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**PRACTISING SOCIOLOGY THROUGH HISTORY –
THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE**

D.N. Dhanagare

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL STUDIES, SURAT

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Quite a few social science disciplines in India – more specifically, anthropology, sociology, and political science have chosen to remain estranged from history in the course of their development and institutionalisation for quite some time. The reasons are not far to seek. Barring some notable exceptions, most Indian sociologists preferred to distance themselves from historical analysis during the 1930s to 1960s or so. In recent decades, however, in the study of both the existing structures and the processes of social change, professional sociologists in India have been increasingly reaching out to history and trying to rediscover historical connections of their discipline. As Charles Tilly (1981: 37) has argued: ‘the discipline of sociology grew out of history.... out of the nineteenth century efforts to grasp and control the origins, character and consequences of industrial capitalism’. The truth element of this assertion and its wider implications are now being gradually realised by Indian sociologists in practising their craft.

Despite such close connections between the two disciplines, both sociologists and historians have shared certain misgivings about each other’s work that have led them to believe in some kind of division of labour: between the brains and the brawn, between past and present, and between analysis and narration. Consequently, ‘sociologists and historians tend to perceive each other in terms of a rather crude and naïve stereotype’ (Burke 1980: 13-14). It is often assumed that sociology takes care of analysis of the present, and history that of narratives and reconstruction of past events. Many historians too have tacitly subscribed to and reinforced mystification about such an insulated binary distinction between history and sociology that it views the former as ‘idiographic’ and the latter as ‘nomothetic’. For no reason though, most conventional historians were too defensive in confining their practices to collecting facts – reconstructing and interpreting them. However, in doing so they either used sociological concepts by assuming their meaning-structures or felt that theoretical anchorages and underpinnings of those concepts were to be provided by sociologists. In their turn, sociologists, while

studying and analysing institutions and processes, have also used what is today broadly called as 'historical method' in the sense that the place and time of action (or event) enter their explanations (Tilly 1981: 6-7). When a sociologist tries to integrate time and space into his/her argument, then quintessentially his or her study marks off some kind of a historical analysis.

Intellectual tradition of historical sociology can be traced to the classical writings of Karl Marx, Franz Oppenheimer, Max Weber down to Karl Mannheim and others. All of them were seized with historical problems. Some attempted to portray general features of the history of mankind, while some tried, as Marx did, to understand ideas as expressions of certain periods of history or of classes seen as corresponding to stages of development of the means and relations of production. Others attempted to reverse such arguments, as Max Weber did (Parsons 1949: 500-530) or to synthesize them all, particularly in understanding conflict of group interests in industrial society as, for example, Dahrendorf (1972: 157-205) has done. Until the dawn of structural-functionalism as a dominant paradigm, sociology was conceived primarily as a discipline akin to history, more specifically to philosophy of history. Doing sociology through history essentially meant searching and providing answers to questions about the present out of the past, irrespective of whether the questions pertained to society, culture or civilisation in entirety or to any specific institutional social reality. This point needs to be made here rather emphatically, knowing fully well that it is often difficult to separate 'present' from 'past', and that attempts to do so are often arbitrary.

Most philosophers of history, however, tended to theorize not simply about civilisation (i.e., comprising positive knowledge and development of ideas about nature of man) but also about how their theories came to be applied to 'objective life situations in different periods of history and how that knowledge was viewed subjectively' (Aron 1964: 34-46). Most practitioners of historical sociology have, however, lowered their sight to focus attention, not as much on understanding developments at the civilisational level as on specific societies, cultures or institutions in different historical periods. Particularly, they chose to address themselves to changes in structures in

response to external forces that ignited their inner dynamics. The thrust of historical sociology has all along been on understanding processes that bring significant alterations in institutions and structures as well as in ideas, norms and values over a long span of time. Therefore, a sociologist trying the craft via or through history aims at understanding the present, if possible, by attempting to explain it in the light of past events and experiences and their meaningful linkages. A sociologist may undertake such an exercise either by using authentic secondary sources produced by historians who have verified past events, or by verifying facts and their interconnections by consulting primary archival sources during one's own data collection. Sometimes such an exercise may be brought to bear upon prognosis about the future trend or social course that is discernible, if not predictable.

It is, therefore, necessary to recognize that historical sociology, notwithstanding its initial obsessive flirting with evolutionism, is less concerned with any general theory of knowledge. Rather it essentially involves a quest for a theory, or at least an understanding and search for historical causality, and for methods of empirical verification in those fields of investigation where first hand experience is not only possible but also valued as the most dependable source of understanding (i.e., *weltanschauung*). Arguing in favour of sociology as a historical social science, in a sense, predicates practising sociology through history to a certain extent. However, it is not, suggested that it is *the only* meaningful mode of doing sociology or of understanding social reality.

In this essay it is proposed to look into the extent and the rigour of use of history by Indian sociologists in their attempt to understand and explain social phenomena and to critically assess whether they found historical reconstruction as necessary and desirable in their sociological studies. Two clarificatory points need to be made right at the outset. It must be noted that many ace historians have used sociological conceptual categories in their analyses and there is no reason why their works could not be considered as substantively 'sociological' in nature.¹ The scope of this exercise is, however, confined to a critical review of the works of professional sociologists in India who have used history purposefully. Secondly, assuming that history is an important source of data and analytical insights for sociologists, one need not take a dogmatic

historicist position, either anti-naturalistic or pro-naturalistic as Karl Popper (1969: 5-54) has put it. Historicism broadly refers to an approach that asserts making historical prediction as the main aim of social sciences. Even though a historicist does not have to commit to methods of natural sciences, the historicist position subscribes to formulating general laws, canons of scientific objectivity, and theorisation as the main agenda for social sciences. Although relativism permeates, if not dominates, studies of human societies, social institutions and human behaviour, a historically oriented sociologist does not, in fact, should not, give up the quest for generalisation, explanation and theorisation. Such a quest ought to be pursued without any pre-conceived historicism. It is recognized that such attempts to generalize, explain and theorise do suffer from limitations of time and space; i.e., they may not measure up to the norms of universality often asserted by either philosophers of science or by those who believe in the possibility of the natural science of society. Despite unavoidable elements of selectivity and subjectivity in a sociologist's inquiry based on use of history, especially in the process of collection of facts, data and suitable evidence of any form, some kind of optimism must propel that endeavour. Such optimism implies a robust faith that one's efforts could be brought to fruition in the form of at least some tenable generalizations that may lead to formulation of sociological laws and may make some contribution to the existing theoretical discourse. The most important element of this optimism is openness, in the sense that a historical method would at least deepen one's understanding of social reality even if it may or may not yield causal explanation, or what Nagel (1961: 15-28) called 'genetic explanation'.

It is noteworthy that striking similarities exist in agendas of sociologists and historians; these are evident especially in the field of social history. It follows that all history is, and necessarily involves, reconstruction from a sociological point of view. When a professional historian starts looking at the daily life patterns of inhabitants of the land in the past — their economic life and activities, interests of different social categories (say, classes) and their control over resources and relations to one another, their households and family life; and their religious beliefs and cultural practices — in an attempt to understand changes in those patterns through a time span, his or her analysis is

bound to blend methods of history and sociology. As a general field of study though, 'social history has an omnibus invertebrate character' (Perkin 1965: 55-56). On the contrary, sociological orientation and imagination, when deployed, can prevent social history from dealing with everything that goes on in society. A sociologist does not have to rewrite history. With its conceptual armory and theoretical storehouse, sociology can help in concretizing and sharpening historical problems and research questions, so that research leads to finding meaningful answers to not only 'what' and 'how' but also 'why' questions.

One common objective of research and investigation both in sociology and in history is to aim (or ought to aim) at rising above the level of simple narration and description of specificities, in order to analyse generalities and to discuss them at the level of abstraction and theorisation, whenever possible. Sociology, or for that matter any social science, dealing with abstractions is a familiar experience. As Popper (1965: 135) has very rightly emphasized, 'most of the objects of social sciences are abstract objects or they are basically theoretical constructs'. However, Popper accepts *only* those generalizations and interpretations as scientifically valid that are arrived at either through the route of induction (inductivist interpretation - implying empirical verification of every statement based on facts and their generalization) or that of deduction where a statement is either accepted or falsified first by rules of validity in deductive logic and later by rules of empirical proof or verification (i.e., the *logos* activity). In other words, in advocating the notion of unity of scientific method, Popper has ruled out any role of intuitive understanding or interpretation (*Ibid*: 137-39). However, both sociology and history are basically interpretative disciplines. This is not to suggest that 'intuition' can be used as a euphemism for indulgence in wild and unsustainable guesswork. Intuition must not degenerate into an unbridled free play in interpretation, generalization and theorisation. Of course, it needs to be admitted that interpretations based on tested hypotheses in themselves cannot be mistaken as theories; but they can be theoretical in the sense that, based on verified data and source material, interpretations do contribute to theoretical debates.

Sometimes sociologists, to narrate past events, do use history or historical source materials and cite them meticulously. Yet, at times this

is done without either linking the past with the present or without unfolding the motor force of history. Such casual references to past events or to sequence of events cannot help sociologists to deepen their understanding, and to explain present day structures and processes. When Marx and Engels insisted that 'political economy has to be treated as a historical science, they were suggesting that history ought to deal with material that is constantly changing. In other words, they critiqued the conventional way of writing history and pleaded for a new historiography - an alternative way of history - that involves systematic reconstruction. It needs to be noted here that Marxist historians often tend to allow their ideological predilections to run through their historiography' (Bottomore *et al*, 1985: 211-13). Such a tendency invariably leads to selectivity in and suppression of facts that border on distortion, thereby negating the very spirit of science. Hence, historical interpretations and constructions are not to be reduced to 'official' history as it happened in Stalinist Soviet Union during the inter-War years (Bettelheim 1996: 195-96) or even during the Cold War era. Such an ideological overload, that is likely to creep into one's analysis, might have been one of the reasons why most Indian sociologists, trained in the 'value-freeness of sociology', were put off by the very idea of combining sociology and history.

The real purpose of historiography is to offer an image of the past in order to unravel the forces that underlie the present. It is a method of doing comparative history and sociology whereby the past is reconstructed in order to understand and, if possible, explain the present. It would be quite instructive to see the extent to which practitioners of sociology in India have worked their way through history. The exercise here is only illustrative and not exhaustive. It is naturally restricted to my familiarity with relevant sociological literature.

