Unit 1

Social Background of the Emergence of Sociology in India

Contents

Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you will be able to

- Describe the historical roots of Indian sociology
- Explain the sociography in classical and Arab Persian roots to emergence of sociology in India
- Discuss the heritage of social thought in India
- Describe the socio-economic conditions which existed at the advent of British rule in India
- Explain the three major approaches of the Westerners to Indian society and culture
- Discuss the official view of the British regarding caste and tribes, their customs and manners
- Describe the growth of associations and institutions promoting social inquiry
- Explain the early sociological beginnings and finally
- Discuss the early emergence of sociology in Independent India.

1.1 Introduction

Sociology, which in India is closely associated with social anthropology, is a relatively loosely-defined area of study in this country as in other parts of the globe. Different scholars adopt different approaches to it and have even different conception of its scope. But, most of them appreciate the need for studying the socio-cultural antecedents of its birth and growth. They agree that sociology in India bears the imprint of Western sociology. They differ in their evaluation of this impact of Western sociology.

1.2 The Historical Roots of Indian Sociology

Sociology is a "humanistic social science" (Abraham, 1973). It, therefore, has to take into account the specific ideas and ideals, values and aspirations, problems and predicament of concrete groups human beings in particular historical circumstances even when it tries to attain generalisations about human relations. Sociology therefore hardly fits in the mould of natural science and its development in different countries bears in one way or another the imprint of particular historical experiences and cultural configurations. Lack of attention to the fact in India has resulted in that one cannot even today speak with much conviction of an Indian tradition in sociology whereas one could speak of a German or American tradition of sociology (cf. Mannheim, 1953:185-226). This is largely because of the fact that in their teaching and research Indian sociologists have in an overwhelming manner drawn upon the concepts, methods and theories already in use in the West instead of developing their own. The activity of the sociologists in this regard is hardly different from what is done by the physicists or biologists or even economists. But the sociologists have a special kind of reason for their worry. The relationship of data on the one hand and concepts, methods, and theories on the other in the human sciences is different from what it is in the natural sciences. When an Indian physicist formulates, Andre Beteille most appositely points out, a general rule or principle such as the Saha Equation or Chandrasekhar Limit, he takes for granted that it will be used by the physicists everywhere and not just in India. "The utility of a common stock of tools in not in question in natural sciences; but in human sciences, its very existence is in question." (Beteille, 2002:197)

True, because of their familiarity with Western sociology and its basic concepts and categories, the Indian sociologists did not have to struggle so hard as their predecessors in the nineteenth century Europe to establish the legitimacy of sociology as a serious intellectual discipline. But their over dependence on the Western pathfinders made them forget the fact that sociology in the West was "an intellectual response, a cognitive response, to the problems which that society was facing as a result of industrialisation and the type of social upheaval and transformation that were taking place" (Singh, 1979: 107-108). The Intellectual Revolution embodied in the movement for Enlightment, Scientific revolution and Commercial Revolution, which spanned the period between the 14th and the 18th centuries, the French Revolution of 1789 and the Industrial Revolution put a deadly blow to the age-old feudal system monarchy and the church when the saga of the aspirations and achievements of individuals and the tale of their woes started, there was great uncertainty about the values and social order in the new situation Sociology in the West came by way of an attempt to come to grips with it. It "was very largely a kind of cognitive system which the industrial bourgeoisie in the European context tried to develop as a response, as a kind of worldview to overcome the problems of the disintegrating traditional worldview and, at the same time the disintegrating paradigms of knowledge." But, the industrial bourgeoisie did not develop in India when sociology came to the country (Singh, ibid: 108).

Sociology in India was the product of intellectual response of the Indians to the Western interpretations of Indian society and culture by the Westerners, mainly after the colonial rule of the British began in India. Anthropology, the kindred discipline with sociology, too was largely the product of European expansion of the world during the last three or four centuries. The need to

govern men of various races and vastly different cultures created the urgency in the European rulers to study the life and cultures of the ruled. The Western effort to gather information of the life and culture of the Indians, which formed the basis of sociology and anthropology in India, was marked by a similar interest of the colonial rulers. It is, of course, true that later genuine scientific interests enriched both the disciplines and they emerged in the Western context of modernity. At the same time one can ill-afford to ignore the colonial context within which sociology grew in this country. Lack of adequate attention to this dual aspect of the milieu in which sociology emerged in this country tends to give it the semblance of an appendage of Western sociology. No protest, for example, is made against the statement made in 1957 by Dumont and Pocock that**"**... the sociology of India has only properly begun in the last ten years.**"** What is more deplorable is the audacious statement of Robert Bierstedt who would trace the roots of sociology to Plato and Aristotle but summarily dismiss the tradition of social thought in the east. Bierstedt writes, **"**Although I may be guilty of a species of provincialism, I have excluded all sociologists outside of the Western tradition of intellectual history. If excuse be needed, one may say that sociology has not characteristically been a discipline that has appealed to the Eastern mind and there does not exist, in fact, a corpus of Eastern sociological thought**"** (Bierstedt, 1959: u). Bierstedt's is not the lone voice. The error must needs to be corrected.

