

I.P. Desai Memorial Lecture: 16

THE FIELDWORK TRADITION IN SOCIOLOGY

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Studies of social events and processes make their own demands on researchers, on their tools of inquiry, and on orientations towards unravelling the hidden forces. What is recent for a geologist is archaeological for others, pre-history for yet others. When one speaks of the significance of history, E.H. Carr would insist on the study of the present and locate its historical development. For others the past is the starting point in its own right and the present a degeneration of the golden age. Then there is a view that history is a record of significant stages of evolution, for Sorokin a cycle of events, and at least in one more meaning a dustbin to which things no longer relevant are to be confined. There could be arguments on the unfolding of history, on paths that historical determinism dictates, or at the explanatory level, on the location of a significant event or process in conglomeration of factors unique to the time and the place. For instance, why in Western Europe and Western Europe alone in the nineteenth century all social characteristics emerged that to this day continue to be called 'modernization'? The specificity of the events and their consequences, bearing in mind improvements in the 'quality of life' are later paraded along 'universal' and 'human' lines. Alternatives too develop within the Western European frame and compete for acceptance, till by the end of the last quarter of the twentieth century one alternative seems to wither away. Yet the eternal conflict of ideas, dialogues and choice of alternatives continue to be the hallmark of discourse of modernity and history. The existence of the competing perspectives and dialogues marks the core of the discourse. It is our purpose here to locate these possibilities in the study of social movements and events and relate them to the structure of the units under inquiry, howsoever we define them. First, a few words on the time span of the inquiry and how it affects the result of the exercise. As the present lecture is being delivered in Gujarat and in I.P. Desai's memory, I propose to deal with the nature of the fieldwork done in the state through a few selective references. My own understanding or interest in the state arises out of the experience in guiding a Ph.D. thesis here (Doshi, 1974) and several visits to the state, including one to Vedchhi, and the last one to Vyara when a fellow sociologist told me, 'we have some Gaikwadi influence', with a sense of dignity.

STUDY OF EXISTING SOURCES

When a fieldworker covers a span of a few decades in a society where written records of those who had been participants in the forces under inquiry are available, for all purposes the fieldworker is handling the first hand data and making his own assessment of their reliability and relevance. Let us begin with an examination of one such document: Mahadev Desai's *The Story of Bardoli – Being a History of the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928 and its Sequel (1929)*, which has the author's disclaimer, 'I never had the privilege of taking part as "a combatant" in the Bardoli 'Satyagraha' in the first sentence in the Preface. Then follows a statement on what was he. 'I had enough work as a "non-combatant" in the Satyagraha army, and because of my close association with the Sardar of the campaign I had the pleasure and privilege of witnessing some of the moving scenes described in the following pages'. Then there is a self-evaluation, 'the narrative therefore is an authentic and somewhat intimate record, cast in a chronological sequence'. Events proper begin with chapter V entitled 'Twelfth of February' (p.27) leading through significant episodes on 4th August. All this happened in the year 1928, when I.P. Desai was 17 years young, an age normal for clearing the matriculation examination and for becoming acquainted with the trends of social forces operating in some significant measure in the country that was beginning to feel the fervour of a national struggle for independence. In today's phraseology, it has become almost a routine conversation to ask, 'what is the relevance of a particular study?' Mahadev Desai, to whom the question was not specifically asked, had included a statement that could have been a reply to such a contingency: it is likely to be of some value to all those who are interested in the method of Satyagraha as a weapon to secure justice and freedom (Preface iii).

Confining first to the value of the narrative as a repository of information and its use by social scientists, three types are discernible.

(1) There are scholars who have used the work, along with other contemporary records, to gauge the influence of the movement in political mobilization during the period, though focusing on castes and other units. In this category come Anil Bhatt (1970) whose accounts make one feel the flavour and essence of the struggle and Sardar Patel's *modus operandi* and qualities of leadership, and Ghanshyam Shah (1974) who specifically addressed himself to '*Traditional Society and Political Mobilization, the Experience of Bardoli Satyagraha (1920-1928)*'. Besides Mahadev Desai's work, Shah makes ample use of the *Satyagraha Patrika*, a newspaper

published everyday during the Satyagraha, and a few other regional sources. The two authors supplement their information through interviewing knowledgeable persons who had direct or indirect connections with the process under study.

(2) Scholars who have made ample use of Mahadev Desai's work for weaving together the actors and their role in the struggle to arrive at alternative assessments of the venture without doing any fieldwork of their own, form the second type of users of research. Chapter 4 in Dhanagare's work, *Peasant Movements in India 1920-1950*, is a case in point. The chapter is entitled 'The Bardoli Satyagraha: Myth and Reality' (1983: 88-110) which makes the largest number of references to Mahadev Desai's work, 15 times to be exact. Dhanagare's main thrust is on the choice of 'minor agrarian issues', to the neglect of 'more fundamental questions relating to land control and antagonistic class relations', 'espousal of a particular class', preference to compromise with the authorities has support coming 'primarily from the better-off sections of the Indian peasantry', and the existence of the 'constructive programme which had helped the Congress to sustain basic liberal, grass roots level' (1994: 88-9). The use of the word 'myth' relates to the 'success' of the Satyagraha claimed by Gandhian workers, a situation not denied by Bhatt and Shah, but the 'reality' of non-success is stressed by Dhanagare through inclusion of the next civil disobedience movement in the sequence of events upto the Gandhi-Irwin pact of 1931. And, 'if that is taken as the terminating point of the Bardoli peasant struggle one can reasonably say that the government succeeded in restoring its prestige and in cowing the peasant proprietors into submission' (*ibid*: 106). Hence the success was a 'myth'. The debate on the perspective apart, from the point of methodology a significant poser emerges about the beginning and end of a research effort, and their implications for the results; for all that is commonly known, if the period be extended to 1947, the government that had succeeded in restoring its prestige and in cowing down the peasant proprietors into submission, had quit India, winding shop. Likewise, the area under inquiry gets its own significance. In delimiting the scope of the study, Dhanagare states that all those areas which were under the princely states, have been excluded, with the exception of Hyderabad (Telangana) (1994: 20). For purpose of the happenings in Bardoli, this works out that the interactions with the princely states of Baroda on three sides of Bardoli and the neighbouring smaller states of Dharampur, the Dangs, Vansda and Rajpipla got excluded as also the administrative regions of Daman and Nagar Haveli, which later scholars like David Hardiman took into account (1987).

