the presence of relevance and commitment does not necessarily lead to the sacrificing of objectivity in the actual conducting of research. Certainly committed research does not mean partisan data-gathering or the ignoring of facts that go against our ideas and ideals. This also applies, I should add, to concepts and theoretical models. In any research it is not without risk to be prisoners of theory. Further, it is important to realize that many

seemingly value- neutral positions are dangerously value-loaded.

It has come to be recognized that the race, nationality, gender, age, training and personal history of the researcher affect both the collection of material and its interpretation. It becomes necessary, therefore, that our biases be *known* biases.

Earlier, personal accounts of fieldwork, when they were given, remained separate from major scholarly writings. Self-awareness and the problem of political responsibility were not prominent. The trend now is to give autobiographical accounts of the contexts of fieldwork or research work and of the researcher's relationship with the people encountered. Perhaps women scholars have shown greater willingness to open up and relate the links between their personal life situations and self-images at particular points of time with the ways they went about their research work, what they observed and absorbed, and how they understood and interpreted the data.

Interestingly, some have compared their earlier with their later work among the same peoples in the context of their own changed life situations, altered concerns and intellectual development, and have shown how the same societies looked different to them in many ways.

It cannot be denied that as in actual research, so in writing are involved a series of choices which depend on the selective interest of the researcher, personal biases, and often the strong hold of one school or other of theory. As a result, monographs presented and read as timeless are in fact selective and historically contingent. Very few scholars have the ethical courage to admit this when it comes to their own work.

During the 80s trend of reflexivity, many renowned scholars' work was critiqued threadbare, and a sceptical attitude developed towards empirical fieldwork and towards research itself. By now, fortunately, much soul-searching has taken .place, compulsions in academic pursuits have been deciphered, and faith has been reinstated in well- intentioned and consciously planned research and in cautious fieldwork, with an awareness of possible pitfalls.

I have brought up this matter here with a purpose. I wish to emphasize that eflexivity and

the contextual evaluation of our own research activity and the resultant data have the potential to contribute a great deal to good quality research. At the same time, I do not insist on *open* autobiographical accounts as a necessary condition: every individual has the right to privacy, and researchers can always undertake in their own minds the exercise of self- reflexive activity and of questioning their own procedures, data and interpretations. Such self-evaluation would bring clarity to the possible need for the retracing of steps, for the making of additions and subtractions and for the devising of new strategies. In the final analysis all research is interpretation and construction of knowledge, which makes essential great caution.

With the subjects of our research acquiring the skills of reading and writing, and with the extension of the scope of research to literate, even highly educated, populations, the problem of "They read what we write" has become serious. Some Western anthropologists have been attacked for faulty substantive data and wrong interpretation by the people of the cultures they have studied. This has happened in Africa. Hawaii and the Mediterranean region. It has also happened in India, though on a modest scale. (Its politics is a different issue altogether and does not need discussion here.) Ingenious ways of research include interacting, where possible, with the people themselves and discussing with them the findings and interpretations so as to verify the accuracy of translations of culture.

Emerging issues and objectives of research often ask us to free ourselves from established concepts and to develop fresh concepts, to innovate new ideas and approaches and also new skills. It is imperative to keep in mind that value judgments and evaluative standards rooted in and deriving from Western experience cannot always be superimposed on the social realities of the developing countries. With these general propositions I shall make only a few points.

Many programmes of social development have to make use of the survey method, with large-scale samples and mainly with structured instruments. Great caution is required here. There is a tendency to pass by many steps essential for evolving efficient instruments of data collection which are comprehensible to the people, and which have logically consistency and relevance. The stages of observation, informal interviewing, case studies, and use of archival sources must not be ignored. In fact, these have to be used at several stages of research and writing. Nor can we ignore native categories of thought, people's voices and people's perceptions. Often a combination of micro and macro

research gives good results. I say this because it should be our mission to prove that problem- focussed sociology need not be second-rate sociology. (I am not by any means implying that research not geared to development issues is by definition research of good quality; but let us not go into that here.)

My disciplinary bias does not make me deny the value of demographic surveys, the National Sample Survey and other large-scale surveys. After all, I too use their results. But I believe that depth can be achieved by working in smaller units and by combining quantitative material with qualitative. In large surveys conducted through questionnaires or interview schedules, the issue of where the respondents are met becomes crucial. Perhaps confining oneself to the workplace and completely neglecting the surroundings - including the households in which the respondents live - may result in partial, even faulty understanding of the issues taken up for snrdy. Much strategizing and special efforts are needed in solving such problems. Researchers cannot intrude beyond a point into the private lives of the people they are studying. At the same time, ensuring anonymity and generating confidence can often open up people.

