



B.S. Baviskar
D.W. Attwood

Inside—*Outside*

Two Views of
Social Change
in Rural India



Inside-Outside

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Inside-Outside

To friends and family down through the years,
we salute you and thank you all.

Thank you for choosing a SAGE product! If you have any comment, observation or feedback, I would like to personally hear from you. Please write to me at contactceo@sagepub.in

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Preface

We started this book long ago. It began as the life story of my friend, B.S. (Baburao) Baviskar. We first met in Delhi in 1969, and as I learned more about his life, the more interested I became. He had great talent as a storyteller. Indeed, his talent for public speaking was a crucial asset when he was young, drawing him into India's Independence Movement and enabling him to attend college. But if his story were to be told on paper, Baburao insisted that it become the story of two lives. And so it has, though somehow that delayed its completion by many years. Our stories accumulated to the point where this book is shaped as much by what has been left out as by what remains. It is a hybrid in more ways than one, and no one knew how it would grow into its present form. Fortunately, some patient friends have read through earlier versions, offering comments and suggestions. Now the book is as ready as it will ever be. It started as a description and ends as a tribute.

It is a great pleasure to thank the friends who read and commented on previous versions: Arvind Shah, Shanti George, Laurel Bossen, Nathan Bossen, and the anonymous reviewer for SAGE. Their comments and suggestions have been extremely helpful. Shanti George read the whole thing in two different versions, providing astute comments on every chapter. Like those who read from afar, Deborah Sick discussed and criticized a number of ideas that required serious reformulation. We are deeply in debt to all who had the patience to read and discuss this book. Fortunately for my sanity, they tended to agree on which thoughts needed to be modified or abandoned. Their patience gave me something to lean on.

Over many decades, I often relied on advice from D.P. Apte (1927–2013), my friend, advisor, mentor, host, guest, role model, and much more. As Registrar of the Gokhale Institute of Politics and

Economics in Pune, he befriended a number of foreign scholars and established the Professor Yamato Kawakami Foundation to honour the memory of one. Thanks to Baba's tireless efforts, the Foundation provides education and income-earning opportunities for needy women in and around Pune city. He leaves us all bereft.

Many others helped bring this book to fruition: M.S. Marathe and Vasant Baviskar generously provided information on the sugar industry in Maharashtra. Jill Hanley did the original typing for Baburao's chapters. Cynthia and Lynn Attwood helped with family history.

After retiring from the University of Delhi, Baburao became a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences in New Delhi. Over the years, we both enjoyed hospitality, collegiality, and assistance from the academic and administrative staff of the Institute. Special thanks to George Mathew and Ash Narain Roy, as well as P.N. Kuttappan, P.K.K. Namboodiri, Meenakshi Devi, Molly Bino, and Laljit Prasad.

Above all, we offer our sincere thanks and best wishes to the many villagers who patiently taught us so much; to the people of Pilkhod, Kopargaon, Sanjaya, Malegaon, Supe, and other villages. In many ways, this is really their book.

Baburao died shortly before we finished the final revisions. He was a decent, kind, good-humoured, sensible person. He was a good storyteller and a good listener; his company was welcome wherever he went. For a decade he faced cancer with dignity and fortitude, working almost till the very end. He was glad to have completed this project, and we both hoped he would see it in print. Baburao dedicated this work to his wife, Kusum, to his children, Shirish, Amita, and Siddhartha, to his grandchildren and his family in Maharashtra—his brothers and sister, their deceased parents, and other elders who helped him through life. I dedicate my part to Deborah Sick and to Cynthia, Lynn, and Rose Attwood. Long may they prosper.

D.W. Attwood

Introduction

The first part of this book opens the life story of B.S. (Baburao) Baviskar. Born in 1930, Baburao grew up in Pikhod, a village on the western side of peninsular India. His father was a small farmer, and his family had become quite poor. They had been obliged to move from a large house in the centre of the village to what was formerly a storage shed.

In a ceremony soon after birth, the infant boy was named Ramdas Shravan Mali. The first name was a mistake, one that endangered his health and had to be corrected. The last name he changed himself while on his way to college. Meanwhile, he was also given an incorrect birth date. He was born officially on 1 February 1931 (by the stroke of a headmaster's pen) but actually on 12 October 1930 by the usual method. Within days of his birth, he lay swaddled in a cloth hammock tied to a tree branch, while his mother assisted at getting in the harvest. A born scholar, Baburao never was much help with the crops.