1.3 The Heritage of Social Thought in India

Indeed, India has a rich heritage of thinking and reflection on the socio-cultural reality. There **"**have been recorded observations on Indian society since the third century B.C.**"** (Cohn, 1969:4) India has a millennium old living tradition contained in the religious and philosophical texts. These discuss ideas about man and society. Several stereotypes impede an adequate appreciation of the Indian tradition of deliberations on man and society (Dube, 1977:2). First, it is believed that the Indian treatises discussing ideas about society and its values were deeply grounded in metaphysics and ethics and were, therefore, far removed from social reality. For example, Bierstedt writes, **"**In intent and emphasis,... they were ethical rather than sociological, prescriptions for right conduct rather than propositions about any conduct, whether right or wrong... ... ... Their authors, in short, were lawgivers to the race rather than students of society**"** (Bierstedt, 1959: xii). Second, they allowed little scope for development of an empirical tradition in respect of knowledge relating to man and society. Third, the ascription of inviolable sanctity to the ancient texts, it is alleged, inhibited the growth of critical and independent thought in later periods (cf. Bottomore, 1962).

The truth is that the ancient texts, shastras and smritis, despite their philosophical and metaphysical content, were not concerned with the eternal verities of truths only and did not ignore the existential reality of the time. Even Manu's Dharmashastra which has drawn the ire of a large number of critics was not a utopia providing only the outline of an idealized normative order grounded in a system of philosophy and lacking in organic links with institutions and norms of society. This treatise abstracted and schematized from a wide range of elements of the social system of its time. The assumptions and principles underlying even the concept of **dharma** related **sthana/desa** (place/country), **kala** (time) and **patra** (person/social category). To comprehend **dharma** it was not enough to learn its philosophy; its empirical referents also were crucial for its proper understanding. To take a concrete

example, one may note the detail in which Manu described the right of the **varna-samkaras** (born of parents of different **varnas**) in the then society.

Manu, the upholder of the norm of maintaining varna, did not summarily dismiss the rights of those who deviated from the norm after the fashion of Aristotle who denied the rights of those who deviated from the norm after the fashion of Aristotle who denied the rights of citizen to the slaves in the Athenian society. Further, it is often forgotten that the scope and variety of ancient social thought were very large. Besides **dharmasastras**, it also produced **arthasastras, kamasastras, vartasastras** (relating to trades and vocations, **vastusastra** (relating to construction), which related to mundane life and social relity (Bhattacharya, 1990; Sarkar, 1941).

Treatises like Kautilya's **Arthasastra** (324-296 B.C.) urging upon the king to take regular census of the subjects and the livestock or Charakasamhita (8th century BC) advising the healers to take into consideration the norms and values and customs of the people who would approach them strongly refute the charge of lack of attention to empirical data in the ancient Indian tradition.

As against the pronounced concern of many sastras with the ultimate reality and other worldly issues, there were the **Lokayata** philosophers or followers of Charvaka who were sceptical, materialist and undaunted in their criticism of this concern with other worldliness. Traces of skepticism regarding the prevalent explanation of ultimate reality or the rites and rituals purportedly related to its realisation may be discerned in the Upanishadic literature of the sixth century B.C. Ajit Kesambakelam, a contemporary of Buddha preached complete materialism.

All the treatises or activities mentioned above unmistakably represent the existence of an intellectual tradition in India in which social philosophy maintained close links with the social reality of the time. Freedom of inquiry too was asserted.

1.4 Sociography in Classical and Arab-Persian Accounts

Relatively solid empirical foundations for understanding the culture and society of India lie scattered in the writings of many travelers and chroniclers. These travelers included Greeks, Romans, Byzantine-Greeks, Jews and Chinese and, increasingly from AD 1000 onward, Arabs, Turks, Afghans, and Persians. Most of the classical accounts of Indian society follow Megasthenes the Greek ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya (324-3000 BC). He had the advantage of direct observation of parts of India. He described the Indian society as being divided into seven classes, though he did not refer to the varna theory. Three Chinese travelers. Fa-Hien (AD 400-411), Yuan Chwang (AD 629-644), and I-Tsing (AD 671-695) described the socio-cultural conditions of their time in India in great detail. An analysis of their accounts in a chronological order may give a valuable perspective on change in the Indian society.