(3) The third type of response lay in dismissing Mahadev Desai's work as what historian E.H Carr would have classified as not belonging to the club of historical facts. Hardiman comments on 'nationalistic history' and says, "another technique found in such writings is to relegate to insignificance the early stages of adivasi initiative while throwing spotlight on the bourgeois workers who commonly went to the adivasi villages at a later stage of the movement, and claiming as if they were going to virgin areas of adivasi backwardness to "uplift the tribals". A good example of this form of distortion is provided by Mahadev Desai's *The Story of Bardoli* (Hardiman, 1987: 7). Then follow a few quotations that name the nationalist workers and leave the tribals unnamed being 'depicted as a mere collective lump to be leavened' (*ibid*: 8). These accounts could be easily criticized at the factual level (*ibid*).

The critics of the nationalistic perspective include 'socialist histories', which Hardiman considers: "as history, accounts of this sort are in no way superior to writings of nationalists, for in both cases the adivasis are appropriated to an external cause" (*ibid*: 9). The author then criticizes the manner in which 'religiosity' of the adivasis is ignored in such socialist histories. Further, their studies get confined 'to highly militant struggles in which the economic cause of discontent appears to be of far greater consequence than any informing religious ideology.' Then Hardiman stresses on the need for study of 'less militant and more obviously religious movements', which appear 'to the socialist historians to be suffused with a backward looking', or perhaps 'petty bourgeois religiosity which they believe cripples the enterprise from the start'. The author terms their orientation as an elitist form of socialism and defines the scope of his own study, adopting 'a more genuinely socialist course, which is to write a history of the adivasis in which they are the subject'. So far so good. The characterization is in simple language. It itself becomes 'elitist' when two labels are attached to the whole of the exercise, viz., a genuinely socialist one and a part of the wider '*subaltern studies*', a prime aim of which is to understand the consciousness that informed and still informs political actions taken by the subaltern classes on their own, independently of any elite initiative (Chakrabarty in Hardiman, 1987), referred to by Hardiman in an acceptable tone, with further notes on the collective acts of the peasantry as fundamentally religious' (Chatterjee in Hardiman, 1987) in a similar vein.

The subaltern perspective finds a mention in PG Course 4 of the UGC Model Curriculum in Sociology (2001: 51) with two authors specifically mentioned, B.R. Ambedkar and David Hardiman. It is pertinent

to mention that neither in 'Essential Readings' nor in 'References' any work of the former is mentioned, and under 'References' the two works, *Feeding the Bania: Peasants and Usurers in Western India (1996)* and *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India* of Hardiman find mention. Those works need attention. However, we may profit more from comments on the 1996 work by the person whose competence in understanding the theme inside out, A.M. Shah, is beyond question. Only let this be said here, that in the context of the theme of today's presentation, the UGC syllabus also mentions 'Syntheses of Textual and Field Views' (Karve, 1961; Shah, 1979). Here again a work of the former, *Hindu Society: An interpretation* (1961), is an essential reading; and A.M. Shah is conspicuous by no mention. So let us deal first with Hardiman's work.

A bit of search in the *Chamber's Twentieth Century and Oxford's Concise Dictionary* suggests that the term 'subaltern' could signify 'subordinate'; or the idea of 'the other' obviously of a lower rank. The general idea of distribution of power and prestige into high and low categories, where the upper group defines the standards and identifies those not acting upto them as lower than the norm, had a long history in social science discourse. Ghurye had considered the birth of the caste system itself as a clever device of the Brahmans of the Gangetic plains (1969, 5th ed.) and the literature is full of such references the world over. Shakespear's tragic heroes were great men, and his comic characters those that slipped from the norm; and his characterization of caliban is that of almost sub-human. It drew strong protests from Latin American literature in the twentieth century. The Bhakti movements in India were interpreted as a protest of the low, and in contemporary India the processes of sanskritization and westernization have begun to work simultaneously among the emerging elites of the lower sections. Social anthropologists the world over precisely concentrated on 'the other' who for all intents and purposes were tried to be empathically studied by experts.

To those of us familiar with doing field work among the tribals and the other economically backward sections, it was only normal to try to understand the other's ways of doing things as normal and never deprived of culture. The attack, as it were, was on the tribal customs and mores. Forces of civilization have been gone into detail, the loss of nerve talked about, and expressions of discontent and revolt noted. In fact, some efforts were made through Applied Anthropology and planned developments to work for what in today's terminology would qualify for in-situ solutions. What then is new about this growing concern with 'subaltern studies'?