Thanks to ability, hard work, and some strange twists of fate, he was able to attend high school, then college and university. Partly by accident, he found his way into a career as a sociologist. Returning to his native region, he studied rural development in a district close to home. Such research is usually done by people from urban, middle-class backgrounds, people driven by curiosity but with less experience of village life. Many villagers have, like Baburao, sought education and urban jobs, but they rarely turn around to study social change in the villages. Usually they want to leave all that behind.

Baburao was in a rare position, describing his own village, and others where he did research, from a dual perspective. He was a true insider; he knew village life from years of childhood experience. He was also partly an outsider, a scholar curious about recent changes

in village life. His story makes a lively narrative, while the context (even inside his family) is described partly from the view of an outside observer.

So this is a book about our points of view. Baburao tells his stories and I (Donald Attwood, writing this introduction) tell mine. In contrast to Baburao, I am a complete outsider, having grown up in a suburb near Chicago, in the US heartland. I knew nothing of the world at large. I stumbled into anthropology and spent several years in India, mostly doing fieldwork in the same region where Baburao grew up and did his research. My early life and first inept encounters with India are described in Part Two, then our stories interweave.

We first met in 1969 when Baburao was writing up his PhD research and I was just starting my fieldwork. Within a few years, we began working together on joint research projects. There has been much discussion about the biases which insiders versus outsiders bring to social research. We offer a dual perspective in this discussion. Much of this book presents a set of narratives about our experiences. We mention questions concerning bias and point of view as we go along but leave a fuller discussion of these issues until the final chapter.

One quick question about me, the outsider: It is evident that an insider brings special abilities to social research. He or she speaks the local language and understands the regional and historical context better than almost any outsider. So is there any point in having a complete stranger doing similar research? Some have argued that Western anthropology is useless, hopelessly tainted by bias, even harmful. Our view is different. In this book we compare our backgrounds, our points of view, our initially flawed assumptions about the villages we studied, and the surprising patterns of change that we discovered. Combining the views of an insider and outsider strengthened our research.

A philosopher once said that he knew how to ride a bicycle but not how to explain how to do it. We all have such taken-for-granted knowledge (of how to ride the bike) which we are accustomed neither to question nor to explain. An outsider, one who does not share the same automatic and unconscious assumptions, may discover interesting patterns of behaviour that are taken for granted by local people, including local observers. He or she will ask questions to understand how these patterns work, noting how local people may explain these

patterns in rather simplistic terms that fail to do justice to their varied actions and experiences.

There are many points of view, not just those of 'insider' versus 'outsider'. As a villager, Baburao might have been born the son of a shopkeeper, a blacksmith, or an untouchable cobbler. He might have been a daughter instead of a son. These other contingencies would have given him different views of village life. When he went to college, he found himself in a difficult urban environment. Most of his colleagues, on the other hand, grew up in urban settings and found fieldwork in a village to be strange, even unsettling. Despite their knowledge of the regional language and culture, they were surprised by village customs. They discovered much about village life that could not be found in books and was unknown to educated urbanites living in the same district. Likewise, when Baburao studied life in villages that were more prosperous than his home village, he was surprised and intrigued by unforeseen patterns of change.

That's what makes fieldwork interesting: regardless of how much book learning you may have on a given region, you discover unexpected facets of local life. Quite often, the focus of your research and your view of life are changed by local circumstances. That's what draws people like me into anthropology. We go into a village or urban neighbourhood as strangers from the far side of the world, and we notice that people say and do surprising things that make us ask questions we had never even considered before. If Indian sociologists were surprised by the patterns of village life near their home towns, imagine what it was like for a stranger trying to learn the local language and customs. It's a confusing and exciting process.

Baburao was my friend, mentor, and colleague for more than forty years. We did several joint research projects and also pursued our separate interests. Years ago, when we started this book, Baburao insisted that, if he was going to tell his story, then I had to tell mine. Frankly, I don't know whether the combined result will be more or less interesting to the reader. Our book has come to resemble a mythical beast—a sphinx, griffin, or centaur—with parts combined from various creatures. We tell our own life stories and also a variety of stories from villagers we have known. Some of these stories are interesting or amusing in themselves, others offer insight into larger issues.