Use of Indology

G.S. Ghurye, the doyen of Indian sociology, is regarded to have done pioneering work in historical sociology. One may begin by looking at his celebrated work on caste and race in India (Ghurye 1969). It is interesting to note that, prepared originally as a doctoral thesis in Cambridge University, this work was first published in the "History of

Civilisation Series” (consisting of more than 50 volumes, a monumental work edited by M. Owen of Cambridge). Ghurye had himself expected its reviews to appear in standard journals of anthropology, Indology and sociology, especially those published from the United States; but he felt quite disappointed when American journals did not take any serious cognizance of that work (Ghurye 1973: 83-84). In Ghurye’s own estimation his acclaimed work was more ‘Indological’ than ‘historical’. As one of his reviewers has commented: “almost a third of length of this book [contained] examination of race and caste in which Ghurye resorted to anthropometry – a method that had not hitherto been applied in India”.²

In the first ever review of sociology sponsored by the ICSSR, A.M. Shah (1974: 438-39), who has done a critical review of historical sociology, has argued that Ghurye brought his background of Indology and rigorous training in Sanskrit to bear on his important writings on Family and Kin in the Indo-European Culture, the Indian Sadhus, Gods and Men, and *Pravara* and *Charana*. What is relevant to our discussion is not really the question whether Ghurye was intellectually committed to evolutionism and diffusionism, but whether or not classical Sanskrit texts, written and compiled several centuries ago, could be considered as reliable representation of facts, and whether relying exclusively on their use could be adequate for historical reconstruction. Classical texts often change hands and go through several interpolations by the time they are handed down to us. Hence, the question as to whether or not an analysis based on textual interpretation, however meticulously attempted, could be accepted as a viable substitute for rigorous use of historical method, still remains open. It needs to be emphasized that in studying Indian society it is quite legitimate to examine classical texts as sources of cultural practices, behaviour patterns, norms and values, and as legitimating institutions that regulate day-to-day life of people. As Dumont (1972: 70-103) has argued: understanding the values, belief system and ideology underlying caste system in India is vitally important and indispensable. Dumont’s assertion need not be disputed. Nonetheless, while bringing out the most fundamental distinction between ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ Dumont has drawn heavily on textual interpretations from P.V. Kane’s *History of Dharmashastras*. In this context, whatever has been presented by Dumont as historical evidence

and data is essentially extracted from normative classical literature that tended to depict 'ideal' rather than 'real'. That 'ideal' was a product of the dominant Brahmanical culture and regimented social order in which prescriptions and proscriptions of purity and pollution were coaxed in religious-ethical codes of *Dharmashastras* and *Grihyasutras* — this has also been admitted by Dumont (*Ibid.*: 88-112).

It is true that Ghurye and Dumont never confined themselves to the use of sacred texts only. Both have used primary data and secondary sources produced either by themselves or by other sociologists and anthropologists. However, Ghurye's Indological probing and frequent excursions in anthropometry cannot be mistaken as systematic reconstruction of history or historical analysis of structure and change in Indian society. Paradoxical as it may sound, Ghurye tried to generate historical explanation and perspective (historiography) without systematic 'use of history' in the sense this expression is understood today.

Indology in the tradition of Max Muller is commonly understood as a discipline that studies traditional Indian — mostly Hindu — ideology, values, institutions, and cultural norms and practices through careful examination of classical sacred texts. In Indian sociology and social anthropology, apart from Ghurye, several other scholars have contributed to the Indological studies by using textual sources for interpretation and reconstruction. Whether or not those scholars formally belonged to sociology discipline is quite immaterial. Notable among them are Ketkar (1909), Altekar (1927), Karandikar (1929), K.M. Kapadia (1945), and Irvati Karve (1951, 1963). Among them, Altekar, in his study of village communities in India, has extensively used such sources as Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, *Shukraniti*, *Jataka* stories, and also acclaimed historical research monographs. He has thus succeeded in reconstructing the village communities in Western India — the structure of village councils, their officials and functions, administration of justice, settlement of village disputes, land revenue and land tenures, as well as caste and occupational structure. Through this historical analysis, Altekar has drawn conclusions to suggest that until the beginning of the British rule, village communities in India enjoyed relative autonomy vis-à-vis the State, that they were not a static or unchanging social reality, and that to

a large measure they functioned as self-governing systems in Western India;³ however, they were not considered as village republics nor were they fully 'democratic' in the contemporary sense (Altekar 1927: 120-27). On future of village communities in India, Altekar, with streaks of romanticism, has emphasized the need to revive and recapture the spirit of harmony and mutual cooperation – attributes that have been often associated nostalgically to Indian villages in history by both neo-colonialist and neo-nationalist historians as well as by social scientists. Altekar had, however, warned colonial administration against excessive formalism of rules, laws, Acts and statutes and additional taxation that village communities were not familiar with (*Ibid.* 127-33).

In contrast, studies on Hindu exogamy by Karandikar and on history of caste by Ketkar are predominantly Indological, in that they have nearly totally relied on classical textual sources. This is not the case either with Kapadia's studies (1945; 1955) on Hindu kinship, and marriage and family in India, or by Irawati Karve (1963) on kinship organisation. Both have abundantly used ethnological and anthropological research findings in addition to relying on textual sources. More specifically, Karve (1951; 1963) has systematically used anthropometry and ethnographic data on family, various castes, tribes and clans, as also linguistic data on kinship terminologies, religions and cultural regions of Maharashtra (see for instance Karve 1975). Her work on caste is mostly embodied in *Hindu Society – an interpretation* (Karve 1953: 50-77) in which she questions Ghurye's contention that the system of caste and *varna* was a product of the Indo-Aryan culture and that it diffused to parts of the Indian subcontinent. Similarly, Karve was disinclined to accept Ghurye's thesis (which was also Nesfield and Hutton's thesis) that *jati* – the smallest endogamous unit – resulted from occupational specialization and diversification. Although Karve (1953: 50-69) has titled her chapter on caste as 'a historical survey', most of the references cited in this chapter are from such textual sources as *Vedas*, *Upanishadas*, *Manusmriti*, *Bhagvadgita*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and so on. Hence, like Ghurye's work, Karve's work also suffers from the limitations of Indological approach if it is to be understood as use of history in 'reconstruction of caste as a form of living hierarchical system of discrimination' (Sundar 2005: 7). Her references to the present day caste system and its functioning are only token, if not casual, and not

supported by any historical data, textual sources or even by contemporary field data.

Karve's other well-known work, *Yugant* (1991) is essentially an insightful re-interpretation of the epic of *Mahabharat*, in which she has challenged the commonly held norms of a Hindu family - particularly those ideas associated with ideal womanhood (such as vaginal purity as a precondition of a virtuous wife, unflinching devotion to husband, and the like) as defined by the patriarchal authority structure of the dominant upper strata of the society. Karve's otherwise brilliant commentary on the epic, thus, presents a paradox of being 'historical' without any systematic use of history. This is not to deny the originality of her interpretation of the role of Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari and other female characters in the epic. Specialists in gender studies today find these interpretations by Karve as full of feminist ethos (Channa 2005: 5-6).

Extensive use of Indological source material for sociological analysis is also evident in the work of Veena Das who drew our attention to caste *Puranas* as an important source hitherto neglected by sociologists. According to her, most caste *Puranas* were apparently composed between 7th and 18th centuries. Basically, a caste *Purana* is a text that reflects on the way a particular caste community understood its mythical origin, how in doing so it often tended to elevate itself to a ritually superior status than what was accorded to it by other castes within village social organisation, and how such a text helps in inculcating a sense of identity among members of that caste, no matter how few of its members actually read and understood that text (Das 1987: 10-17). Das's argument is that there has been a wide gap between the way anthropologists understood 'truth' or 'social reality' with positivist assumptions of direct observation of that reality and the way sociologists of knowledge have been insisting that conceptual categories mediate between reality and its understanding. And when it comes to understanding observable behaviour it is specific meanings superimposed by cultural ideas on conceptual categories that in the ultimate analysis become more decisive in epistemological terms (*Ibid*: 2-3). Although Das does not subscribe to a 'one-sided assumption that all knowledge about Indian society can be derived from studying classical Sanskrit texts only', nonetheless she feels that 'the richness, complexity

and sophistication in Hindu practices cannot possibly be gauged without consulting scriptures in which Hinduism gets reflected' (*Ibid*: 5).

Obviously then, like Karve, Das also treats mythologies as a defining element of culture, and believes that understanding of culture in the Indian context is more likely to remain incomplete, if not superficial, until it is based on careful perusal of *Puranas* and other forms of mythologies that classical Brahmanical texts contain. In her study, Das has drawn on Levi-Straussian structuralist analytical categories in understanding the relations between the *Brahman grihastha* (householder), kingship and *sanyasa* (renouncer) on the one hand and differences between *sanyasi* in the Brahmanical Hinduism and *bhikku* (monk) in Buddhism on the other. In doing so she has highlighted the renunciatory ideals in the texts like *Dharmaranya Purana*, *Smriti* and *Grihyasutra* literature and their inversion in the Buddhist tradition. Das (*Ibid*: 139-49) finds this contrast even more striking in respect of relations of the two types of renouncers with other social categories. However, a real problem arises when social construction of lived categories like *sanyasi*, *parivrajak* or *bhikku*, and what they meant in concrete behavioral terms, is attempted purely on the basis of classical texts – whether *Dharmaranya Purana*, or a caste *purana* of the Modh Brahmanas and Baniyas, an *Aithereya Brahmana* or *puranic* texts, or on the basis of interpretation of *Suttavibhaga* of *Vinaya Pattika*.

In yet another study, Veena Das has analysed the symbolism of laterality, the division of the body and the universe into right and left along with the use of spatial categories found in the classical text *Gruhyasutra* of Gobhila. She has rejected Dumont's position, which stresses the binary divide between 'pure' and 'impure' as the most fundamental opposition in Hindu belief and ritual. Das (1976: 248-51) draws distinction between rituals associated with the use of the right side (namely, passage of time, rites of initiation, of pregnancy and marriage) and those with the left side (i.e., death rituals, rites to ghosts, demons, ancestors and serpents). Here, using the concept of liminality, and the textual sources, Das has shown that 'symbolism of impurity in Hinduism too has more meaning to it than just the 'other' of the 'pure'. Liminality may often symbolize a creative transcendence of the given categories of the system' (*Ibid*: 261) – a point which is well taken. However, reliance

purely on a text can certainly not make up for historical analysis. Quintessentially most classical texts portray at best the 'ideal', and at worst they are no more than grand mystifications. Myths in themselves, of course, do constitute a fascinating subject of inquiry. The question is whether we are to distinguish between myth and history or not. In fact many social anthropologists have used myths as an alternative mode of explanation quite antithetical to history.⁴ Generally post-Enlightenment historiography has been rather dismissive about myths and it has all along questioned adequacy of 'myths' or sacred (textual) narratives in traditional societies as authentic record of "what really happened" (Hechs 1994: 1-5).