Language is crucial to communicative research, and our people's linguistic skills are limited. Hence there is a special relevance to emphasizing the value of involving indigenous researchers and local persons in studies of social and cultural reality. In any culture, subtle aspects of life and contextuality of meaning are difficult to grasp, and so are categories of thought and nuances of behaviour along with their underlying logic. Effective communication in their own language can make' people talk openly. Interviews conducted and life histories taken in the local language can be most effective in cquiring reliable material.

In this connection I might mention Vina Mazumdar's recent experience of the Action Research Project . conducted in Bankura in West Bengal by the Centre for Women's Development Studies. When the plan was made for collecting life histories of women, it was decided to involve a few students of anthropology from Vidyasagar University, which is in the region. These students, of both sexes, easily established communication with women and succeeded in getting excellent'life history material through broadly designed but free-flowing interviews. Life histories made the women think about their lives and about those of others; while for the investigators the whole process was a revelation.

An experiment carried out in Maharashtra in the early 80s by V.M. Dandekar's colleagues is also worth mentioning. Vidyut Bhagwat was the person in charge. Advertisements were placed in Marathi newspapers asking women for anonymous essays on themes such as "Had I been a woman ... ". "The relationship between mother-in- law and daughter-in-law", "My treatment of sons and of daughters", "The balancing of gainful work outside the home with housework". Hundreds of essays were received, written by women of all educational levels, and were analysed. Selected essays were published in a volume. From the letters that the organizers received, it became clear that this was the first time that the writers had seriously thought about the issues that were raised.

Pursuing the issue of language, I am always bothered that large projects involving dams, water management, the environment, tribal peoples, and so on, are mostly conceived and planned in English. Points for investigation and research questions are then translated for use by investigators. The data collected are then translated back into English for analysis and for the final writing-up. Are there people competent to ensure that all this translating is done faithfully? And do the lower-level people who do the translating and the data collection have a voice in conceiving and working out the project, in the forming of conclusions and the taking of decisions? (There is of course also the question of who gets, or takes, the credit for all the work done.)

Attending to our own languages - Hindi, Bangia, Marathi, Tamil - is a task that must be taken up. We hierarchize everything: 'high' work and 'low' work, writing in English, writing in an Indian language. We do not realize that good translation too can be a creative job. Also, should some of us not think of looking at our store of indigenous knowledge from the point of view of social science, traditions and culture? There are many insights in our centuries-old literatures.

In social development research the literatures in our several languages can be effectively used in order to get ideas for formulating research plans and for obtaining ethnographic information and even cultural insights. Literature can often very usefully depict the life ways and thought ways of people to be studied. It can help in explaining and interpreting the data collected. I recall here S.C. Dube's statement that the kind of sociological understanding about a small town and its social and political life that is contained in, for example, Shrilal Shukla's *Rag Darbari,* cannot easily (or ever) be matched by sociologists' accounts. Development projects should

certainly use the depiction in literature of issues relating to women, old age, Dalits, familial conflicts, prostitution, children, and a myriad other aspects of social life.

In some ways, literature can match life history material and reveal subtle aspects of social life. This does not mean that literature can be a substitute for methods and techniques developed in the social sciences. Also, in the use of literature contextualization and historicization are essential. As Romila Thapar says in her lecture "Shakuntala: Histories of a Narrative", a narrative can have its own biography, and the changes it manifests can provide us with a view of historical change and historical context.

Dalit literature has described and challenged the oppression and discrimination inflicted by the upper castes. It is well known how Black American literature has exposed the ethnocentrism of the Whites. Black American feminists have taken White feminists to task for holding erroneous views about the formers family life, gender relations and sexual ways, and have derided the idea that 'sisterhood' can come into being in the face of so many racial prejudices. There are several more examples: my point is that both history and sociology/anthropology on the world stage have begun to make more use of literature, folklore, myths, narratives and oral tradition.