Indian villagers are often believed to live highly constricted lives: opportunities for change and innovation are limited by poverty and

scarce resources; by the caste system; by Hindu fatalism; by tradition and superstition; by the domination of big landlords and moneylenders; by the self-sufficient isolation of village communities; by what Marx and Engels called 'the idiocy of rural life'. We find these old stereotypes are often wrong. Baburao grew up in conditions constrained by poverty and colonial domination. As the son of a small farmer and member of a farming caste, he was destined to live on limited resources, struggling to feed his family. Or so it seemed. Instead, he found a way out of the village via education, as many others have done. Other villagers found ways to seize new opportunities as farmers and agro-industrial entrepreneurs.

In these chapters, we describe villagers as we found them, as highly innovative and resourceful. Choices made at the village level have influenced regional and national policies and stimulated India's industrialization. Rural people have embraced new institutions and moulded them to their purposes. They have built institutions of their own, in education and sugar production, for example. Often overlooked, they have played important roles in India's progress towards economic and social development. This was happening in the late colonial period as well as after Independence. The villagers we know were not bypassed by history, they made it.

This is not a bookish book.¹ We tell stories with the same object as Scheherazade—to hold your interest. In the concluding chapters, we discuss common stereotypes applied to Indian villages, and our writing becomes a bit more academic. At the very end, we discuss what our experience tells us about biases brought to social research by insiders versus outsiders.

In Part One (Chapters One to Four), Baburao tells of his early life, as I do in Part Two (Chapters Five to Eight). Part Three tells how Baburao found his way into marriage and a career as a sociologist, while Part Four describes my experiences as a young anthropologist in India. Part Five presents two chapters from Baburao's later life, and in Part Six we discuss some broader issues connected with our research, using a dialogue format.

A quick point on anthropology and sociology. Baburao was trained in sociology, I in anthropology, but we have been doing the same sort of research. Indian sociology was largely shaped by M.N. Srinivas, Baburao's mentor, who studied sociology at Bombay University

and social anthropology at Oxford. In the anthropological tradition, Srinivas insisted that his students do long-term fieldwork as 'participant observers', not merely as survey researchers. I refer to myself as a social anthropologist and Baburao as a sociologist, but in India, they mean the same thing. The choice of one term or the other depends on context.

Baburao died on 10 April 2013 while we were completing final revisions of this book. He never lost his sense of humour nor his sense of proportion. His fortitude in the face of a deadly and debilitating illness set an example for us all. He is sorely missed by friends, colleagues, and former students in many parts of the world, and we grieve in turn for his wife, children, grandchildren, and siblings. His was a life well lived.

D.W. Attwood

Note

1. For Western readers, notes at the end of each chapter provide information on historical figures such as Tilak and Ambedkar. For Indian readers they provide information on North American history and institutions such as the New Deal. The notes also refer to source materials listed at the end of the book.

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PILKHOD AND BEYOND

PART 1

Pilkhod village stands beside the Girna River in the northern marches of the Deccan Plateau, which covers most of peninsular India. To the west, rugged coastal mountains cast a rain shadow over the interior, making the climate semi-arid and drought-prone. If it rains at all, it rains during the monsoon, June to October. If not, you wait until next year.

Three great river basins, the Godavari, Krishna, and Kavery, drain most of the plateau—all flowing eastwards to the Bay of Bengal. The Girna seems to follow this pattern but then loops around and flows northeast and eventually empties into the Tapti. The Tapti and Narmada rivers mark the boundary between the Deccan and northern India. Both flow westward into the Arabian Sea, taking the water back whence it came.

As the northern hemisphere turns towards the sun, the land heats faster than the ocean. The land warms the air above it, causing it to rise. Lower pressure draws in air from the ocean, air that is denser, cooler, and moister. Clouds form when oceanic air rises over the coastal mountains. As they go higher, the clouds get cooler, and water vapour turns to rain. Most of the cloud-water falls on the mountains, which become lush and green. In just a few months, up to 4 m of rain drench the Western Ghats. Much of this flows back down the steep western scarp into the sea. Some rainwater flows east across the Deccan Plateau through the great river basins and onward into the Bay of Bengal. Yet another portion remains in clouds floating eastward beyond the mountains. With luck, these will discharge their rain on the farmlands of the Deccan.