In his study of the Pandits of rural Kashmir, T.N. Madan (1989: 13-19) has given a brief historical account of Kashmiri Pandits in which he has recapitulated important events or political rule of different migrants and invaders in Kashmir. The major source he has cited in this characteristically brief historical outline is that of Pandit Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* – a twelfth century Sanskrit text (which is in verse) that is a sort of chronicle on Kashmir from the earliest times to the twelfth century. Since Madan's study, originally published in 1965, focuses on structural specificities of kinship and family among Hindu Pandits of Kashmir, he emphasizes the fact that historically Muslims and Hindus evolved into two insulated communities with 'a two-fold division of society founded on occupation and fortified by endogamy' (*Ibid*: 19). In his concluding review Madan has underscored the 'economic ties between Pandits and the Muslims as providers and buyers of services whether in agriculture, trade and commerce, education or in domestic life' (*Ibid*: 192-93). In yet another study, Madan has traced the historical evolution of relationship between Muslim and Hindu kings right from the days of Islamisation of the Kashmir valley that actually began with persuasion by Turkish missionaries, especially those associated with the Surhwardi school of Sufis from the eighth century onwards (Madan 1972: 118-19). His historical analysis has shown quite convincingly the kinds of interfaces between the Muslim identity and Hindu representations, and the Hindu identity and Muslim representations (*Ibid*: 123-37) that have been decisively impacted by the Muslim and Hindu rulers of those times. Further details of this argument need not be gone into in the present context. Our main problem arises from Madan's

exclusive reliance on a Sanskrit text that is partly Indological and partly historical, and not backed by any other sources. Moreover, he has not used this historical account to raise a question as to how and why, despite close economic interdependence, a miniscule minority, namely, Kashmiri Pandits could sustain its structurally exclusivist institutions of family, marriage and kinship, nor has he developed any historical explanation of such a unique instance of unhampered structural and cultural aloofness, almost bordering on insularity, of Kashmiri Pandits.

Amrit Srinivasan's study (1980) of four myths from *Bhagwata Purana* is also a case where Indological source material has been used for developing a sociological argument. She has argued that though *Puranas* are considered as heterogeneous and incoherent texts that are full of interpolations and contradictions arising from hearsays, the *puranic* narratives or lore are essentially unstable or open for incorporation of new material within a familiar framework or the rearrangement of the old. Srinivasan (1980: 198-209) has tried to show that in a literate culture with a continuous history, the meaning of the structures is relative to social and historical context. Hence, mythologies and puranic narratives provide an essentially chronological dimension of textual time for the study of the transformative mechanism. Her argument is basically deductive despite the fact that she has examined four cases of mythical narratives. Nonetheless, it is obvious that Srinivasan accepts any 'text' as an incipient 'context'. It hardly needs to be overemphasized that texts may at times be necessary, but certainly not sufficient, for historical reconstruction, analysis, reasoning and interpretation.

Systematic use of history in Macro-Analysis

At the Bombay School of Economics and Sociology, Ghurye and research students, as discussed earlier, had set towering examples of how history, at least in the limited sense of Indology, and sociology could be fruitfully cross-fertilised. Styles of using history in the Lucknow School appeared to be quite different as its stalwarts – especially Radhakamal Mukherjee, D.P. Mukerji and D.N. Majumdar- were quite averse to allowing fragmented growth of narrow social science disciplines. They tried to develop the Lucknow school as a centre of interdisciplinary

research programmes in economics, sociology and political science. D.P. Mukerji – one of the founders of Lucknow School – was an avowedly Marxist sociologist. He always pleaded for economics to be closer to Marxism because he thought it did not separate economics from politics, and sociology from history (see Joshi 1986: 1455-57). Notwithstanding this unequivocal position of D.P., it is interesting to note that formally history was never associated with the Lucknow School. During its most creative phase the Lucknow school and its academic research had three prominent foci or features: (a) their rootedness in the history of ideas, philosophical thought that was seen as the foundation of every intellectual practice, or attempt, to understand social reality, (b) their responsiveness to the nationalist urge and proximity with the Indian National Congress, and (c) their praxiological concerns that brought the stalwarts of the school closer to grass-roots level problems – whether industrial or agricultural or tribal, and hence the involvement of scholars of the Lucknow School in the national planning for reconstruction and development (*Ibid* : 1457-59). These tendencies were sharply reflected in the teaching, research and writings of Radhakamal Mukherjee as also of D.P. Mukerji. It is quite evident that, caught between ‘philosophical, meta-theoretical, epistemic’ concerns on the one hand and ‘ideological-praxiological’ moorings on the other, these two pioneers of the Lucknow School showed little or no interest in trying rigorous historical analysis, although they were conscious of its importance in understanding structures and change. However, their historical approach remained confined to the field of history of ideas and was seldom reflected either in their pedagogic practices or in research.

This ambivalence towards the need to bring sociology closer to history in the Lucknow School did not, however, prevent some of its illustrious students from using history purposefully in sociological understanding. The work of T.N. Madan, who studied at Lucknow, has already been discussed above. A significant contribution to what may be called historical sociology came from P.C. Joshi who also studied at Lucknow. Joshi has traced historically the thinking in India on agricultural land questions in general, and problems of tenurial as well as agrarian reforms in particular, right from the early colonial period, more specifically since the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Joshi has brought this analytical exercise to bear on understanding

as to why land reforms in India since the Independence turned out to be very radical at ideological level and why they failed at programmatic level. The actual implementation of land reforms legislations in India did technically remove the old-style absentee landlordism but only after tenants were made to pay fabulous compensations to the landlords. Reforms only created a new class of owner cultivators out of the established tenants, who now became the new middlemen while the lowest category – comprising of the landless poor, sharecroppers and marginal peasants – received little or no benefits. Joshi has thus offered historical explanation of land reforms as implemented in post-Independence India (i.e., the present) in terms of the class character of the colonial and post-colonial state (i.e. the past) (Joshi 1975).

Another noteworthy work in the tradition of historical sociology from a product of the Lucknow School is Yogendra Singh's (1973) study of *Modernisation of Indian Tradition*. He has traced the major changes in the Indian cultural tradition as well as in social structure and institutions from the earliest times (starting from the *Vedic* and epic cultures) and has highlighted the sources of orthogenetic changes in Indian culture that were introduced by Jainism, Buddhism and a number of other philosophical schools and the *bhakti* (devotional) school that sharply criticised and reassessed some of the then prevailing values and institutional practices. Singh argues that *renaissance* and *Sanskritisation* were the two orthogenetic processes through which Indian tradition was already moving in the direction of modernisation (Singh 1973: 28-59). According to Singh, the impact of Islam is visible in the Indian tradition in the form of readiness to be liberal and pragmatic and in this sense it further accelerated the modernisation process. Heterogenetic changes, effected by the impact of Western civilisation during the colonial period, are evident in the macro structures of urban settlements, industry and new institutions of law and justice, in the great variety of social reform movements (from Raja Rammohan Roy to M.K. Gandhi), and in micro-structures of *jatis* (castes), family, village, its economy and polity (such as *panchayati raj*) and the like. Basically, Singh's argument is historically developed and his major conclusion is that the nature of modernisation in Indian society, despite the prolonged spell of colonialism, is irrevocably influenced by the initial conditions. It means that each society develops its own path and adaptive patterns of

modernization, suggesting that validity of the universal theory of modernisation stands questioned by this historicity unique to each society (*Ibid*: 208-15). It needs to be mentioned in this context that in this study Singh has used secondary source material most creatively; and though he has himself not done any intensive archival work on the periods he has covered in his study (perhaps because he felt that was not his priority), that does not necessarily lower the value of his seminal contribution to historical sociology.

Historical analysis in rural studies

Students of sociology in India know it well that after Bombay and Lucknow the Delhi School of Economics emerged as a major centre of excellence in teaching and research in sociology since 1959 onwards. Academic leadership of M.N. Srinivas at the Delhi School is chiefly given the credit for introducing structural-functionalism as theoretical orientation with analytical rigour and also for the fieldwork tradition with which Delhi School came to be identified for a fairly long time. One of the first few students of Srinivas, A.M. Shah (1974: 416-17) holds the view that ‘Srinivas had been an advocate of the use of historical records in the study of Indian society because he found them indispensable for analysing rural social life’. Srinivas thought that a good grasp of local history reinforced an anthropological field-worker. Particularly, Srinivas found village records and documents as an invaluable source material that provided both data and insights for studying legal disputes – relating to caste, land, any other immovable property, and agrarian issues. Although one may agree with Shah’s observation, one wonders whether use of historical method could at all be considered as a strong forte of Srinivas. In his famous ‘itineraries’ – that embody his reflections and autobiographical memoirs – Srinivas has come out with a confession that his ‘commitment to Radcliffe-Brownian structural-functionalism had had practically a blinding effect on him as he started subscribing to the view that history was irrelevant to understanding the present day structures, institutions and practices as well as changes’ (Srinivas 1973: 141).

A prominent exception to this streak of anti-history trend in Delhi School is undoubtedly the work of A.M. Shah and R.G. Shroff (1959) who studied a Gujarat village from historical perspective to

understand the structure and change among Barots – a caste of genealogists and mythographers. Likewise, with the help of official records and rare documents, Shah (1964: 83-93) has also probed into the political system in Gujarat right from the eighteenth century onwards. In yet another study undertaken jointly with two other scholars, Shah has revealed that ‘self-sufficiency of an Indian village’ and an autonomous ‘joint family system’ as the dominant pattern in Indian rural households have been built as a ‘grand myth’ (Shah *et.al.* 1963). Almost a generation later at the Delhi School of Economics, Anand Chakravarti followed it up in his study of contradiction and change in agrarian social structure in a Rajasthan village and also in his subsequent study of Purnea district in Bihar where he has abundantly used historical source material (gazetteers, records of land revenue settlements etc.) by combing through the archival sources himself.

Chakravarti’s initial study is a micro-level account of a Rajasthan village, Devisar; it provides an elaborate historical background of the caste structure, especially of the Rajput clan (Kachwaha) that claims descent and genealogy from the mythology of *Ramayana*. Chakravarti has spelled out the feudatory arrangements and the traditional land control that Rajput clans had after north India came under the Mughal rule. His argument is that the feudal system and land control remained intact in the hands of Rajput clans till almost abolition of *Jagirs* in 1954. *Jagirdars*’ land control was inherited, i.e., they held inalienable right in their respective territories. They were, however, deprived of this traditional authority when their land rights were taken away by the *Jagirdari* Abolition legislation (Chakravarti 1975: 22-39). Thereafter, Rajput clans witnessed a steady decline of their traditional authority because new patterns of power and authority were emerging as a result of introduction of local self-government in the form of *panchayati raj* institutions that created space for political participation, choice and electoral politics. These changed the rural scenario as democratic decentralization generated both: (i) new political environment and (ii) leadership. Chakravarti has explained the displacement of traditional authority in terms of the emergence of new political entrepreneurs. Although Rajput clans still dominated the village, it is not because they still had some land-ownership, but mainly because of availability of new political resources (*Ibid*: 191-221). Chakravarti has

used 'historical background' here to contrast the present-day political power base of Rajput clans with their traditional authority that they had enjoyed by virtue of monopolistic land control in the past.