Among the Arab travelers, Al-Biruni (973-ca 1030) seems to have been familiar with Sanskrit sources and the Indian systems of thought. He mentioned the four varna theory of caste in his description of the social life and customs of the people. A sort of sociological approach may be traced in his comments on the ethnocentric predicament of the Hindu. Ibn Btutta, Arab traveller

from Morocco, offered valuable information regarding the geography of the land, or socio-cultural conditions and daily life of the people of India between AD 1333 and AD 1347. For South India useful information may be obtained from the chronicles of Marco Polo who visited that part of the country around AD 1293 and in Faristah's account completed in AD 1609. All these narratives and chronicles deserve to be considered as works in sociography since their authors based their accounts on what was observed and heard and not on accounts of the past as provided by others. This evaluation is applicable also to the accounts provided by European travelers.

In the seventeenth century many translations were made from the Sanskrit literature into Persian by Indo-Moslem scholars. They paved the way for a better understanding of Indian culture and society Abul Fazl, the author of **Ain-i-Akbari** which was a late sixteenth century gazetteer containing description of Akbar's court, revenue, and administrative system, was "an empiricist par excellence" (Dube, op. cit.). He covered the widest spectrum of society in Akbar's empire, paying attention even to the remote Ahoms and the inaccessible Gonds. His work suggests that the Mughals clearly recognized that the operational level of the Hindu social system was to be found not at the plane of four varnas but at the level of kin-based categories. Writers like Abul Fazl were not sociologists or social anthropologists in the modern sense. But, they were keen observers of the social life and even "perceptive social analysts" providing valuable stuff for the making of sociology.

Box 1.01: The Early European travelers

The earliest direct observers of the Indian social system, particularly caste system, were the Portugese adventurers, merchants or administrators who began primarily on the Malabar coast. Duarte Barbose (1866, 1918,1921) accurately reported major cultural features of the caste system which continue to be recognized as central today. Barbosa took a matter of fact approach and knew an Indian vernacular well. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, a French merchant and traveler, who provided a history of the reign of Aurangzeb and a detailed account of various Hindu beliefs, rituals and customs, which was based on conversation with the people and eye witness reports. Abraham Roger, the first chaplain at Dutch Factory at Calicut in Madras studied Hinduism from a Dutch-speaking Brahmin.

1.5 Socio-economic Conditions of India at the Advent of British Rule

The establishment of British suzerainty in the later eighteenth century prompted rapid acquisition of knowledge of the classical languages of India, of the structure of the society and of values and manners of her people by the British officials, missionaries and also Western scholars. The diverse responses of the native intellectuals to the ferment created by all these may be better understood in the light of the principal features of the Indian society and culture prevailing at that time.

As Gopal Haldar, a Maxist scholar, rightly points out, the essential features of the comparatively stable Indian socio-cultural system that persisted with minor variations down to the British times appear as follows:

1) *Economically*; its base was mainly agricultural, the tools and implements did not register any remarkable change through time, arts and crafts mostly connected with such poorly developed production grew.

2) *Socially*; its framework in the main was that of comparatively self-sufficient village communities in groups of contiguous villages; caste was the typical Indian institution to accommodate various socio-economic strata and nascent classes and bind together each in groups and ensure for such constituents an occupational protection as well.

3) *Ideologically,* the outstanding feature of Indian culture, the foundations of all its religion and philosophy, was the idea of karma and rebirth, which discouraged, in general, social mobility and individual initiative and secured social stability thereby.

Of course, new institutions and laws grew, though somewhat haltingly, literature, arts and philosophies blossomed. Besides, in the sub-continent regional variations also became well-marked at least from the middle ages. But the socio-economic system had since the time of Gupta Empire encouraged mainly what may be called feudal relations and a sort of Indian feudal system came to develop during the Muslim rule. Socio-economic relations akin to feudal relations lingered on even when exhausted. But, the Indian merchant classes were all through too weak and timid to overstep the socio-economic limits and develop new tools and a viable native capitalist system of larger production.

The British rule introduced, no doubt in its own interest, the railways, the press, the Western system of education, the clubs and associations which shook the prevalent socio-economic order. The British were, as if, working as **"**the unconscious tool of history**"**. But, the processes of exploitation unleashed by them destroyed the possibilities of development of industries and modern economic system in India. The British rule, rather, systematically destroyed the native industries of India for the benefit of the industries in Britain and their market in India (Desai, 1976; Mukherjee, 1957). Even though it sought to tie down the people it ruled to colonial backwardness; it released new historical forces within the Indian fold by throwing the traditional economic system and socio-cultural order out of gear. It gave birth to the desire for material advancement and better amenities and living conditions of individuals, as distinguished from groups or communities. Simultaneously, it gave birth to a spirit of inquiry into the minds of the native intellectual who came in contact with Western education. Both the social reformists and the conservatives took a fresh and critical look at their own society and culture as a reaction to Western interpretation of the same. Their ideas and explanation as well as the Western interpretation of Indian society and culture and data collected by the government officials, scholars and missionaries have laid the foundation of sociology in India.