Let me guess. The first factor appears to be that the tradition of fieldwork is new to socialist scholarship. The classic formulation of Engels was based on the writings of Morgan, who had lived generations before systematic field studies became the norm in social anthropology through the pioneering works of Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Franz Boas in the first quarter of the twentieth century and their subsequent spread over nearly half a century. The second factor looks like the connecting link between tools of research and theoretical perspective that got closely associated. 'Conjectural History', or more authoritative one, had been hand-in-glove with the theory of evolution, and the field studies with at least some recognizable degree of participant observation got connected with the structural-functional approach. Such inter-connections between research tools and theoretical perspectives were, to my mind, got overworked, and today at least we have better realization of how a few tools (and concepts) developed in one perspective or closely associated with it, can be freed from the conditions or situations of their origin, and mix or move freely with others to arrive at penetrating analyses.

However, the concern with 'the other' or the lower section has carried us to the other extreme, where the facts of social life come out to be those as described and felt by the people themselves, and the way of looking at them by themselves presented as a legitimate (even logical) inquiry. Then an additional input of a theoretical perspective is added, that of the study of 'exploitation' and 'hegemony' and the assertion of identity that may or may not become so overt. Here the scholar uses his skills rather than the subject of study, and his theorization enters a new realm. Classes and class-conflicts in the mode of 'capitalist' production are somewhat given a second thought when dealing with a society in which class divides have not developed as in the industrial world. The concern is thereby shifted to the Gramscian term 'centrality of relationship of ordination and subordination'. It is in this context that the statement of Hardiman in following 'a more genuinely socialist course' (1987: 8) can be understood, as also the title of Jan Breman's study, *Patronage and Exploitation: Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat, India* (1974), of which a little later; and perhaps Hardiman's other work, *Feeding the Bania: Peasants and Usurers in Western India* (1996). It is obvious from the last title that the Bania is not the subject of the study, almost like the Desais in Breman's study. He now becomes 'the other'. Suffice it to say that an alternate view is also possible.

Gujarat is one of the more urbanized states (37.67 percent urban population in 2001, next only to Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra among larger

states of India) and a large part of its agriculture has been commercial, with cotton, peanuts, oil seeds and horticulture providing the cash nexus. The movement of agricultural groups to urban centres has been quite noticeable, and that was a factor that weighed with Vallabhbhai Patel in not extending the peasant struggle to Chorasi area (Desai, 1929: 34). The interconnections of the Kanbis, Anavlas and Mussalmans with South Africa has been referred to in *Story of the Bardoli Satyagrah* (1929: 4). Among sociological inquiries, Harish Doshi (1974: 38-40) noted the presence of Patel Pol in Ahmedabad almost as a carry forward of a *gemeinschaft* in the urban center. But more importantly, for purpose of this presentation, there was the diversification of occupations among the Kadva Patels with quite a few becoming leading politicians, officials, industrialists, businessmen and trained personnel in private and government institutions (*ibid*: 40). In the larger urban context their pre-eminence in industries was illustrated by the presence of 9 out of 30 members of the executive of the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industries. One may note an analogous movement among the Reddys of Andhra Pradesh; but when one comes to look at the Jats of western Uttar Pradesh, one sees their mobility towards administration, the army and the police rather than towards business or industry.

OBSERVATIONS OF DAILY LIFE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF WORDS FOR RESPECTABLE PERSONS

This brings me to a few personal observations of daily life, a technique these days associated with Bourdieu (Wacquant, 2002: 549-56) who thought that the country of the momentous revolution needed a dose of looking at daily life and conversation of its citizens; one more instance of a time honoured fieldwork being given a new name or legitimacy and claimed as a significant departure. But my question is: what is the regional word for a respectable person? In Bengal '*Bhadralok*' sounds a bit classical, but in popular parlance it is *babu*, a person who knows how to wield the pen and conversation to good effect. Even the former Chief Minister was "Jyothi Babu" and it is quite in order to designate the leading sociologist by calling him Ramkrishna Babu (the reference being to Ramkrishna Mukherjee). In the Punjab "*Lala ji*" passes, as in Lala Lajpat Rai or Lala Amarnath Chaudhri, would do among the Jat of western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. The respectable word for a decent person in Gujarat is "*Sheth*" and any beggar could entreat any donor as "*Sheth*". Vania as a term of reference is neutral, but Hardiman's use of the term "*Bania*" becomes a synonym for an exploiter, quite like the word "marwari" outside Marwar. Hence, one can put

Hardiman upside down or right side up in his presentation of the businessman from an object to a subject.

The ethos of patronage was traditionally found more commonly among the Kshatriya rulers and landlords who could be addressed as '*annadata*', '*malik*' and '*mai-bap*' by the 'subaltern' when they had not become articulate or organized. Proper use of the mode of address or as a term of reference for the respected section of society is a valuable technique in conducting field work, as well in presentation of data. While analyzing the situation a classification of 'respectful', 'disgraceful' and 'neutral' categories could be helpful, with perhaps the social scientist opting for the last mentioned as a generic category. This would be different from the titles like 'Myth and Reality', 'Patronage and Exploitation', or 'Feeding the Bania'.

I would like to add a few observations of daily life that make me understand the ethos of a region like Gujarat or Punjab. An incident in a railway compartment during the period when 'Inter Class' compartments with three horizontal berths and two upper berths were in vogue. One of the passengers put the latch to close the door. He kept on telling prospective entrants, 'There is a lock'. Three-fourth of them agreed to look for accommodation elsewhere. Then came an enterprising youth. 'How come, you entered the train?' 'We came from behind, the other side of the platform.' The youngster took the gauntlet, went to the other side, and demanded the door be opened. He could not be refused. Then he quipped, *lock laga hai ji* (it is locked) mimicking the first person. He too yielded by saying, 'So you have managed to come in at last' (*Are ap to aa hi gayeji*). The tone was in the nature, 'Be satisfied now'. This is an illustration of 'assertion' and then getting used to a success on balance.