In his second major work, Chakravarti (2001) has examined agrarian class relations in a canal-irrigated village (called Aghanbigha) in Purnea District in North Bihar by doing intensive fieldwork. Here he found that production relations between the *maliks* and labourers were highly exploitative because, after the introduction of irrigation and subsequent to it commercial farming, the traditional system of *bataidari* (sharecropping) had started declining, though the dominant landlords continued to be as oppressive towards their labour as before, that was reflected in wage payment and tight work schedule. Tenurial rights were denied to the *bataidars* and labour could not mobilize itself against the landlords. Chakravarti's main focus is on understanding everyday class relations. Even when profit was the main motive of farming, landlords continued to depend on pre-capitalist forms of labour utilisation (like use of attached or bonded labour, or leasing out to *bataidars* on an year-to-year oral tenancy with no legal rights (*Ibid.*: 278-93). In this study, Chakravarti has used some historical source material but only to provide background of commercial agriculture in Purnea, and also to explain the impact of ecology due to the Kosi River changing its course (*Ibid.*:19-62). Chakravarti has attempted to respond to the mode of production debate on 'feudalism/semi-feudalism in India' and also 'development of capitalism in Indian agriculture' (*Ibid.*: 282-86). Despite the use of some historical material, this study is based less on history and more on anthropological fieldwork. His conclusion is that agricultural labour in this part of Bihar is dependent on their landlords because of unorganized labour market; moreover, labour could not resist their exploitation partly because it had no agency to mobilize them, and partly because of the nexus between the landlords and the agencies of the state. This conclusion, however, does not follow from the historical background provided by Chakravarti.

In the area of rural studies, Ramkrishna Mukherjee who belonged to none of the established schools in Bombay, Lucknow and Delhi, made a significant contribution at a time when village studies or studies on peasant societies/communities were dominated by

ethnographic tradition and fieldwork approach of social anthropologists till almost mid-1960s. However, in his somewhat less frequently cited study, *The Dynamics of Rural Society*, Mukherjee (1957a) has argued by demonstrating that dynamics of any society cannot possibly be grasped fully without a careful historical analysis of the development of its basic economic structure. He has further emphasized that function of economic structure in shaping or moulding its dynamics is no less vital for studying agrarian societies than it is in studying industrial societies. By carefully using aggregate and time-series data on land ownership, land transfers (by either sale, gift or mortgage), changing crop patterns and crop yields, and also data on use of sharecropping as a dominant pattern of land cultivation, Mukherjee has traced historically the emergence of three rural classes and production relations in Bengal's agrarian society right from the pre-British period (*Ibid.*: 14-27). He has also shown how landholding classes were impoverished by the colonial economic policies that almost always favoured the British East India Company's monopoly trade throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries (Mukherjee 1957b: 40-51) and how India's external trade during the colonial period actually helped the transformation of food into commodities, thereby benefiting British industrialists exclusively.

The most noteworthy aspect of Mukherjee's *Rural Dynamics* (1957a) study is that it has historically tested a hypothesis that economic structure delineated the contours as well as historical course of social dynamics in the context of West Bengal. He has traced the origins of the present day rural classes (by marshalling data on economic structure of 12 villages in the Birbhum district in the 1930s) to the production relations of the pre-British days, and has shown how the present rural classes corresponded to the class structure of late medieval Bengal. Using this historical background, Mukherjee (1957a: 7-40, 90-101) finally explains why the class of landless labourers existed only marginally and why preponderance of sharecroppers has been a unique feature of rural West Bengal till today. This study is an excellent example of Mukherjee's methodological rigour not only in defining agrarian class categories but also in demonstrating their development historically in non-rhetorical empirical terms. He has also shown how certain classes have persisted in the rural dynamics of Bengal over the last three to four centuries. More importantly, Mukherjee did all the first

hand archival work, although he has also used aggregate data and statistics, and a number of very authentic research monographs of professional historians, for reconstructing the class structure and production relations in the 'past' as he found it crucial to understand the 'present'. To further corroborate his historical explanation of rural dynamics in terms of the development in economic structure during the colonial period, Mukherjee even undertook a full-length study of the East India Company with a view to revealing its true character as an instrument to serve the interests of industrial capitalist and trading class in England (Mukherjee 1957b) by siphoning off the wealth generated in Indian agriculture in the production of food and industrial raw materials.

Historical Studies of Social Movements

It has been observed that in studying social and protest movements in India the historical approach has had a comparatively greater appeal among practitioners of sociology. In this context it is necessary to begin with a review of the work of A.R. Desai. Although a student of G.S. Ghurye, Desai was not in the least fascinated by Indology. In his frequently cited work, Desai (1982) has attempted a variant of Marxist analysis and interpretation of various socio-political and nationalist movements that gathered momentum, particularly after the spread of Western education and the consequent rise of new social classes in India during the colonial period. Desai has perceptively applied categories of class analysis and the method of historical materialism⁵ in understanding processes of socio-economic transformation in colonial India. He has not only highlighted contradictions inherent in the growth of parasitic capitalism in India but also revealed through historical assessment of the built-in deficiencies in the Indian national movement – deficiencies emanating from the class background of its leadership (Desai 1982: 384-86). Diversity of class interests that surfaced in the form of the Indian National Congress did not, however, weaken the anti-imperialist freedom struggle. On the contrary, Desai argued that influx of new social forces built considerable pressure on its leadership to accommodate as many of them as possible by making serious compromises on the one hand, and 'brought dynamic energy to the movement' on the other hand. Nonetheless, the capitalist class – the Indian bourgeoisie – effectively controlled the rising

aspirations of those forces that in turn were tied to foreign capitalism, i.e., 'metropolitan capitalism', to be precise (*Ibid*: 114-22). To Desai the class character of leadership explains why the process of nation-state formation remained deficient as well as incomplete in India. In his writings on rural transformation and agrarian struggles in India after Independence, Desai extended similar explanation as to why most of the state-sponsored development programmes failed to bring about any substantive change in rural India (Desai, 1979).

In analysing various socio-political movements, A.R. Desai has used historical facts and narratives to delineate their key features and also brought his analysis of the past movements to bear upon the present day nature of the Indian state and to explain the failure of state-sponsored development programmes in rural India. It must, however, be noted that in his historical approach Desai has neither collected nor sifted primary historical sources as such, nor has he done any archival work himself. Quintessentially, Desai relied on and consulted available studies on the Indian National movement as well as on socio-political reform movements. In trying sociological analysis through history, of course, there are no agreed norms, standards or rules regarding the extent to which a researcher has to, or ought to, consult primary sources. It rests, for all practical purposes, on a researcher's inclination, and accessibility to as well as familiarity with primary sources. Basically, sociologists who are inclined to use history, tend to use secondary sources that are known to be authentic and that they consider appropriate as well as adequate for their purpose. Naturally, those historians who believe that generalisations not founded on primary sources run the risk of being treated as untenable, think that such attempts often lack rigour. In evaluating historical analysis by sociologists, such historians generally act as 'high priests' though in all fairness it must be admitted that at times their criticism of sociological work is based on historical method is both fair and valid.

It may not be out of place to mention in this context that Desai's entire historical analysis and interpretation, both in style and content has been greatly influenced partly by R. Palme Dutt (1947), whose famous work, *India Today* was first written in the mid-1920s, and partly by K.S. Shelvankar (1940). Those familiar with Palme Dutt's work would

unfailing notice (a) that Desai's line of substantive argument is considerably influenced by Palme Dutt's classic, and (b) that streaks of rhetoric occasionally punctuate Desai's style of writing as well as argumentation. But Desai made no secret of his ideological predilections. Notwithstanding some rhetoric, it does not lessen the importance of Desai's contribution to historical sociology.

A note of I.P. Desai's study of the Vedchhi movement must be taken here for two reasons. First, this is a relatively less known work of I.P. Desai. Secondly, although it is an attempt to reconstruct historically the kind of response an *Adivasi* area in Surat district in South Gujarat gave to Mahatma Gandhi's call for constructive work in the 1920s, Desai's primary source in this study was a series of personal interviews he conducted with a number of active workers of the movement. The study covers the life history of the Vedchhi movement from 1922 to 1967 and narrates the programmes undertaken by the Vedchhi *ashram* that had already initiated social reform activities, such as spread of literacy, prohibition and so on, before it was drawn into the wider political movement for Independence under the leadership of Indian National Congress. Desai (1969: 1-78) has given the details of the activists, leadership, ideology of the movement, and how workers had adapted themselves to the new ethos and discipline introduced by the wider national movement. He has called his study a sociological one. Though the study involves historical approach and reconstruction of past events, Desai has not cited any sources - reports, documents, or published or unpublished material. Surprisingly, his published monograph has no bibliography. Obviously, the principal source of information was the workers of the movement and interviews of some knowledgeable persons. In this sense it might be the unique use of historical method that relied solely on oral interviews.⁶

Among the first attempts to put together studies of social movements by various scholars was M.S.A. Rao's two edited volumes (1978-79). Most essays in these volumes are based on systematic use of historical documents in reconstructing social movements. Among the contributions to these volumes, special mention must be made of Partha N. Mukherji's study of Naxalite movement (Vol. I, pp. 17-90), Rajendra Singh's study of the peasant 'land grab' movement in the Basti district in

Uttar Pradesh (Vol. I, pp. 91-148), Chandrasekhar Bhat's study of 'social reform movement among the Waddars' (Vol. I, pp. 169-89) and Arun Bali's study of the Virsaiva movement (Vol. II, pp. 17-51). All these scholars have used historical documents to trace the systemic origins of disaffection or need for reform. Mukherji has used considerable amount of oral and archival sources to reveal the roots of Naxalbari movement in the *zamindari* and *jotedari* system of land control and land use in Bengal that has been the main source of discontent, which had developed historically but gathered momentum only in 1967 or so. Singh has probed caste and land control in Basti since 1810 onwards with the help of historical source material, and highlighted the consequences and political implications of the land-grab movement there. Comparatively, Bhat's and Arun Bali's studies are based more on the use of secondary sources (i.e., less of primary or archival sources), though all the studies have come out with historically developed sociological arguments.

Besides editing the two volumes containing a number of studies on social movements, M.S.A. Rao has also done a pioneering study of two backward class movements – the S.N.D.P. movement in Kerala and the Yadava movement in North India. In a comparative perspective, Rao (1979: 1-19) has examined genesis and historical and structural conditions in which the two movements grew, their ideologies, organisation, leadership, social class base, and their internal dynamics – i.e. ideological conflicts and rivalries, interaction with wider socio-political forces, and the two movements' impact – in terms of their social and cultural consequences. The S.N.D.P. movement represented aspirations of Izhavas, a caste below the pollution line, while the Yadavas are a non-Brahman landowning middle caste. In the first case, Rao has historically traced the relative deprivation the Izhavas experienced from the days of early British rule in Malabar. Rao then brings up the account of development of the movement upto the 1950s, by which time the S.N.D.P. Yogam had succeeded in spreading its ideology among other castes with similar ritual status in different parts of Kerala, and thereby in creating an ethnic bloc as a powerful demand group in politics (*Ibid.*: 102-22). Rao's study of the Yadava movement also covers more or less the same life cycle of that movement. The only difference is that the Yadavas form a category that consists of several allied castes, are above the pollution line, and together constitute nearly

one-tenth of India's total population. Tracing the history of identity formation of Yadavas from the 1870s onwards when they began to adopt the Arya Samaj practices, Rao has focused his attention on showing how a micro-level caste identity got enlarged into a pan-Indian macro level ethnic identity that helped the Yadava movement to spread itself rapidly in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar and Orissa on the one hand and to form quasi-political organisations in different parts of India on the other (*Ibid.*: 123-47).