1.6 Three Major Approaches of the Westerners to Indian Society and Culture

By the end of the eighteenth century three types of western interpretation of Indian reality became evident: 1) the orientalist, 2) the missionary, and 3) the administrative (Cohn 1968; Singh. 1979). The orientalists were enchanted by the Indian spiritual tradition mythology, philosophy, etc. Their reliance on textual view led to a picture of Indian society as being static, timeless and space less. The missionaries, who were zealots of the Christian religious traditions, looked at it as a socio-cultural and ethnic system which needed total religious traditions, looked at it as a socio-cultural and ethnic system which needed total religious conversion. Both the groups agreed

that Hinduism as practiced within the realm of their observation was filled with 'superstition' and 'abuses'. Though, the orientalists considered the situation of their contemporary Indians as a fall from a golden age. The missionaries, of course, added a lot to the empirical study of the Indian society which was strengthened by the administrators. The interpretation of Indian reality by the administrators, trained in British universities and indoctrinated by utilitarian rationalism, was more pragmatic and more matter-of-fact. Their purpose was to understand it in order to exploit its resources.

The administrators sought to develop categories that would help them in ordering their ideas and actions relating to the life of the natives of India avoiding the enormous complexities characterising it. For example, B. H. Baden-Powell's 3 volumes of **The Land Systems of British India (1892)** were not just a compilation of data but contained a series of arguments about the nature of Indian village and its resources in relation to the state and its demand over these resources. Baden-Powell recognized that there were in general two claims on the produce of the soil, the state's and the landholder's. He postulated that the government derived its revenue "by taking a share of the actual grain heap on the threshing floor of each holding". In order to ensure the collection of this share a wide range of intermediaries between the state and the grain heap developed. They asserted in their turn varying degrees of control or ownership/possession right over land and its produce. In addition, rights over the land were established by conquest.

Baden-Powell strongly contested Henry Maine's view that there was only one type of Indian village, viz., politically autonomous and economically self-sufficient village community. It continued to fascinate both the Western thinkers such as Marx and Metcalfe and the Indians Metcalfe observed, "They [i.e., The village Communities] seem to last when nothing else lasts." The idea of the unchanging village community was incorporated into general social theory of the later nineteenth and also twentieth centuries. The Marxists viewed the British rule as an unconscious tool of history" breaking the stagnation Indian society founded on unchanging village communities. The Indian nationalists on the other hand came to rely on R. C. Dutt's **Economic History of India** to establish that it was the evils of British imperial rule which degraded India from this idyllic state of village republics with agricultural prosperity to the conditions of stagnated rural economy dominated by moneylenders and rapacious landlords.

According to Baden-Powell, there were two distinct types of village in India: (1) "ryotwari" or non-landlord or severalty and (2) landlord or joint-village. But both he and Maine and their respective followers were interested in developing evolutionary stages of development of socio-economic formations. The types and classifications of villages were also attempted in relation to the institution of caste. They were found advantageous by the administrators. They reduced the need for specific knowledge. To act in terms of categories was relatively convenient. Latently, the categorical or conceptual thinking about villages directed attention away from internal politics in villages and from the questions of the nature of actual social relations and economic conditions engendered by the colonial policy. Of course, the reports such as those of the Famine Commission of 1901 and concern over widespread peasant riots and large scale alienation of land from peasant to moneylenders prompted the search for remedial action and a number of official investigations into the socio-economic conditions in the villages were made. Although some knowledge was acquired, the ground-reality was ignored.

1.7 Official View of the British Regarding Castes and Tribes

In 1769, Henry Verelst, the Governor of Bengal and Bihar, stressed the importance of collecting information regarding the leading families and their customs in addition to the cultural and social life of the natives. The revenue officers obeyed the order. Many prominent British officials followed the lead. For example, Francis Buchanan undertook the ethnographic survey of Bengal in 1807. Abbe Dubois, a French Missionary, wrote in 1816 **Hindu manners, Customs and Ceremonies,** which is considered valuable by sociologists even today (Srinivas, 2000). He was one of the first to have examined the interrelations of castes. Prior to his work, military Chaplain William Tenent's wrote two — volume work, **Indian Recreations: Consisting Chiefly of Strictures on the Domestic and Rural Economy of the Mahommedans and Hindoos** (1806). The mid and late eighteenth century western myth of "an undifferentiated orient characterised by the rectilinear simplicity of its laws and customs, the primitive innocence of its people" (Guha, 1963:26) in the face of empirical data were provided in such works. The fairly deep, if somewhat unsystematic, knowledge of Indian society started accumulating through the direct experience of many officials like Munro in his land settlements in Madras, Elephinstone in his diplomatic work in Maharashtra.