I now point to a second incident. We were travelling by bus from Delhi towards Chandigarh. The bus stopped near a village on road-side. The driver looked helpless. After two minutes, the passengers showed impatience, and the driver said that something was wrong with the bus. One passenger asked, 'What is wrong with the bus?' Others joined in, 'The clutch, the break, the pipe'. Soon half a dozen passengers showered different technical questions, but the driver kept quiet. By then he had received his lunch box from home. The generality of technical knowledge about the transport system ensured that no excuse was possible on the count, at least in Punjab.

Now back to Gujarat. A look at the agricultural field will be enough to locate plants in straight rows, as at the time of sowing a string is used to demarcate the line of sowing. Commercial crops ensure accountability at each step, which probably lies behind the success or recent questioning of the cooperatives. The ethos of commerce prevails all over the state. While purchasing a small new item in Surat, a friend of mine acted as an agent, and told the shopkeeper that he had not earned much that day, and pleaded for a 10 per cent commission. The shopkeeper conceded, '*10 percent to wajab chhe*'.

One more incident on a railway train in a general compartment. Some one had spread a bed sheet on the upper berth. Then came a passenger from Delhi side, and tried to put his luggage there, saying that space was meant for the luggage. Fellow passengers from the region were not impressed. In hushed tones they said, 'Why bother that fellow.. he too must have paid something for the facility'. Thereby the legitimacy was conceded on customary grounds of having paid for a facility. Another person entered a train in a Ist Class compartment as a daily commuter at 6.50 A.M. for the train scheduled to depart at 7 A.M., and complained of 'standing accommodation' only. A fellow passenger said, 'at 6.50 you can get only a standing space'.

I continue to be impressed by the accounting process as an idiom of the common man in Gujarat. While the state had a hundred princely states (in Saurashtra) before 1947, the erstwhile princes were quick to adopt the business ethos; a type of transformation described for the Middle East by Daniel Learner in the famous case study of 'the Grocer and the Chief', conducted after a reasonable gap, which concluded, 'The old grocer was dead. He was reborn in the son of the chief'. A social scientist should allow the daily occurrences to be observed for the insight that they offer, specially in a region different from his own, thereby sharpening a comparative outlook. He can then draw some hypotheses as to how standards of respectable persons and their behaviour are different in different regions (and probably in different strata within the region): differences in being a '*babu*' in Bengal, '*sheth*' in Gujarat, and '*chaudhari*' in Western U.P. and Haryana among the Jat. They signify some sort of ethos of the concerned groups, and further that these are not fixed stereotypes but connected with setting the reference group for others to follow. This could then present a reading different from the one that Hardiman has for the 'Bania'.

THE DEVI: AN ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION

The hard work put in by Hardiman in his studies is in itself amazing, particularly his near odyssey in searching for the origin of the Devi. Every conversation with a possible lead to a village makes him go further until he reaches a point beyond which further evidence is not available. The sheer persistence in the effort bogs down imagination which reminds me of David Pocock telling me that he had studied Indians in Kenya, found quite a few Gujaratis there, so he came to Gujarat to study the interplay between religion and economic development near Somnath temple and growing cement works in the region. Then he discovered that the deity closest to the Gujarati ethos was Shrinath Ji. He therefore decided to travel to Nathadwara, Shrinath Ji's place, and at I.P.'s suggestion met me in Udaipur. What is important is that Hardiman talked to knowledgeable persons all along the journey, recorded their names, places and dates of interview. That most of them were ordinary persons who could be trusted for the details, marks the high point of the study. His interpretation that 'the Devi originated at a small pox propitiation ceremony which started in the fishing villages of Palghar taluka, probably in late 1921 or early 1922, and travelled along the course shown on Map 3' covering the region (Hardiman, 1987: 22-23), raises a few questions in the wider perspective.

The epidemic believed to be a consequence of soldiers returning from World War I, was widespread in India and claimed several lives. Persons who got affected and survived, got pimples on their bodies, on the face in particular, which were in the nature of boils that had left deeper or minor depressions on the face. In large portions of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh these were described in popular parlance as '*mataji*', the bigger one as '*badi*', the lesser in size as '*chhoti*'. They were believed to be the results of divine anger, and '*mataji*', a local deity in most of the villages, had to be cooled down. The designation for such a deity, therefore, was "*Shitla mata*" – indicating that meaning. The beginning of the new year in Vikram calendar in the month of Chaitra after Holi festival, usually in April, marks seven days for the worship of the deity. On the seventh day, a final ceremony, participated in mostly by the women of the village, is observed as '*Shitla Saptami*' (Chauhan, 1988: 76).

In the princely state of Mewar, Maharana Sangram Singh II begot a son Bhim Singh on this date, got a temple built in the name of Shitla Mata, and decreed that thenceforth the festival would be observed on the following day (*ashtami*). Thus, 'only in the Mewar territory is the festival observed on

the Ashtami. And over other territories in Rajputana it continues to be observed on Saptami (the seventh day)', records the court historian Shyamaldas in the classic work *Vir Vinod* (nd: 136). Internal evidence suggests that the work might have been completed during the nineteenth century. Hence, the existence of Shitla Mata pre-dates the emergence of small pox epidemic after the World War I. The deity has a spread much wider than Gujarat. The deity is associated with all troubles connected with misfortunes in the wake of divine displeasure. The deity has to be 'cooled down' and this process involves taking food cooked the previous night so that even the heat of the hearth is dispensed with. The deity is thus 'appeased' whenever an abnormal difficulty gets associated with her wrath or displeasure. To this generic function was added the epidemics of chicken pox and small pox. One regional variation could be found in Gujarat in the case of Salabai mentioned by Hardiman. Marriott's conceptual categories of 'universalisation' and 'parochialisation' of festivals and deities, and their local, regional and national 'spread', have been noted prominently in social anthropological writings (Srinivas, 1952, and Dube, 1958).