In presenting the historical account of both the movements through their different phases, early agitations, membership, and memoranda and petitions submitted to the government, Rao has done an intensive archival work himself, consulted all the relevant documents, official reports, censuses, and newspaper reports covering the span of about a century and a half beginning from the early nineteenth century for the S.N.D.P. movement and from the 1870s onwards for the Yadavas movement (*Ibid.*: 21-122, and 123-241). Rao has demonstrated how both these movements could bring about social transformation, in the sense that they led to formation of politically articulated ethnic blocs in Indian polity and thereby succeeded in creating space for backward classes within the power structure (*Ibid.*: 249-56). Rao's study is thus an excellent demonstration of how comparative historical method could be deployed systematically to attempt a sociological analysis of social change brought about by two movements that had divergent social bases.

T.K. Oommen has studied the nature and dynamics of agrarian movement in Kerala during the twentieth century. In this work, Oommen's focus is on understanding peasant struggles in Malabar as well as in Travancore-Cochin princely states that together formed the state of Kerala. Using largely secondary sources as also some of the accounts available in vernacular (Malayalam), Oommen has attempted to reconstruct the initial process of mobilisation that gathered momentum when peasants were drawn into the anti-imperialist movement led by the Congress. His argument is that the anti-imperialist ethos of the early peasant movements gave way to new issues and more institutionalized forms of protests under the Leftist parties and their leadership (Oommen 1985:35-53, 180-254). However, it needs to be noted that in reconstructing the past Oommen has depended heavily on secondary

sources, barring some exceptions. This is quite evident in the end notes added to each of his chapters. Similarly, studies on agrarian unrest in Thanjavur and on peasant organisations in South India by K.C. Alexander (1975, 1981) have used the historical mode of argumentation, but these too are based largely on secondary sources.

In my work on social movements, I have covered studies of the Moplahs in Malabar in 1921; peasant movements influenced partly by a local level leader like Baba Ramchandra in Faizabad district in U.P. in 1921-22, and partly by the Gandhian Congress and its ideology in the 1920s-30s (such as the Bardoli *Satyagraha* of 1921 and 1928 in Gujarat and the 'No-rent' campaign in U.P. in 1930-32); and case studies of the *Tebhaga* movement (1946-47) and the Telangana insurrection (1946-51) which were organised and launched as planned offensives against the state and class enemies by the Communist Party of India. In addition I have studied the left wing peasant organisations floated as 'front organisations' during the 1920s-30s – their activities, leadership, ideology, and relationship with the mainstream nationalist movement from 1925 to 1947. My purpose was to historically reconstruct social origins of a given movement and to understand its lasting impact on agrarian power structure. In this comparative study I have located these movements in their agrarian structural settings, in an attempt to identify the social origins of peasant disaffection, whether in *zamindari* or in *raiyyatwari* areas, and then to highlight the issues raised by these movements, their ideology, leadership, nature of the protest, and the grass-roots participation in these movements. While my findings challenge the validity of the thesis on 'passivity of the Indian peasant', propounded by Barrington Moore Jr., they also question the empirical validity of the 'middle peasant thesis' proposed by Eric Wolf and Hamza Alavi. It has also been my endeavour to identify social forces that in the ultimate analysis determine the *form* of mobilisation and protest (see Dhanagare 1975: 17-112; and 1983: 213-27). In these studies I have extensively used primary sources, archival material – official reports, gazetteers, and private papers – as well as some vernacular material, besides using authentic secondary source material. My submission is that this is the first ever attempt in comparative social history that aimed at contributing to the theoretical discourse on peasantry and peasant movements in Indian sociology.

An important piece of research by Hira Singh (1998) has provided us with an insightful view of the changing land relations between *thikanedars* (landlords) and the *kisans* (peasants) in the context of princely rule in Rajasthan. This study historically traces the traditional code of honour that was accorded to the landowning class of aristocratic *thikanedars* within a feudalized agrarian setting. Singh reconstructs the entire process in which this class acquired a place of pre-eminence by virtue of its tight hold over economic and political power (*Ibid.*: 59-97). Hira Singh then draws our attention to the role and traditional rights of the *kisans* – their obligations (such as rent, cesses and unpaid *beggar*, i.e., compulsory labour) – that were the main forms of surplus extraction by the landlords, who imposed cultural restriction on peasant-tenants also (*Ibid.*: 100-124). In this fascinating historical account Hira Singh has not overlooked the responses of the *durbar* (i.e., princely ruler) on the one hand and the paramount colonial power, i.e., the British *Raj*, on the other to the dynamics of agrarian class relations. Finally, this study highlights the ways in which peasant movements in Rajasthan gathered momentum during the 1920s–40s and sought a complete transformation of the economic and political relations, and how with the help of some outside non-peasant leadership the peasant protests successfully acted as an agency that ultimately dissolved pre-capitalist feudal relations. Hira Singh has bestowed the transformative role on peasant movements in Rajasthan.

In this exercise Hira Singh has not only criticised the colonial, nationalist and neo-nationalist historiographers but has also revealed deficiencies of the neo-Marxist dependency theories: theories of world capitalist system as well as of the colonial mode of production, and last but not the least the school of subaltern historiography, for their failure to recognize the historic role of popular resistance, i.e., of peasant movements, in liquidating feudal social formations in Rajasthan (*Ibid.*: 215-48). Two noteworthy features of Hira Singh's contribution to historical sociology must be acknowledged without the slightest of hesitation: (a) He has developed a sociological argument historically, by reconstructing the pre-colonial, pre-capitalist feudal social formations in a princely setting in Rajasthan by tapping and purposefully using enormous archival sources that were not hitherto consulted by any

sociologist. He has then enriched this account by insights he gained through his personal contacts during his fieldwork. Secondly, and more importantly, notwithstanding the streaks of theoretical nihilism in his argument, his study is an excellent example of an exercise in historical sociology that has made valuable contribution to theoretical discourse on both feudalism and social movements.

On similar lines Pushpendra Surana has done a study of the Bijolia movement that gathered momentum in the princely state of Mewar in Rajasthan during 1917-22. Although the agrarian social structure was feudal in Mewar, with *thikanedars* controlling land and exploiting *kisans*, Surana shows how cultural symbols of landlords' domination were inverted by the *kisans* as a form of protest. When the *Thikanedar* of Bijolia died, quite contrary to the custom, the *kisans* went ahead with the Ram Nawami celebrations instead of observing mourning. In Bijolia, thus, religious sentiments were used successfully to mobilize peasants and to convey through the incident a message that the authority of *Thikanedars* no longer commanded any respect from the *kisans* (Surana 1983: 70-72).

K.L. Sharma (1986: 109-33) has also studied specificity of the feudal social structure in the states of Rajputana, and peasant movements that gathered momentum against the absolutist form of feudalism in Rajasthan, first from 1913 to 1930 and second from 1930 to 1947. Sharma provides relevant historical details of the *jagir* system – castes and classes that occupied position in the agrarian structure in Rajasthan and the peasant protest movements, including the Bijolia *kisan* movement in Mewar. An insightful narrative then backs up his account of the way in which peasant movements in Rajasthan coincided with the national awakening for Indian Independence in the first half of the twentieth century. Sharma argues that peasant movements were carried out largely by various organisations like Marwar Hitkari Sabha and Lok Parishad, Praja Mandals, Rajputana Madhya Bharat Sabha, Sewa Sangh, that were engaged in welfare activities simultaneously with the task of political awakening of the peasant masses (*Ibid.*: 122-33). However, although Sharma claims to have used 'structural-historical perspective' his essay is based more on secondary sources, and less on the use of primary archival material as such.

P. Radhakrishnan (1989) has historically examined the interplay between peasant struggles and important land reforms in Malabar (Kerala) from 1836 to 1982. In this study he has probed the pre-colonial social arrangements concerning land, their interface with the hierarchical caste structure, and the intricacies of tenurial statuses within the upper caste *janmis* (landlords) dominated agrarian setting in Malabar (*Ibid.*: 20-67). Radhakrishnan argues that some commissions were appointed by the then British Government that suggested certain changes and reforms in land related laws between the 1880s and 1920s, largely because the historical processes of spontaneous peasant struggles were building pressures on the pro-landlord government. Thus, Radhakrishnan offers a historical explanation of land reforms that not only redefined land rights but also provided tenurial security to middle level peasants and to the 'tenants-at will'. His study suggests that transformative legal reforms were necessitated by the persistent occurrence of the Moplah rebellions in Malabar from the 1880s to 1920-21. Subsequently, the same pressure continued to be built and sustained by mobilisation of peasant organisations under Communist leadership from 1957 to 1970 that finally resulted in the enactment of the Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act of 1969 (*Ibid.*:71-109, 110-47). In this study Radhakrishnan has used extensively official records and publications of the Government of India and Government of Madras, in addition to secondary sources. He has convincingly demonstrated that state initiatives for introducing liberal land reforms proved to be transformative in Malabar only because of the sustained peasant struggles. He has thus generated a historical explanation that meets Nagel's (1961:15-28) criteria of the 'genetic explanation'.⁷

As a major contribution to historical sociology Ramchandra Guha's study of an ecological, conservationist protest movement has attracted considerable attention. In his well-known study of the famous environmental movement, called *Chipko* (meaning, hug the trees in order to protect them), Guha has traced the stem of this popular peasant struggle to the century old massive deforestation in the Himalayan region. Guha claims, and very rightly so, that his study has brought an ecological dimension to the study of agrarian history on the one hand and the study of peasant resistance on the other. The initiative of the popular

movement like the *Chipko*, according to Guha, is embedded in a long historical process that witnessed ecological degradation and rapid decline. Guha (1991: xii-xv) has explained the rise of the *Chipko* struggle in terms of the relationship between the colonial state and its forest policies that favoured commercial exploitation of forest resources to protect the interests of contractors and government officialdom. So frequent were such protests in Garhwal and Tehri regions of Uttarakhand that rebellions of peasants had become routinised as a custom (*Ibid.*: 62-98; also Guha and Gadgil 1989: 144-77). Though Guha's study is basically sociological in nature, he treats sociology of social movements as inseparable from social history; by social history he implies history of changes in the agrarian landscape resulting from ecological changes introduced by the state. In his pioneering work on the historical analysis of *Chipko* as an ecological movement, Guha has consulted enormous archival sources: records, reports, private papers, and manuscripts. This study of the *Chipko* movement is perhaps one of the best examples of how historical sociology could be tried and brought to fruition in the form of a historical explanation that broadly conforms to Nagel's norms mentioned earlier.

A study of the Jharkhand movement in Bihar by K.L. Sharma also deserves mention here. After spelling out the numerous instances of tribal insurrections and revolts in the Chhotanagpur region of Bihar during the 18th and 19th centuries, Sharma has historically explained how British administrative initiatives as well as missionary activities, especially in the field of education, contributed to identity formation among tribals in Jharkhand. The account includes some details of the famous Birsa Munda movement, the Unnati Samaj and the Adivasi Mahasabha, this narrative is concluded with observations on the formation of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (Sharma 1986: 189-209). However, this study is based on secondary sources and not on any primary archival sources.