The first all-India census taken by the British Government in 1861 marked the beginning of more systematic attempts at gathering data. In 1901 Sir Herbert Risley sought to found an Ethnographic Survey of India which would develop as part of the census. He justified the proposal on the grounds of:

1) The contribution of such a survey to the solution of European problems with the aid of superior data available in India.
2) The need to collect ethnographic data, particularly the primitive beliefs and usages in India before they disappeared through social and cultural change, and
3) The indispensability of data for purposes of legislation, judicial procedure, famine relief, sanitation, control of epidemic diseases and the like.

The British Government finally conceded in 1905 to the demand for establishing the Ethnographic Survey which yielded huge bulk of data, valuable in anthropology and sociology in India. The volumes on tribes and castes of each province, the district gazetteers and finally, the Imperial Gazetteer of India (26 volumes, Calcutta, 1908-09) were all written as part of the Survey.

Box 1.02: Divide and Rule Policy of the British

Thanks to the work of such officials as Wilson, Risley, Barnes, Blunt, O'Malley, Hutton, and Guha, the census has become a precious source of information for demographic studies and also for social and cultural analysis. Its range and quality have further increased after independence. The census became also an instrument of official policy. For example, Risley, commissioner of the 1901 census "noted as well as deplored the tendency of the tribes to become jatis which meant their absorption into Hinduism" (Srinivas and Panini, 1973, 483). Observations of this kind contain the germs of the policy of creating divisions between Hindus and other groups and sections. It is significant that while caste distinctions among the Hindus were meticulously recorded, similar distinctions among other religious groups did not receive

equal attention, and, " this fact seems to have gone unnoticed by Indian Nationalists" (Ibid. 474). Finally, the recording of caste divisions among Hindus at each census promoted, according to the Indian nationalists, "fissiparousness" and was therefore condemned by them. The census in independent India has ceased to record data on a caste basis.

1.8 Growth of Associations and Institutions Promoting Social Inquiry

Despite its serious limitations, the Western interest in Indian society created a ferment which led to the growth of social activity in the subcontinent (Duttgupta, 1972). A number of literary and scientific associations marked the intellectual scenario of eighteenth and nineteenth century India. Most notable was the Asiatic society of Bengal founded in 1797 by the world famous Sanskritist and Indologist, Sir William Jones. It regarded history, science, and art as the trinity of human knowledge. It encouraged work in indology, comparative philology, comparative mythology, comparative jurisprudence, history and anthropology. Its deliberations and publications including the **Asiatic Miscellany** covered a wide range of social institutions and problems. The Academic Association, started in Bengal in 1828 under the inspiration of Henry Derozio, kindled in the minds of youngmen such as Pyari Chand Mitra, Dakshina Ranjan Mukherjee, and Rev. K. M. Banerjee and questioning sprit with regard to literary and philosophical issues as well as contemporary social institutions and problems. The active but short-lived Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge (1838- 1843) examined themes like prostitution, the Hindu widow, and female education. Another notable society of the time, also in Calcutta, was Tattwabodhini Sabha. Founded in 1839, it discussed social conditions and problems and questioned several established customs and institutions. Rammohan Roy (1777-1833), whom Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru called the first Modern Man of India, was a great social thinker and reformer. His writings had considerable sociological content (Duttgupta, 1972). Rammohan's crusade against Sati, and his views on religion, position of women, and rural society anticipated several major concerns that were to characterise Indian society later. Other notable thinkers and reformers of the time were Akshay Kumar Dutta (1820-1886), Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Pyari Chand Mitra. Such activities were not confined to Bengal alone. Yogendra Singh mentions Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), Dadabhai Naoraji (1825 – 1917), Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928), J. G. Phooley (1827-1888) and M. G. Ranade (1824-1901) and several others in creating intellectual and social self-awareness in the country about India's cultural and civilizational strengths and yet pleaded for radical reforms in society in order to meet the challenges of the western civilization and its colonial expansionism (Singh Y. 2004: 13&).

As to the associations in town or cities other than Calcutta, S.C. Dube (1977: 5-6) points out that the Literary Society of Bombay deliberated on and published in 1929 in its journal **Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay**, a comprehensive empirical survey of a small town, Lon. The volume published another comparable statistical survey of the "Pergunnah of Jumboosur." The **Madras Journal of Literature and Science**, started in 1835, published historical and ethnographic studies and also surveys of cities and villages. The Benares Institute founded in 1861and recognized in 1864, was popular and active. Its section on "social progress" received important papers regularly on ethnography and social problems. The Oudh Scientific Society of Lucknow

was also concerned with social problems. A paper on "Sociology for India" was presented before it by Syed Shurrafoodin. A Society for Sociological Studies was established in Jaipur in 1869.