The connection of the Devi with Gandhiji's programme of abstinence and self-reliance forms a significant part of Hardiman's work. Reference is made to the 'First Kaliparaj conference of 21 January 1923 wherein the conference was divided into two separate sections, one for the workers and the other for the Adivasis, with greeting Vallabhbai's speech as "garam", "garam", "garam", and waving of red cloth symbolic of Devi's influence, are graphically mentioned (1987: 191-2). The author relies for the source of information on a 1977 publication of B.P. Vaidya, '*Retima Vahan*' and I.P. Desai's *Raniparajma Jagriti* (1971), thereby further indicating the plasticity of things divine.

I.P. DESAI ON VEDCHHI MOVEMENT

I.P. Desai's study of the Vedchhi movement (1977, 32-158) is marked by the choice of the period over which the inquiry is spread, viz., 1922 to 1967, subdivided into two parts with 1947 as the demarcation line. In terms of political activities, the pre-independence period gets subdivided into several periods. The period 1922-1929 is marked by the 'decline in the political movement but of rise in the Vedchhi movement'. It is during the year 1928 that the Bardoli Satyagraha had taken place. The period 1929-1936 is marked by 'intense political activity and decline in the Vedchhi movement', the period 1937-1942 by stable work with 'the Congress Party

in power', and then the period 1942-45 by political activity. During the last short period between 1945 and 1947 'the work done up to 1942 was carried further'.

From the point of literature on rural studies, it is worth recalling that on the eastern side of India, the non-significance of political process had been noted for the corresponding period by F.G. Bailey in his famous comment, 'While the economic forces cut across the village, the political process passed tangentially over it (1957)'. On the west coast, 'the tides in the political movement' were considered sufficiently significant to provide a classification for periods of study.

While the time span of the study covers 45 years and takes note of the background situation, it may be taken to mean as covering half a century. Four major sources of information have been used: '(i) the written material, published (ii) unpublished; (iii) long open ended interviews or guided talks with 30 individuals who have been in the movement before 1947 and after 1947; and (iv) the observer lived in these institutions, attended their meetings and conferences and talked to many people informally' (1977: 38). Needless to say that most of the written material, conversations, and observations of life went along with frequent use of the regional language, Gujarati, which has its own idiomatic flavour and punch. He could understand the people. This combination of the sources available in written form and conversations with people who had first hand experience of events, as well as IP's own live experiences of institutions and the more general life of the region over a long period of time, enabled him to produce an enlightening work on a theme with which others have had their mental gymnastics.

The style of presentation in the study is direct and avoids clichés. I.P. is modest when he says 'the present study has no pretensions of being a sociological study' (*ibid*: 36), neither a set of hypotheses to commence with nor an exploratory study in the accepted sense. Its 'very humble aim' is 'to classify the information around different elements of the movement that took place in the Adivasi areas of about 30 miles in the eastern part of Surat district during the years from 1922 to 1967'. His further pinprick is, 'The study is likely to irk both who wish to see a comprehensive study and those who look for an intensive study (*ibid*: 40). I think Desai always enjoyed himself in teasing those who thought the use of concepts (jargons) and sophisticated statistical procedures, or anything that exhibits scholasticism showed as if they were more bothered about form rather than substance, and that too not merely in sociology but also in entire life style.

Contrast the laboured explanation of the term 'subaltern studies' by Ranjit Guha and David Hardiman, and a non-technical phrase used by I.P. Desai as a heading for Section I of the Vedchhi Movement: 'The Social Reform Movement among the Adivasis Initiated by the Adivasis themselves' (1977: 41). Consider again the clear-cut heading for Section II, 'The Political Movement for National Independence Goes to the Adivasis' and contrast this with the entire discussion on the sequence and significance of the two streams that disturbed Hardiman to the extent of calling into question the nationalist and socialist historians and his own claim for being the true socialist historian. All these labels and over-worked dialogues had little place in Desai's thought process, as he insisted on getting straight to the crux of the problem. Even in his description he provided the underlying explanation.

I recall a discussion after the late A.R. Desai's assertion that economic questions had not been centrally attacked in many rural studies. I.P. quipped: 'Will you be satisfied if in the questionnaire, I include, "How many acres of land do you have?" to farmers in the rural setting?' Regarding a research design coined in Parson's terminology, his observation was, 'But where is sociology in it?' He had the capacity to catch the central theme even of research written in technical phraseology, and relate it to ground reality, without making a fuss of it. This is very different from those who criticize 'models' without taking the trouble to understand the same. Yes, to be simple is a difficult exercise.

PEDAGOGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF FIELDWORK

Now I make a few observations beyond Gujarat, relating to pedagogic significance of field work and my own experiences, obligations towards the subject of study, and the challenges faced in the emerging context of international concerns for studying and initiating interventions in areas of poverty reduction and related matters.

Participant observation has pedagogic significance in the sense that the teacher-supervisor trains the upcoming students and instils in them the confidence to observe social events and keep on discussing their significance over a prolonged period. The tradition of fieldwork and continuous interactions in seminars introduced by Malinowski (1922) was carried forward by Raymond Firth in London School of Economics, of which Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and J.F. Bulsara from India were the direct products.