Historical Studies of Agrarian Structure

Some scholars have systematically used historical method to analyse changes in agrarian social structure to understand class formation process and production relations. However, not all of them necessarily

link these changes with any peasant mobilisation or protest movement as such. For example, Virginius Xaxa has traced the entire history of evolution of agrarian structure and changing class relations in Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal from the 1860s when the first survey and settlement operations were conducted there. Xaxa brings out how the highly commercialized plantation economy existed there side by side with a purely traditional subsistence farm setting. Although market forces had deeply penetrated this region, they did not alter the subsistence agricultural setting; rather traders, moneylenders and new investors of capital in the region continued to rely on traditional forms of sharecropping and encouraged the leasing in and leasing out practices (Xaxa 1980: 62-82). Xaxa has used this interesting historical account to establish a pattern of, what he called, 'economic dualism' in which a dialectical relationship between plantation and subsistence economies got accommodated to each other, and this symbiosis was sustained despite the fact that the two economic systems have been drawn into global capitalist economy (Xaxa 1997: 59-133; 251-65). Nonetheless, one of the two settings developed faster while the other stagnated.⁸ For this study Xaxa did considerable amount of archival research by consulting original survey and settlement reports, other official records available at the district headquarters, and the files and records of the tea plantation estates (from 1860s onwards) in his fieldwork area.

Likewise, M.N. Karna (1981: 184-206) has historically constructed the landlord dominated agrarian structure in the Madhubani subdivision of the Darbhanga district of North Bihar from the times of the Permanent Settlement (1793) onwards. He has traced the origins of the *bataidari* (sharecropping) arrangements that were used by landlords for extortion and exploitation of sharecroppers. Karna then explains the rise of the *bataidars'* struggle during 1965-75 by attributing it to the oppressive agrarian structure in Madhubani and to the politicization of peasantry during 1920s-60s.⁹ Quite on similar lines Partha N. Mukherji and M. Chattopadhyay (1981 137-162) have probed the history of the evolution of agrarian structure in Birbhum district of West Bengal and the emergence of a large mass of agricultural labourers in Birbhum, Naxalbari and Gopiballavapur areas, which subsequently became the locus of the Naxalite movement. Here again these scholars have explained the Naxalbari movement in terms of the growing

proletarianisation in this region. In doing so they have used historical records and other archival material quite fruitfully.

A truly creative collaboration between history and sociology is seen in a study of rural elites and agrarian power structure in Basti District (U.P.) attempted by Rajendra Singh (1988). He has examined the dynamics of power and authority against the backdrop of the historically changing relationship between land, power and people. Rajendra Singh has combined the historical and contemporary data on rural elites and agrarian power structure. His historical analysis covers the period from 1801 to 1970 and brings out the changes during the pre-colonial and colonial periods in Basti District. Accepting the method of reputational identification of elites and leaders, he has investigated changing statuses in terms of land control, caste factor, and the critical differences between the established and the emerging elites and their social profiles (R. Singh 1988: 11-16; 55-70, 78-187). Singh has used historical data to show the changing sources of power and its correlates as well as to gain insights into persistence and change in institutions and everyday practices in the past as well as in contemporary society in Basti (*Ibid.*: 237-45). In this study Rajendra Singh has only obliquely referred to peasant revolts and movements (*Ibid.*: 191-95), but that was not his main thrust. This is yet another significant study that addresses a sociological research problem and uses history to that end purposefully. Rajendra Singh has apparently done considerable amount of archival work for this study, besides consulting a large number of secondary sources.

A study of the changing agrarian structure in the face of land reforms in Dakshina Kannada District in Karnataka by C.B. Damle focuses on the impact of the Karnataka Land Reforms Act 1961 (subsequently amended in 1974) in a commercial setting and a subsistence setting. Damle has attempted to blend a comparative-historical approach with a conventional diagnostic exploratory approach that has yielded fresh insights into the differential impact of the 1961 legislation and the 1974 Amendments on class relations in villages from the commercial as well as subsistence settings he studied. He has highlighted the changing land market, the nature of tenancies, conditions of agricultural labourers, the attempts by landlords to evict their tenants before the implementation of the 1974 Act, and rural credit in the

commercial and subsistence settings (Damle 1993: 196-236). He has shown how the impact of land reforms, of tenancy legislation in particular, varied not only between the two settings but also between the two villages selected by him from each setting, and he attributed the differences to the accessibility tenants and labourers had to the machinery of implementation of reforms (Damle 1989b: 83-97). Again, for historical understanding of the development of commercial and subsistence agriculture in the D.K. District, Damle has consulted several reports and records of the government, gazetteers, Census reports from 1891 to 1961, statistical atlases from 1913 to 1965, and published and unpublished private papers (Damle 1989a: 1896-1906; 1993: 245-46). However, Damle's explanation of the differential impact of land reforms in the two settings is not derived entirely from the historical reconstruction of the contrasting agrarian structures in the plantation and the subsistence settings in that district.

Probing the connections between the changing agrarian structure and the growing indebtedness among farmers in Haryana, Surinder Jodhka (1995) has first traced the history of the pre-colonial *jajmani* (patron-client relationship) system that regulated exchange between landowning families (producers of goods) and service castes (i.e., producers of services). While such an arrangement ensured distribution of surplus, it also guaranteed minimum subsistence to the poor in times of scarcity. Jodhka then looked at the changes in the social arrangements on land during the colonial period, especially highlighting the land settlement operations, commercialization of agriculture, and increase in demand for rural credit – all these leading to emergence of money lending activity that resulted in the growing land mortgages and alienation, and to leasing-in and leasing-out practices from 1870s to 1920s in the Haryana region (Jodhka 1995: 31-55). Though Jodhka has used only secondary sources to construct this historical background, he found that background as crucial for understanding debt and dependency patterns even in the institutional credit network created under the state sponsored development programmes after Independence. He has thus attempted to link the present with the past.

More recently, Parvez Abbasi (2005) has conducted an innovative study of the changing agrarian structure, i.e., land control and

its interface with caste and lineage structure in a predominantly Muslim village in Meerut District. Abbasi collected data by scanning the original historical records, viz., land accounts as entered in land records at the time of the first, second and third land settlement operations that were conducted in the years 1860, 1897 and 1936 respectively in village Hajipur that he studied in 1992. He then looked into the lineages and their genealogical charts and the landholdings owned by members of those lineages at the four points of time, including his field study in 1992. His analysis has revealed that while some dominant lineages had not only continued their hold over agricultural land but also managed to acquire more during the last 135 years. Other lineages had lost their farmlands while a new lineage too had appeared in the village. Within the Gaddi caste there have been ups and downs for different lineages. Hence, caste as such was no longer a homogenous category among Muslims. Rather, Abbasi has interpreted internal differentiation within a caste group in terms of landownership as an indication of emerging class structure in Hajipur (Abbasi 2005: 562-70). This interesting piece of research has shown the enormous potential that historical documents, such as land settlement records, have in enriching our understanding of the changing agrarian structure and social relations in rural India. He has ably demonstrated that by using such records one can generate a convincing sociological analysis in a longitudinal research design.

History in Studies on Caste and Caste Movements

First important research work in caste movements is that of Gail Omvedt. Her study of the non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra is particularly noteworthy. In the early 1970s, she undertook an extensive and exhaustive historical survey of the development of the non-Brahman movement from the times of Mahatma Jotiba Phuley, including its ideological foundations and social origins, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Omvedt (1976: 1-14; 285-303) has argued that the articulations of identity in the *bahujan samaj* movement, led by Maratha and other non-Brahmin castes in Maharashtra, were not only a form of protest against the exploitation of peasantry in rural economy but also a form of cultural revolt against the upper caste Brahmin landowners throughout the colonial period, especially during the phase of the nationalist movement. Omvedt has used this argument subsequently as a

device to understand and explain the contemporary Dalit movements, or anti-caste struggles in India. She has also painted some of the new social movements (farmers', women's, ecological, and Dalit movements) as the rise of alternative politics for 'reinventing revolution' (Omvedt 1993: 257-319). Though the Dalit movement has been inspired mainly by Dr. Ambedkar's thought and ideological articulation, some of the Dalit struggles have also been the outcome of agrarian distress being enmeshed with class struggles in different regions of India. Omvedt (1994: 336-41) has termed them as "unfinished revolution". Omvedt's ideological leanings are at times expressed in a rhetorical manner; that apart, in the present context it needs to be acknowledged that her studies demonstrate systematic use of historical source material to reconstruct the development of protest movements of lower castes in India, especially in Maharashtra. Historical sources used by Omvedt as her research material, particularly in her study of the non-Brahman movement (*cultural revolt*) are simply enormous, and these have yielded rich analytical insights reflected in her work.

Social protests of lower castes against the cultural hegemony of upper caste Brahmins in Maharashtra have attracted attention of a senior sociologist like M.S. Gore nearly a decade and a half after Gail Omvedt's first path-breaking study was published. Gore has first probed the changes that had taken place during the nineteenth century as a result of the initiatives taken by the colonial rulers and the Christian missionaries, and that were entailed by expansion of modern education, trade and industry, because these were the principal sources of change (Gore 1989: 4-18). He has then discussed the ideology, leadership, and nature of protests during two phases of the Non-Brahman movement: first, from the beginning of Mahatma Phule's *Satyashodhak* movement till the 1880s (i.e., Mahatma Phule's times), and second, the *Brahmanetar* (i.e., non-Brahman) phase in which the princely ruler of Kolhapur took over the leadership of the movement. In the second stage, the dominant Maratha caste, joining hands with the non-Maratha middle castes of peasants, artisans and workers, turned the *Satyashodhak Samaj* into an anti-Brahman movement (*Ibid*: 18-78). Gore's main purpose in undertaking this study was to focus on the interface between social structure (i.e. patterned behaviour) and the process of social movements. In attempting this sociological analysis, Gore has relied on secondary

sources, mainly on writings of Dhananjay Keer, Rosalid O'Hanlon, Gail Omvedt, and Y.D. Phadke, and has not consulted primary sources himself. Nonetheless, he has developed a historico-sociological perspective in this study of a caste movement.

An important study of conflict between upper caste Hindu and Muslim *Zamindars* and the low caste peasants (mostly Yadavas, also known as *Gowalas*, Ahirs, Kurmis and Keoris) by Hetukar Jha (1977) deserves careful attention in this context. In the course of his archival work, Jha had come across repeated references to riots and conflicts between these interest groups with upper caste *zamindars* over a five-year period (1921-25) in the government reports, available in political files in North Bihar districts. Jha consulted these archival papers to find out the causes of such conflicts. The most common explanation then advanced in sociological and anthropological literature was that such conflicts in rural India were a sequel to the process of *Sanskritisation*.¹⁰ After probing into his historical documents and source material, Jha has pointed out that socio-economic oppression of the low caste peasants in general, and Yadavas in particular, by the upper caste *zamindars* was truly the root cause of such repeated conflicts in the 1920s. Actually, the low caste peasants resorted to *Sanskritisation* primarily to get rid of their socio-economic exploitation (Jha 1977; 554-56). Thus, low caste peasants began wearing the sacred thread and refused to perform *begari* (i.e., forced and unpaid labour) for *zamindars* as a form of protest against their oppression. Here is an excellent example of a sociological query into the factors underlying conflicts and tensions between castes during a certain historical period. Jha himself consulted all the relevant documents and archival sources to contradict the then well established thesis on *Sanskritisation* (see Srinivas, 1966: 1-45) and to show that vested interests of *zamindars* were primarily responsible for economic privations and exploitation of peasants that constituted the root cause of the conflicts in the early 1920s in North Bihar.