Calcutta, of course, housed more associations than other towns or cities. The Bethune Society, established in 1851, contributed significantly to social science studies. A section on sociology was started in the Society 1859 in recognition of the subject's elevation to the rank of a "science" and of the fact that it was replete with practical benefits to man." Reverend James Long presented to the Society in 1861 his paper comprising "500 questions on the subjects requiring investigation in the social condition of the natives." The most notable among the insititutions concerned with the social sciences was the Bengal Social Science Association (1867-1878). Its object was "to collect, arrange and classify. Series of facts bearing upon the social, moral and intellectual conditions of Bengal, and by such means to assist in the promotion of measures for the good of the country" (cited in DuttGupta, 1972). Indians formed an important part of the members of the Association's council. Through questionnaires the Association collected a great deal of empirical data. The papers presented at it's meetings also demonstrated an attempt at systematisation and logical analysis of facts about Bengal and other parts of India.

Another noteworthy fact was that Positivism and its founder Auguste Comte were known to the Indians, particularly, Bengalis such as Jogendra Chandra Ghosh, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the famous Bengali Litterateur, and Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, the first Indian author to have exmined the feasibility of developing a universal science of society, and many others. Bankim and Bhudev logically controverted the claim of Jogendra Chandra that positivism was superior to Hinduism. Positivism, however, buttressed the spirit of critical inquiry (Forbes, 1975). Herbert Spencer, the British sociologist, too, was a well known name for persons like Bankim, Bhudev or Vivekananda. His evolutionism or theory of Education was discussed and debated.

A little later, i.e., 1905 Shyamaji Krishna Verma, a non-resident Indian political and social revolutionary in Britain, deeply influenced by Herbert Spencer, started publishing a journal, **Indian Sociology**. His journal did not, however, focus upon sociology either as a discipline as enunciated by Spencer, nor did it primarily focus on social and cultural issues within the frame of reference of sociological categories. The issues discussed had a mix of the orientation of social reformism and political activism.

1.9 Responses and Reactions of the Indian Intellectuals

A close scrutiny of the records of the Associations and Societies mentioned above and the writings of native intellectuals reveals several interesting trends. A small section of the Indian intellectuals were completely overwhelmed by the West; a few, on the contrary, were drawn to the traditional heritage. Social reformers like Rammohan or Iswarchandra Vidyasagar or Jyotiba Phoole wanted to change the existing social institutions for a more humane condition. However, nearly all recognized the necessity and desirability of understanding the social situation. The question with many was neither of uncritical acceptance nor of blind rejection of the elements and ideas of the West. Persons like Bankimchandra and, particularly, Bhudev sought to reinterpret their tradition and challenge the Western interpretation

of Indian society, which presented the Indians not as subjects but as objects (Raychaudhury, 1978, Bhattacharyya, 2004). A little later Brajendra Nath Seal and Benoy Kumar Sarkar took up the threads. In case of the former, "one witnesses a critical and discursive response to the comparative evolutionary treatment of various societies and cultures, including that of Indian, by the British social anthropologists and sociologists, which often reflected not only the wrong premises in their treatment of other cultures or societies but also carried unjustifiable value (Singh, 2004: 136-147). Seal refuted attempts to interpret the Indian social and cultural reality from a reductionist, unilinear, evolutionary frame of reference. Sarkar wrote extensively in response to the writings of European Indologists and sociologists in whose writings one could clearly find the biases of 'the orientalist frame of reference' that depicted the Hindus or Indians to be 'otherworldly' or 'pacifist.' Particularly, the contributions of Max Mueller and Max Weber on Hinduism and the culture and social structure of the Indians came under his severe criticism (Bhattacharyya, 1990). Similarly, many other social scientists such as S. V. Ketkar, A. R. Wadia, K. P. Chattopadhyay, Bhupendra Nath Dutta (the first Marxist sociologist in this country) and N. K. Bose created through their writings the ambience for teaching and research in sociology and social anthropology in this country. Their writings and activities shared in common the consciousness of historicity of the Indian civilization and its distinct social and cultural identity which was denied the centrality it deserved by most of the western scholars, Indologists or sociologists. The writings of these early social scientists had a very high degree conscenscitizing effect on the Indian academics and intellectuals to provide legitimacy to the teaching and research in sociology. The discovery of India's past, and the antiquity and richness, versatility of its heritage gave self-confidence to the elite and the material necessary for national myth-making. European missionaries' criticism of Hinduism and conversion of poor and lowly Hindus as well as the tribal people into Christianity whipped up the nationalist sentiments of the new elite. There was an urge for social and religious reform, a reinterpretation of the past, an assertion of identity and an examination of the present. The ground was being prepared for the emergence of sociology.