With D.N. Majumdar imbibing it, the tradition continues through N.S. Reddy, T.N. Madan, K.S. Mathur (Malwa), G.S. Bhatt (Dehradun), T.B. Naik (Valsad), L.P. Vidyarthi (Gaya), C.B. Tripathi (Chor Ka Gakron), Gopal Saran and several others. It is worth recalling that Majumdar spent his summer vacation at Chakrata in Jaunsar-Bawar region where he kept on working for the master piece, *Himalayan Polyandry* (1962). He asked me to visit there, to prepare my own synopsis for research that ultimately led to my book, *A Rajasthan Village* (1967). A group of researchers there were doing fieldwork and got excited over the transfer of a village school teacher who was popular in the village, and subsequent fall in student attendance. They said, 'Let Dr. Majumdar come. We will acquaint him with this, and ask for the cancellation of the transfer of the teacher'. Majumdar returned after two days, and the excited conversation was unleashed upon him. Quiet sat the senior villagers and then had the last word, 'Yes, the village school-master was the Romeo of the village'. The young researchers were on their first field visit, while their teacher had a sustained experience in the region. We also learnt from him an extended use of the genealogical chart.

Among other cumulative experiences of fieldwork I may mention the efforts of the Lucknow-Cornell group (later Lucknow withdrawing from it). In the 1950's nearly a dozen of American anthropologists concentrated on what are now referred to as the Rajput and Tyagi villages by S.C. Dube (1958) in western Uttar Pradesh and on Madhopur in the eastern part. The latter happened to be the original village of one R.D. Singh who had gone to Cornell for higher studies, written a term paper on it, and attracted the attention of Morris Opler for sustained fieldwork. These three villages provided a field of study for several dissertations and publications. The villagers were telling fresh researchers, 'Come, we will enable you also to get your Ph.D.' (*apko bhi Ph.D. karva denge*).

In my own case, as a student of M.A. classes, I was a member of the educational tour of the Dudhi area in south eastern corner of Uttar Pradesh. The senior teacher D.N. Majumdar had conducted the programme. Morning tea with him used to be a conversation hour. That visit has a lasting impact on me. When I joined the teaching profession in Udaipur in September 1949, the topic, 'Influence of Geographical Factors on Social Life', provided the beginning of teaching in various texts – MacIver and Page included. The half-yearly examination in December was conducted with the same question asked with a rider: 'Illustrate your answer with examples drawn from the situation around you'. The question was answered with reference to the Eskimo and the Prairies about which students had read, but none applied the

vision of the local environment around. The best of the students could not cross 40 per cent marks in the question. Hence, I thought the mode of teaching needed a change. Every week they were taken to nearby fields, made to see the material out of which houses had been constructed, irrigation gadgets made, and fields fenced. We discovered our laboratory.

Further, we planned three-day camps in the village to observe things there. We formed teams for work. The experiment was linked with half-yearly examinations, and was later transferred to the University for inclusion in the syllabus. When the Masters programme started, we got fieldwork included as an exercise in social investigations and research. On one occasion we planned a study in Kerala. The experiment added to a variety of experience and confidence of the students, something they cherished for long in their memory.

In Meerut University, where I moved later, we devised a course on 'practicals in sociology', imparting seven different skills, from writing one page to 4 to 8 pages, and then 30 pages. These exposures provided the feel of the field to the students and stood them in good stead in their interviews where some competence in the application of knowledge was required. I also tried to visit the field of study of most of the candidates doing their work for a research degree. These interactions helped them to look for better interconnection of the selected data and the wider setting of both the society and the subject. Moreover, their written accounts become more lively.

Harish Doshi's accounts of the Pols in Ahmedabad became more lively with the mention of group sports competitions (1974: 124) and with the design of the study modified to include a comparative perspective. In the village studied by Giri Raj Gupta (1974) we came across a piquant situation. We attempted a sort of 'cohort' study, i.e., study of the progress of the same batch of students of a class over the years. By the time a few students moved three classes, father's name had been changed. These students came from such caste groups where *nata* was permissible, and their mother had got a different husband. Examples can be multiplied. Thus, for our present concern as a pedagogic exercise in participatory learning fieldwork has its own strength.

In Meerut University, after a visit to the villages described in *India's Changing Villages* (Dube, 1958), a student increased his speed of reading that book by more than five times, as he could connect what he had seen with what he was reading. Two students got interested in including the large village, out of these villages, as a part of their Ph.D. work (Pundir and

Arvind Chauhan) and two junior researchers (V.P. Singh and Parvez Abbasi) got their training in fieldwork in that village and in two other villages included in our study, *Rural Urban Articulations* (1990). They then continued with us on study of Muslims in Meerut region. One of them developed his own thesis later (Abbasi, 1999), publishing it as *Social Inequality among Indian Muslims*. In turn, he further trained two young students in the field during a research project on *Muslims in Meerut Revisited* (Chauhan, 2001a). One of them then continued his research interest at Surat. Earlier, two research scholars participating in the Nepal Areas Studies course for M.Phil had chosen their research area in that country for their Ph.D. programmes. K.S. Chauhan wrote his thesis on *Peasant Organisation – An Asian Experience* (1987) and Dharam Vir on “Education in Nepal”, and the third extended his studies to Singapore (Mishra, 1994). Field studies under the personal guidance of a senior scholar on the spot is a valuable input in the training of researchers, as was evident in the case of ‘a Gujarati Vania’ in *The Remembered Village* (Srinivas, 1976), besides others referred to earlier.