In another study Hetukar Jha has looked into the issue of cultural identity of Mithila region of the North Bihar districts. Two caste groups, viz., Brahmans and Kayasthas, who formed the Mithila Mahasabha in 1910, have been the main actors behind the identity politics there. These two emerged as the elite section pampered by the Maharaja of

Darbhanga (Jha 1980: 200-02). Jha has explained the simultaneous rise of the elite castes and the Maithili identity movement in terms of the great divide between the masses of poor peasants, Harijans, bonded labourers and other toiling masses on the one hand and the interests of the two elite castes on the other. The gulf between the elites and the masses was institutionalized by certain historical practices of making 'rent-free land grants', bestowing *zamindari* titles and privileges on the two upper castes, custom of slavery, and special privileges for the elite castes in education (*Ibid.*: 188-89). In this study, Jha has marshalled his evidence by perusing primary archival records of the Darbhanga Raj, Survey and Settlement reports, gazetteers of various districts of Bihar and Bengal, census reports, and to several secondary sources.

Jha has done a similar exercise for understanding historically the abysmal conditions of the Scheduled Castes in Bihar and Jharkhand, where they have remained subjected to life of acute indignity, privation and socio-economic oppression. The colonial policy of protecting the interests of upper caste Hindus and absentee landlords (i.e. *zamindars*), who were perceived by the British Raj as its useful allies and collaborators, further intensified the miseries of the lower castes. Since Independence, however, the state policy of social justice, protective discrimination, and state sponsored development programmes have played an instrumental role in sharpening the identity of Scheduled Castes, while the elite sections continued to hamper the development of masses (Jha 2000: 423-44). In a more recently published article, Hetukar Jha (2005) has traced historical roots of the present day tendency in Indian villages to use casteism, factionalism and amoral familism as petty means for acquiring positions of power and/or access to resources and to benefits of development programmes. Jha has observed that in the initial phase of the colonial rule, Indian village life was marked by self-sufficiency, relative autonomy in internal management, and effective regulatory mechanism for resolving disputes and conflicts. However, the community life gradually declined as new land settlement operations and revenue administration brought the peasant (i.e., *rayyats*) in direct contact with the colonial state. Furthermore, monetisation of economy and commercialization of agriculture gave rise to the class of moneylenders on the one hand and to growing indebtedness among peasants that led to massive alienation of land and consequently to

depeasantisation on the other (*Ibid.*: 495-98). Moreover, the newly introduced British legal system was too formal and alien for the rural society to grasp. This resulted in increased court litigation and delayed justice. Finally, the British administrator tended to regard caste as *the* fundamental fact of Indian society and therefore a principal instrument of policy intervention. This was reflected in the way census operations, started in 1871-72, gave prominence to caste enumeration. Formation of various caste *Sabhas* (associations) was a direct outcome of that policy. As caste interests began to be articulated in a narrow perspective, competition and conflicts between castes followed (*Ibid.*:499-500). Thus, Jha has explained the decline of village community as a function of the colonial legacy. Jha generates this historical explanation with the help of several authentic secondary sources.

There are a few studies of either castes or caste movements in which history is used only marginally for providing historical background of a contemporary movement or problem. Satish Kumar Sharma (1985: 56-77) in his study of relationship between the Arya Samaj and the untouchables in Punjab has provided a historical account of how the Arya Samaj was against the political movements of untouchables. It never encouraged any moves for separate identity and solidarity of Dalits, as it was interested primarily in preventing estrangement of the untouchables from the mainstream Hindu society. A part of Sharma's study involved ascertaining socio-economic conditions of cases that had joined Arya Samaj, their causes for joining the Samaj, and its impact on their social status. One of the important conclusions of this study is that the *Shuddhi* (purification) movement did not have much success in Punjab. However, one does not find in the historical background any traces of 'why this should happen'. Similarly, a study of Dalit Panther movement by Lata Murugkar (1991: 1-11) has given a brief historical background of the movement, but one does not find any meaningful linkages between this historical background and the internal factionalism and rivalries among leadership of various factions on which she has focused her attention. In contrast, Jogdand in his study of the Dalit movement in Maharashtra has used historical sources for constructing social reform movements in Maharashtra and for critically assessing their impact on the formative process of the Dalit movement both before and after Dr. Ambedkar (Jogdand 1991: 22-96). Here again

the conclusion is that the Dalit movement in post-Ambedkar period turned to a kind of radical activism, but 'why', despite the initial impact of the legacy of social reform in Maharashtra, the Dalit movement turned to militancy has not been explained. Use of history in all the three studies thus borders on nominalism, if not ritualism, because its purpose seems to be restricted to providing background information only.

Studies of Industrial/Urban Settings

Harish Doshi has done one of the first studies on industrial cities in which historical background has been used to show a meaningful relationship between a traditional neighbourhood organisation and challenges of modern industrialization. He has briefly narrated the history of the growth of the textile sector, i.e., cotton mills, in Ahmedabad city from 1861 to 1961. Its concomitants such as immigration of labour force, population growth at a phenomenal rate, and high density of population in old parts of the city (Doshi 1968: 23-24) posed serious challenges before the close-knit neighbourhood organisations called *pols*. Under the pressure of industrialization the *pols*, that Doshi studied, showed the capacity to survive by continuing to provide security and basic civic amenities to its inhabitants and also to face the challenges by marginally changing its traditional rules and practices (Doshi 1974). However, Doshi's emphasis was more on presenting the ethnology of *pols* and less on tracing the history of its development, although the theme had potential to offer explanation of the changing function of a traditional institution in a rapidly changing industrial city.

A study of Shiv Sena in Bombay by Dipankar Gupta must be mentioned in this discussion for two reasons. First, Shiv Sena was established in 1966 and from its very inception Gupta has observed various stages of its development (between 1966 and 1974) until he concluded his fieldwork (Gupta 1982: vii-viii). In a sense it was a study of an on-going movement that was a source of sensational news almost everyday. Secondly, he has looked into the causes of formation of Shiv Sena in the 1960s, such as increasing unemployment and a growing sense of deprivation among the lower and middle classes in Bombay, resulting from contradictions inherent in the economic structure

characterized by dependent capitalism and nature of industrialization in India, particularly in Bombay metropolis, which discouraged employment but fostered in-migration to the city (*Ibid.*: 52-58). Gupta goes into the political history, ideological currents and party politics in Maharashtra, particularly shortly before and after its formation as a separate state following the massive agitation of the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti in the 1950s (*Ibid.* 39-48). However, this historical account, which is characteristically brief, seems to have very little bearing on the conclusions of the study (*Ibid.*: 185-88).¹¹

In a study of Ahmedabad textile industry that focuses attention on the capital-labour relationship during the 1920s-30s, Sujata Patel has traced the history of the system of trading and marketing in textiles to the institution of *pedhis* in Gujarat. This institution handled such activities ranging from export and import of textiles and money- lending to some kind of organic coordination between merchants and artisans who were organised in trade guilds since the early 16th century. The guild organisation in Gujarat was strong enough to facilitate collective political action of artisans and workers against merchants when required. Over the years, in Ahmedabad a system was then evolved to resolve disputes through arbitration by the *nagarsheth* (Patel 1987: 13-14). This unique system of dispute settlement in the Ahmedabad textile sector in a sense created space for Mahatma Gandhi to effectively unite capital and labour in taking stance against British colonialism. In turn, Gandhi could institutionalize this relationship between capital and labour in such a manner that necessarily replaced encounters and confrontations by peace and capital-labour collaboration. Thereby, Gandhi could bring them both to support the nationalist movement (*Ibid.*:30-110). For this important study Patel did entire archival work all by herself. She consulted official reports of the federal and provincial governments, gazetteers, reports of commissions of inquiry and of Tariff and Textile Boards, and proceedings of legislative Council and Assembly, and also looked into unpublished documents, what, in historical method, are referred to as 'primary sources' (*Ibid.*: 153-54). In addition, she has gathered valuable insightful data through interviews with important political and business personalities.

Patel's study is an ideal case that fits into what is broadly termed as 'historical sociology' because the question she has raised regarding the relationship between capital and labour in Gujarat at a certain historical juncture is basically sociological. Furthermore, by deploying the method of historical analysis Patel has established the fact that contemporary reality of unique relationship of two classes, that otherwise had had antagonistic class interests, had its roots in the 16th century institution of dispute settlement in Gujarat. In her subsequent study of AMUL, a project of the Kheda District Milk Producers' Cooperative known as the 'Anand Pattern', Patel (1990:27-56) has attempted a socio-historical analysis of the developments in the political economy of the *charotar* (Central Gujarat) region that led to the transformation of a milk cooperative into a giant corporate establishment (i.e., Amul) under state patronage. In yet another study of corporatism in Ahmedabad textile industry, Patel (2002) has argued that the Gandhian ideology of corporatism initially helped workers in securing better wages and more congenial working conditions, and in getting enacted certain legislations favouring protection of workers' interests as well as the interests of textile industrialists. However, through Gandhian ideology of corporatism both classes came to be co-opted in the politics of the nationalist movement, then led by the Indian National Congress. In the post-1947 scenario subsequently, thus Gandhian variety of corporatism became state corporatism that, ironically, fettered the textile workers in particular (Patel 2002: 103-13). Here Patel has attempted to build a historical argument to test the validity of the theory of corporatism in general and European syndicalism in particular and to show how the Gandhian and European corporatist ideologies were quintessentially different.¹²

D. Parthasarathy in his study (1997) of collective violence in Vijaywada, a provincial city, has extensively used demographic history of the city to depict its changing social composition, evolution, and the changing statuses of various caste groups – their migration and their shifting occupational patterns from 1871 to 1991. Based on this historical profile of the city, Parthasarathy (1997: 18-83) shows how demographic, social and political pressures drew rich peasant class to the cities, how their participation in the changing urban-industrial economy was influenced by their rural origins. Keeping the power base of the dominant

classes in the rural hinterland intact, rich peasants often resorted to violence as a means of reprisals, to settle old scores. Thus, rivalries inherited from the rural settings and carried over to the new urban-industrial setting drew the contours of collective violence in the city. Hence, far from being spontaneous and irrational, urban collective violence, whether rioting, arson, or gangsterism, over half a century has been an instrument of hegemonic assertion of dominant classes in Vijaywada (*Ibid.*: 123-69). While Parthasarathy does not attempt to reconstruct any past events, he has established historical links between evolution of a city's social structure, patterns of urban land use, and emergence of urban slums (particularly after 1967) on the one hand and collective violence on the other. In doing so, he has used demographic history, caste and ethnographic data as also migration and occupational data covering the span of over a century.