To illustrate the use of a variety of sources in exploring the nature of a social phenomenon, let us look briefly at a study of child labour. In India as elsewhere, a series of studies carried out have condemned child labour and have suggested ways to ameliorate this 'evil'. Poverty is considered the main culprit. In my study I did look at bonded labour, at child work in small industry and agriculture and in tribal settings, and at domestic labour by children. But I tried also to review the place of children in our society and to look into culturally defined notions of obligations towards them and expectations from them. I found that children were an integral part of the household economy - thus work time and school time need to be readjusted, as was done in an experiment by Chitra Naik. I have also looked at the child and at work as these are depicted in Hindu tradition and sacred literature, and have examined cultural notions regarding the stages of human life, placing childhood and the child in a definite perspective. Together these suggest a way of understanding the roots of people's attitudes and views.

Children lived at the guru's *ashrama,* were taught there, and worked there.

Descriptions of the grazing of cattle clearly indicate that play and work were "not antithetical. Although life stages were demarcated right from childhood, this did not in any way negate the idea of the continuity of human life. What was learnt in childhood was retained - even what was learnt in the mother's womb, as the story of Abhimanyu demonstrates. Special value was attached to the training of the muscles, the vocal cords, the movement of the fingers. Thus children were launched at a fairly young age into training for dance, music, weaving, pottery, and many other such skills. This is what happens even today. My argument is that a study of the cultural and historical heritage goes at least some way in helping us to understand child work. It is of course necessary to assess the capabilities of children at different ages so that appropriate work can be added to education and play in such a way that exploitation is controlled.

Let me end with resistance, which I have said is an integral part of social development. Perhaps I should not end a talk with resistance, but I have a streak of non- conformism in me. Whether it - is a study of forms of everyday resistance or one of an actual resistance movement, an understanding of ground realities, of people's beliefs and of their ways of life, is essential. The logic of people's behaviour cannot be understood through one's own perceptions. For example, the efforts of those who seek to launch an agitation can go off at a tangent - or can have unexpected or even opposite results - because issues are approached in the wrong way. The commotions over sati, over child marriage and over the Shah Bano case, all needed sound bases of understanding for the devising of effective strategies. Anyone who seeks to *study* these commotions similarly needs an understanding of the lives, thinking and feelings of the people involved.

I have emphasized resistance because I believe that new constructions have always to face some destruction and must accept resistance and appreciate subversion. These things, often termed "negative", definitely are part of social development. I should like to - thank the Council for Social Development, in particular Professor Partha Nath Mukherji and Professor Muchkund Dubey, and of course the India International Centre, for making this lecture possible.

Thank you all for listening.

DURGABAI DESHMUKH MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES

Year	Speaker	Topic
1992	Dr. Suma Chitnis	The InstitutionalisaUon of Social Purpose·
1993	Dr. Vina Majumdar	Women and the Political Process"
1994	Dr. Karan Singh	Population and Social Development in India
1995	Dr. Kiran Bedi	Concept of Management in Government
1996	Dr. Vandana Shiva	Trading our lives away: Free trade, women and ecoloqy"
1997	Ms. Leila Seth	The Girl Child and Social Development*
1998	Swami Agnivesh	Towards a Spiritual Society* (text in Hindi)
1999	Justice Shri M.N. Venkatachaliah	Human Rights and Women in India

*Available from the Publication Unit, COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, Sangha Rachana, 53 Lodi Estate, New Delhi-110 003.

COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Council for Social Development (CSD) started as an informal group of social scientists, social workers and planners committed to the national ideals of social justice and equality. Late Dr. (Smt.) Ourgabai Deshmukh, the guiding spirit of the CSO, organised a Study Group or Social Welfare to review the situation 'in the developing countries and suggest ways for promoting social development. The (,SO was given a formal status as an affiliate of the India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi, in 1964. When the activities of the CSO increased, the Board of Trustees of the lIC decided that the CSD should be an autonomous organisation and accordingly the CSD was registered in 1970 under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. It, however, continues to have a special relationship with the lIe.

The main objectives of the CSD are :

(a) to undertake and/or promote the study of social development;

(b) in furtherance of that end, to undertake studies;
- (i) in the national/regional policies of social development;
- (ii) in the process of planning in social development; and
- (iii) in the interaction between social and economic development at various stages of national growth in developing countries; and

(c) in particular to plan and promote;
- (i) studies in techniques of social planning and programming;
- (ii) inter-disciplinary research;
- (iii) socio-economic/occupational surveys;
- (iv) motivation for social change; and
- (v) socio-psychological studies in rural areas.