1.10 Early Sociological Beginnings

Karl Marx and Max Weber as well as Durkheim depended on British and continental writings on India for their analysis of Indian society and culture W.H.R. River's study of **The Todas** (1906) was based on intensive field work and was the first monograph on a people of India in the modern anthropological tradition. Two of his students, G. S. Ghurye and K. P. Chottapadhyay came to play a significant role in the development of sociology and anthropology in India. Rivers' study was followed by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's on **The Andaman Islanders**. During the first two decades, two Indian scholars, L. K. Ananthakrishna Iyer and S.C. Roy made their mark in anthropology though both of them lacked any formal training in the discipline. In addition to his research work among the tribes of Bihar, Roy founded and edited the famous journal, **Man in India**. Iyer, because of his anthropological writings, was appointed to a lectureship in ethnography in the Calcutta University which paved the way for the first University Department of Anthropology in India.

The efforts of Brajendranath Seal for the introduction of the discipline of sociology in Indian Universities deserve special mention. As a Professor of Philosophy at the Calcutta University Seal wrote, lectured and initiated studies

on what he called "comparative sociology." He made a comparative study of Vaishnavism and wrote a paper on race origins and a treatise on **The Positive Sciences of Ancient Hindus** (1958 [1914-1920]). He argued that social development was multi-linear and judgments regarding the superiority or inferiority of social customs and institutions hardly made any sense. He observed that social institutions could be properly studied only in the context of race, religion and culture. As Vice-Chancellor of the Mysore University in 1914. Seal along with A. R. Wadia was instrumental in introducing social philosophy and sociology there. Seal also had a hand in the beginning of studies in sociology in the Calcutta University in 1907. Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Radhakamal Mukerjee, both of whom were disciples of Seal, taught the subject though there was no separate department of sociology there. Indeed, the recognition of sociology as a separate academic discipline came much later than, say, Economics or Political Science in Indian Universities.

The first department of sociology and civics started in Bombay University in 1919 under the leadership of Sir Patrick Geddes, though here too sociology was taught at first as a part of M.A. course in Economics (Srinivas and Panini, 2002). Geddes' major focus lay on viewing social reality from a moral, communitarian, global and multidisciplinary perspective (Singh, 2004:138). He observed that "our great need today is to grasp life as a whole, to see its many sides in their proper relations; but we must have a practical as well as a philosophical interest in such an integrated view of life" (Mairet, 1957: xii). In this country he was known for his interests in town-planning, with emphasis on the problems of urban deterioration. His reports on the town-planning of Calcutta, Indore, and the temple cities of South India contain much useful information and display his acute awareness of the problems of urban disorganisation and renewal. His analysis of 'valley section' and his treatment of interrelationship of 'work, place and folk for explaining the growth of regional cultures in societies reveal the strong influence of the French sociologist Le Play and his categories of 'work, place and family'. Geddes consistently harped on the regeneration of city life and ecological awareness in the planning of social and cultural habitats at regional and global levels.

Because of the short stay in the Bombay University, Geddes' sociological approach that revealed a strong blending of empirical methods with philosophical orientations could hardly be institutionalised. Nevertheless, Geddes exercise influence on the development of sociology in India through his students, G. S. Ghurye and N. A. Thoothi. N. A. Thoothi, in particular, observed Srinivas, tried to carry further Geddes' line of research on his return to Bombay after obtaining a doctorate at Oxford (Srinivas & Panini, Ibid : 488). Radhakamal Mukerjee, the pioneer of Lucknow School of Sociology in India, also was influenced by Geddes as he came in association with Geddes in the urban surveys. Mukerjee subsequently carried out studies on social ecology and sociological effects of industrialisation.

G. S. Ghurye was sent to the United Kingdom (UK) by Geddes. He obtained a doctorate from Cambridge mainly for his work on caste. On his return to the country, he succeeded in finding a berth in Bombay University where he became after a few years Professor and Head of the Sociology Department. Under his leadership, Bombay became the leading centre for sociology, especially research, in the country, Ghurye had students from all over the country; some of them were heads of active departments and wrote significant books and papers. Ghurye himself wrote prolifically on a great

variety of themes. Ghurye's knowledge of Sanskrit enabled him to use the scriptures and epics in analysing and interpreting Indian culture and society. He insisted on fieldwork though he himself was an armchair sociologist.