The Rajput village of S.C. Dube’s reference (1958) became the area of study for various research workers. From India there were two research workers: Chauhan (1990) and Arvind Chauhan (‘Dynamics of Agrarian Relations and Social Structure – With Special Reference to a Village in Western Uttar Pradesh’ – a JNU Thesis (1991). The researchers from U.S.A. used the pseudonym Khalapur for this village, which, as Michael Mahar told us, had become ‘Asia’s most studied village’. John Gumperz, Pauline Kolenda and their students continued their research in this village. The “Tyagi” village covered by S.C. Dube was first studied by Raghuraj Gupta, and then re-studied by Ajit K. Danda under a different name. T.R. Singh and A Satyanarayana have been paying continuous attention to this village.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative aspects of fieldwork received an effective articulation in Epstein’s research in *South India: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. She stated, ‘I regarded the collection of quantitative data as constituting the skeleton of my material; the qualitative data provided the flesh (1978: 17)’. She ‘collected genealogies for all residents in Wangala and Dalena; attended all marriages, meetings and functions’ (*ibid*: 18) that took place during her stay. The ‘Yesterday’ relates to the picture presented in *Economic Development and Social Change* (1962) during the years 1954-56; ‘Today’ relates to 1978; and ‘Tomorrow’ to a vision of 1978; which again became ‘Yesterday’ in *Village Voices: Forty Years of Rural Transformation in South India* (1998). Actual

fieldwork relates to 1954-56 in the first instance (1 year and 8 months in the two villages). During a re-exposure in 1970 after 15 years, she 'stayed in one of Mandya's traveller's bungalows and commuted daily to Wangala or Dalena (1978: 20) for a period 'no more than five weeks in the field' (Ibid: 19). 'A further re-exposure in June 1996' was also 'a brief period of four weeks', the investigator staying again 'in a small town house in Mandya' (1998: 136).

The book, *Village Voices: Forty Years of Rural Transformation*, includes two articulations. One is by A.P. Suryanarayana 'who originates from Mysore city and became a public servant working in the state capital, but was always ready to accompany me (Epstein) to the village' (*ibid*: 18). The second is Thimegowda, 'a bright young peasant boy of Wangala (who) got first class Master's degree in economics and is today high ranking I.A.S. officer and resides in the (state) capital. He plays an active role in the development of the village using his insight and administrative abilities.' The long duration of contacts of the two research assistants since 1954 enabled them to keep on collecting data for the senior researcher and, ultimately, to provide the component of 'village voices' to the study. It contains 66 pages of a total of 232 as contributing authors, and a joint piece of 25 pages at the end with the 'peasant boy turned I.A.S.' as the co-author of the chapter entitled 'The Way Ahead'. Epstein states about her own orientation: as 'a student of development economics and anthropology' she has 'never been fully accepted either as economist or social anthropologist by any academic colleagues' (1998: 13-14), but felt quite free in crossing the borderlines of both.

Team work by groups of researchers with different disciplinary orientations, guided mainly by sociologists, is relevant to be mentioned here. In S.C. Dube's study of the *Indian Village* (1955) over half a dozen departmental inputs were made. Prakash Rao and T.R. Singh from the sociological strain received their major fieldwork training, as Haimendorf taught them to observe field situations keeping theorization as the backburner. Two American projects – one in western Uttar Pradesh, and the other in eastern Uttar Pradesh – which attracted attention of the Cornell team, also produced a galaxy of workers in different disciplines. The fieldworkers would start their work after breakfast, make observations till lunch, sit down on the typewriter in the afternoon, and mix up among themselves at dinner in the specially designed place of stay. Adrian Mayer cautioned me about such an approach as I was preparing to go to U.S.A. for some training, and said that he followed a different type of approach. I was

curious to know the difference. He said, 'We conduct our field studies for the entire period of the day, and return every evening'. What the Americans appear to have lost in detailed personal observations, they appear to be making up in mutual conversations. We treated the villages as a place for continuous visits by teams of students from the Institute of Advanced Studies of Meerut University and by participants of the national programme of training and orientation sponsored on behalf of the U.G.C.

OBLIGATION TOWARDS THE SUBJECTS OF STUDY

The investigator's obligations towards the people he/she has studied get reflected in the training of a local resident informant into a social scientist, best illustrated in studies in Yucatan (Mexico) by Redfield and Oscar Lewis, in which the informant developed into a national level scholar. In India, as noted earlier, Epstein tried to include self-perception of two educated research assistants by making them as co-authors of the work, *Village Voices*. A.P. Suryanarayana 'originates from Mysore city, became a public servant, worked in the state capital' (1998: 12-13) and in that sense got recognition. But more importantly, T. Thimmegowda 'was a bright young Peasant boy when I first moved into his native village Wangala. By 1970 a first class Master's degree in economics. Today a well-respected high ranking IAS officer and resides in the capital of Karnataka (*ibid*: 12-13) and is a contributor to the work. He and his family look upon me as a mother figure' (*ibid*). I think one of the obligations we owe to the people of the area we study is of making someone from there a part of our own fraternity.

In case of the Rajput village of the *India's Changing Villages* (Dube, 1958), we were able to spot a young student studying there for his intermediate education in Agriculture, who got a bit associated with our study of *Rural-Urban Articulations* (1990). He got interested in sociology, joined B.A. classes in the district town of Muzaffar Nagar with this subject, and then proceeded to join us at Meerut for his M.A., M.Phil. and later research degree too. Later he became a faculty member of Entrepreneurship Development Institute in Ahmedabad. This is one of the rarest of satisfactions for us to return the benefit to the villages studied by sociologists and anthropologists in an ample measure. The village Pradhan's daughter also got M.A. in sociology. During our visit to Kishangarhi in U.P. studied by M. Marriott (1955), in 1998 we came across a few unemployed graduates in the village, who were aware of the fact that their village formed a part of M.A. syllabus of Agra University.