Before concluding this somewhat exhaustive review of the use of history in sociological work in India, it is necessary to mention two studies that are significant and yet quite different in the sense that they do not fit either into studies of movements or agrarian studies, or studies of caste or caste conflict *per se*. In a major research work on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's political and social thought, M.S. Gore has looked into the entire history of evolution of Ambedkar's ideology and its development, through stages of various protest movements he launched from the 1920s onwards, through the phase of Ambedkar's active involvement in the nationalist movement and in the parleys between Gandhi and Indian National Congress on one side and the imperialists on the other (Gore 1993: 73-190). In a sense, Gore's attempt was aimed at putting together Ambedkar's ideas on various issues from the standpoint of a leader and spokesperson of the downtrodden and how his ideological articulation then conditioned the development of the Dalit protest movement in the post-1951 period (*Ibid.*: 191-337). Gore's study could as well be interpreted as an exercise in sociology of ideas as much as in sociology of a protest movement inspired by Ambedkar's ideology. In either case, his use of secondary historical sources is significant, and social construction of ideology in itself is a theme that is sociological in nature.

Somewhat on similar lines, Hetukar Jha has done a study in history of ideas in which he has elaborately focused on the historical

significance of Vidyapati's discourse on *Purush* (man). He has attempted to reconstruct the 'image of man' as a poet-statesman, Vidyapati from Mithila, had posited it during the medieval period in Bihar. Vidyapati had propagated ideas of *dharma* in secular terms, emphasized on irrelevance of caste, *varna* and *kula* in a situation where manliness is put to test in the face of internal strife and ideological confusion and crisis on the one hand, and the onslaught of the Islamic conquests and politico-religious power on the other (Jha 2002: 9-104). In many ways Jha could have projected Vidyapati's discourse on man as a precursor of a contemporary theoretical discourse on 'modernity' that has occupied center stage in Indian sociology for considerable length of time. Though Jha has used history methodically in constructing Vidyapati's views, his overall concern remains confined at best to history of ideas. In substance, Jha has summarised or reinterpreted those ideas of Vidyapati on *purushartha* (in contrast to what was presented in the Indian tradition) that, to him, have some contemporary relevance to the issues of national reconstruction and development.

Concluding Remarks

While summing up this somewhat elaborate review it is necessary to highlight the main tendencies among historically oriented sociologists and the way they view the relevance of history in their sociological studies. The first category of sociologists consists of those who have used classical texts, i.e., Indological sources in understanding contemporary social structures, institutions, statuses, roles, values, and cultural practices by tracing their origins to one or more Sanskrit texts and then reinterpreting or rationalizing them in the present day context. In the second category we find those sociologists, not few in number, who narrate historical background of social reality, either of the past or contemporary one, which they are researching for. In some cases such a historical account is given as a routine matter to assure readers that relevant past has not been ignored. However, neither such a historical account forms a part of researcher's explanatory scheme nor is it integrated with their sociological analysis. In some cases, though, researchers do believe that the historical background given in great detail deepens their understanding of the research problem or may help them to

search appropriate answers to their research questions. In the second category, what is involved is mostly a *metaphoric* use of history.

What is, however, important is the *substantive* use of history for sociological purposes. Among Indian sociologists there are some who have used historical analysis and method substantively, in the sense that they have deployed it as an explanatory device, or to test a hypothesis. It is immaterial whether they have used primary archival sources or secondary sources. A.R. Desai, Yogendra Singh, P.C. Joshi and a few others have attempted macro-analytical exercises primarily with the help of reliable secondary source material. Ramkrishna Mukherjee, however, used both. Significantly enough, quite a few Indian sociologists have tried their hand at historical reconstruction by using or consulting primary archival sources that they thought was necessary for their sociological inquiry. They include A.M. Shah, M.S.A. Rao, Anand Chakravarti, D.N. Dhanagare, Ramchandra Guha, Hetukar Jha, Gail Omvedt, Sujata Patel, P. Radhakrishnan, Hira Singh, and Rajendra Singh.¹³ It is even more heartening to see that some of the younger sociologists, like P. Abbasi, Sharit Bhowmik, C.B. Damle, Surinder Jodhka, D. Parthasarathy, Virginius Xaxa and a few others have further enriched this tradition of substantive use of history in their sociological studies. All of them have displayed remarkable sense of commitment and discipline in using history rigorously to arrive at broader level of explanation, generalization and theoretical abstraction wherever possible without which, they thought, their sociological mission would have remained incomplete.

My argument is that it is the potential of the substantive use of history, whether for a macro or for a micro-analysis, whether by consulting secondary or primary archival sources, that needs to be fully exploited further by Indian sociologists. Over three decades ago A.M. Shah (1974: 454) had suggested that 'sociologists should not depend entirely on historians for historical knowledge but should themselves go into historical research'. His suggestion has not been taken seriously enough.¹⁴ It is high time that Indian sociologists rediscover the intrinsic value of history and historical method by creatively using it in their researches and by using them in their pedagogic practices.

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Notes

1. The list of historians whose researches and writings are akin to sociology is rather long. Quite a few of them have used sociological concepts and also adopted what may broadly be called ‘sociological perspective’. Questions they have raised about society and social institutions, protest movements, Indian national movement, changing agrarian and land relations, agrarian systems, colonial political economy, feudalism, commercial agriculture and capitalism in Indian agriculture, nascent capitalism and emerging class structure in India, and rebellions of subaltern groups and the like are basically sociological in nature. To name a few, of them Shashi Bhushan Chaudhury, J.C. Jha, Kali Kankanker Dutt, Irfan Habib, R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra, Ravinder Kumar, Ranajit Guha, B. B. Mishra, Binay Bhushan Chowdhary, Sunil K. Sen, Savyasachi Bhattacharya, Harbans Mukhia, Gyanendra Pandey, Shahid Amin, Majid H. Siddiqi, Aditya and Mridula Mukherjee, Sourabh Dube and a few others are those scholars who may be called sociologically oriented historians. However, it is not intended to review their works in this paper.

2. This quotation from the review of Ghurye's book, *Caste and Race in India*, published in the *Statesman* (Calcutta) is taken as cited in Ghurye (1973:83).
3. Later on A.M. Shah, in his study of a Gujarat village, has demonstrated with historical proof that 'autonomy and self-sufficiency of Indian village' was no more than a constructed grand myth. This point is discussed later in this paper.
4. One need not undermine the importance of myths in understanding social reality. Often it may so happen, as A.M. Shah put it in his Presidential remarks, 'in the garb of scientific observation sociologists and anthropologists may actually create new myths, while what historians tend to dismiss as 'myths' may be closer to reality'. His point is well taken. Even then it is generally accepted that the task of social scientists, as a community that accepts 'disciplined skepticism' as an act of faith, is to separate myth from history.
5. For the difference between 'dialectical materialism' and 'historical materialism', see Aron (1968: 119, 154-57) and Lefebvre (1970: 60-100).
6. In fact I.P. Desai (1969: Appendix, 1-6) has given a separate note on method of work at the Vedchhi ashram, but he has not revealed the source material used for his study. Obviously, his major source was personal interviews with a large number of activists of the movement and some knowledgeable people.
7. K.L. Sharma has also studied and written on land tenure systems, land reforms and social change in Rajasthan (Sharma 1986: 139-76). However, unlike Radhakrishnan he does not relate these changes to peasant movements in Rajasthan. Sharma's essay aims at contributing to the famous debate on 'feudalism, semi-feudalism and capitalism in Indian agriculture' only.

8. The first such study of class formation in tea plantation estate in the Dooars during 1874-1947 was undertaken by S.K. Bhowmik (1981: 38-79). His emphasis was more on understanding the plantation system, the nature of work and wages of labour, and the role of trade union movement in the 1970s. Nevertheless, he has carefully traced the present day problems of plantation labour to the very origins of the system of recruitment of plantation labour force and the concomitant migration of tribal labour in the North Bengal region. Bhowmik has observed that the predicament of the tea garden worker from the very beginning of plantation was linked to the manner in which the plantation economy in India was tagged to international capitalist system (*Ibid.*: 49-56).
9. Anand Chakravarti (1986) has done a somewhat similar study of the sharecroppers' struggle that he has described as 'an unfinished struggle'. It also ties well with his subsequent study (Chakravarti 2001, already discussed) in which he has explained why till about 1979-80 *bataidars* and agricultural labourers could not resist landlords' oppression by launching a struggle.
10. M.N. Srinivas has, however, argued that in the *Sanskritisation* process members of lower castes emulate the life style, behaviour pattern, cultural practices, dress, food habits, and norms and values of members of the dominant castes primarily to claim higher status and greater acceptability from upper castes. For details on the concept of *Sanskritisation*, see Srinivas 1966: 1-45.
11. For instance, when Dipankar Gupta started his study of the Shiv Sena movement in Maharashtra in the 1970s it was still an on-going movement. Even then it would have been fruitful for him had he probed the historical background of the making of the Shiv Sena leader Bal Thakre, who has inherited certain political ideas and social attitudes from his distinguished father Prabodhankar Thakre, whose writings in the 1920s and 1930s provide enough insights into the ideological eclecticism that appears to be the hallmark of Shiv Sena today. See, for example, D. Kamble (2002: 50-86, 102-76). However, it is not suggested here that all studies of social movements must necessarily use historical method, or

consult historical records in great depth. This is particularly true for studies of on-going movements that may not have roots in the past. Even when a researcher has looked into historical background, it may or may not have any bearing on a contemporary movement and his/her conclusions about it.

12. Sujata Patel (2000: 288-321) has also attempted a rigorous historical construction and reconstruction of women in Mahatma Gandhi's thought and action (or strategy) that steered the Indian national movement. However, to us this work belongs to the field of 'women's studies or gender studies' in which several other scholars across different disciplines have done studies using history. They include Neera Desai, Bina Agarwal, Malvika Karlekar, Maithreyee Krishna Raj, Meera Kosambi, Prem Choudhary, Vidyut Bhagwat and others. It was not possible to review them all within the scope of this paper.
13. One more Indian sociologist, Satish Saberwal has consistently and creatively engaged himself with history in understanding the historical development of caste mobility, communalism, and Hindu-Muslim divided identities over centuries. For reasons of space, however, I could not delve on his contribution to historical sociology at some length but that does not lessen its importance. Despite his somewhat unhappy experience of working in a major History Centre at JNU, Saberwal (2000: 31-32) recommends 'sociologists to have a bifocal vision that commands a generalized insight one gains from sociology and also a familiarity with historical junctures that have shaped and reshaped social processes through time'.
14. Quite a few younger generation sociologists in India have been turning to history in a meaningful way. Works of some of them have been reviewed in this paper. However, those whose studies could not be discussed here are Nandini Sunder (1997), Rowena Robinson (2003) and Debal K. SinghaRoy (1992, 2004). Of course, not every one of them has used historical approach with the same intention and rigour. However, their writings are pointers to a promising future that historical sociology has in India.

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