The University of Amsterdam through its Anthropological Sociological Centre of the Development of South and Southeast Asia under the leadership of W.F. Wertheim carried out a research project in which 'the researchers had their individual responsibility and did not operate as a team, yet their studies supplement each other in such a way as to present a more or less coherent picture of south Gujarat rural society' (Wertheim 1974; v) with four different scholars looking at abolition of tenancy (C. Baks), the impact of governmental planning at the local level (E.W. Hommes), hypergamy among the Anavil Brahmans (K.M. Van der Veen) and Patronage and Exploitation (Breman). The last two are available in English translations in 1972 and 1974, and the first two dissertations are available in Dutch.

The nature of cumulative enterprise is best seen in the choice of the subject and area of research by later field workers. Breman's study looks at tenancy relations in the nature of owner and worker relationships (Baks) as well as the choice of 'Patrons among the Anavil Brahmins' (Veen). The tradition of a few social scientists coming together on a theme from different points of view in different field situations still continues in the Netherlands, with the University of Leiden encouraging seven scholars for the work relating to *Negotiation and Social Space: A Gendered Analysis of Kin and Security Networks in South Asia and Sub-Sahara Africa* (Risseuw and Ganesh 1998), and three joining in from India (Chauhan, 2001 b: 352-56). These studies take into account the field situation, discuss the same in the context of national economy interacting with the world, and the civilizational interactions. These represent the current relevance of the intensive studies in a globalising era emphasizing things happening at local levels.

NEW CHALLENGES

Fieldwork has entered a new phase with the arrival of the international agencies for promoting specific works in rural areas. Techniques of participatory research encourage villagers to become partners in the generation of the data, like drawing maps of the habitation, location of common resources, water bodies, and roads. The annual charts of major activities get depicted in bar diagrams on a monthly basis. Monitoring tables are drawn for the works undertaken and 'Logical Framework Analysis' developed. At the planning and execution stage, cooperation of users committees and self-help groups are sought to keep a tab on the progress.

The problematic links with the Panchayati Raj Institutions, the district administration, political parties and social strata remain to be studied and analysed. Perhaps these are beyond the scope of agencies operating the programmes.

A few comments are in order. (1) There is emphasis on completing surveys over a limited period of time. At times three days are considered enough, and seven days a sort of luxury. Contrast this with A.M. Shah's position: 'In the first few months, not only was the amount of information meagre but it tended to be vague and erroneous (1979: 32)'. This happened despite the fact that it was the fieldworker's third fieldwork and had been conducted in a village only about five miles from the small town in which he was born and brought up (*ibid*: 30). (2) To speed up the data collection process, group interviews are encouraged, and even decision making rushed through. (3) Longitudinal surveys and case studies that enter into connectedness of factors operating from different directions are a casualty. (4) Even the existing literature in social science is not interacted with, perhaps not even known.

A reference is pertinent here. An anthropologist associated with the World Bank was busy explaining her experiences of micro-credit studies for setting up self-help groups in Udaipur Division of Rajasthan, but she was unaware of the in-depth study of *A Rajasthan Village* (1967) and the work could not be made use of. Another member of the team happened to be an engineer from New York. I told him that in the early 1950's another engineer from that city had visited India and designed the Pilot Project in Etawah district in U.P., which had provided an initial push to the entire movement called Community Projects. The World Bank official looked blank and had no idea of the preceding social facts. An expert on methodology took a class of state officials and N.G.Os and asked, 'How many minutes do I have?' On being told, '15 minutes', he said, 'So one semester course in 15 minutes'. He then proceeded to say something with charts and visuals. A listener of some political/administrative set-up said, 'We must also know the view of the local people'. The World Bank expert then said, 'Yes, that is the most important point you have raised'. With such inputs and outputs, I wondered whether we needed the expertise of the experts of such international agencies. I recall the scene in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* when his father's ghost called Hamlet aside to say a few words in confidence, and then disappeared. The accompanying friend asked Hamlet, 'What did the ghost say?' The prince avoiding the query, and said, "Oh! There is something rotten in the state of Denmark". The friend remained

unimpressed with the nature of the ordinary truth, and said, 'Oh, we did not need a ghost to rise from the grave to tell us that'. Do we need the experts of the World Bank to come from the other side of the Globe to tell us that people's views on their development are important, and that the world over self-help groups are key to micro-financing and success of plans to reduce poverty.

These are simple things. To know the richness of culture of tribes and villages of India through long stay of the researcher in the region of study; mixing or living with the people and participating in their major activities as observer; building inter-connections among unanticipated actors and forces; and respecting local traditions – all these mark the strength of intensive fieldwork in India. To those connected with that tradition, the very idea that the 'subalterns' have to be studied, and that people's views and values have to be respected, appear to be ordinary commonsense or an established part of our own repertoire. And then if they are told to complete studies of a village in less than a week's time is a mismatch of the aims and methods of study.

We agree that existing sources have to be taken note of, like the Voters List, the B.P.L. selected persons, school enrolment, the data on auxiliary nurses and *anganwadis* and all the new institutionalized and ad-hoc programmes in operation. However, all these that require the combination of approaches in a manner best illustrated by I.P. Desai in the study of the Vedchi Movement. A bit of widening of micro-studies; inclusion of the locals as participants in research; using their oral and written accounts as data; ascertaining their authenticity through other sources; and arriving at one's own conclusions – these are processes that are somehow paraded now under new dispensations of ethnomethodology, at times phenomenology, at others subaltern studies, participatory research, or reflexive sociology. Even if all these are translated into specific studies, one would have to accept the logic and practice of fieldwork.