Box 1.03: G.S.Ghurye (1893-1984)

Ghurye was catholic in his interests as well as methods. A few of his students, K. M. Kapadia, Irawati Karve, and S. V. Karandikar carried his approach and concepts to materials in the sacred texts and other literature in Sanskrit. M. N. Srinivas, a structural-functionalist, A. R. Desai, a Marxist, obtained their Ph.D. in Sociology under Ghurye's supervision. Ghurye founded the Indian Sociological Society in 1952 and was the first editor of its journal, **Sociological Bulletin.**

The Lucknow University became another centre of sociology and anthropology because of contributions of Radhakamal Mukerjee, Dhurijati Prasad Mukerji, and anthropologist D. N. Majumdar, all of whom were illustrious students of the Calcutta University. Despite the concentration of such talent, sociology had only a minor place in the department of economics and sociology in Lucknow University. Radhakamal Mukerjee was greatly influenced by Brajendra Nath Seal, Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Patrick Geddes. In his earlier works he was empirically oriented and sought to build a regional and ecological sociology. He stressed the need for multidisciplinary effort to comprehend reality better. He worked and wrote on an amazing variety of social, economic and cultural subjects and philosophical issues. His **Fields and Farmers of Oudh** (1930) offer a good example of the study of agrarian studies. He wrote also on the Indian labour class. He developed a theory of human migration and settlement in which he argued that human beings, like plants, thrive best in those frontiers which are similar in environment to those in which they have already succeeded. His regional analysis was pervaded with his notion of 'Sangha' which depicted the Hindu notion of commonality and cooperation rather than conflict. His stress on the importance of myth, language, ritual, art, and symbolism made his works appear, according to Srinivas, "philosophical, if not mystical" (Ibid.: 490). But, Yogendra Singh, a direct pupil of Mukerjee, maintains that one of the most significant contributions that Mukerjee has made to sociology lies in "his formulation of a general theoretical paradigm of social science and sociology from the perspective of Indian philosophical traditions" (Singh, 2004: 142). He thus sought to offer an alternative to the Western theoretical approach in sociology.

D. P. Mukerji too, like Radhakamal, acknowledges the relevance of the Indian tradition and philosophy for arriving at valid theoretical and conceptual schemes for the study of the Indian society. But unlike Radhakamal, D. P. does not totally reject the Marxian contributions particularly its dialectical logic enunciating the centrality of the processes of conflict and contradiction in the social processes. He exposed the irrelevance and vacuity of much of thought and activity of the Indian Middle Class imitating blindly the Western ideas including both Parsonian and Marxist variants. He posited his own notion of Person over developing as a responsible agent interacting with others in society guided by dynamic tradition as against the Western, Parsonian, notion of Individual pursuing his own material interests (Bhattacharyya, et al, 2003). D. P's "same ideas regarding the study of tradition were not pursued with resolve and dedication" (Dube, 1977:9)

D. N. Majumdar, an anthropologist by training had a major concern with the

problem of culture change. He maintained that "with his expert knowledge of social relationships, the sociologist can help, predict, control and direct social change and 'speed up social progress'." He founded the 'Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society' and its quarterly journal, **The Eastern Anthropologist**. His emphasis on anthropological fieldwork and on culture inspired his students such as T. N. Madan, R. K. Jain, Gopala Sarana or T. N. Pandit who became important names in Indian sociology and anthropology.

A. R. Wadia, a founder of teaching of sociology in Mysore University looked upon sociology as applied philosophy. This university had the distinction of being the first to introduce the subject at the B.A. level in 1928-29.

A combined department of sociology and anthropology under the leadership of Irwati Karve was started in 1930s in the ambit of the Deccan College and Post Graduate Research Institute in Poona. Karve, authoress of the famous work *Kinship Organization in India* (1952) did extensive fieldwork in differtnt parts of the country and her knowledge of Sanskrit gave her access to data in scriptures, law books and epics. Sociology Department of Poona University is an heir to the bequest of Sociology Department of the Deccan College.

The Osmania University offered in 1928 sociology as one of the options at the B. A. level. However, it was only in 1946 that a full fledged Department in Sociology was started there. Christoph Von Fuerer – Haimendorf and S. C. Dube were associated with it.

This story of early beinnings of sociology in this country should mention the contribution of Nirmal Kumar Bose as well, though he could not continuously serve the academia because of his imprisonment during the Freedom Struggle. Beginning as an Assistant Lecturer in Anthropology in Calcutta he later became the Director of the Anthropological Survey of India and the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Government of India.

Bose was basically a student of Indian civilization and culture. His approach was historical but he insisted on fieldwork by the researcher without any prejudgment in mind. His interests included tribal life, peasant society and urban centres as well as temples and pilgrims. He sought to demonstrate that production relations explained the persistence of the caste system and the changes occurring in it (Bose, 1968 and 1975). He demonstrated the unity and diversity in Indian peasant life through a study of the distribution of cultural traits across the length and breadth of India. He expressed concern over the fact that parochial loyalties were strengthened by the rising middle classes in their desire to consolidate their sectarian advantages. Though a Gandhian, he made a critical analysis of Gandhism. He instilled this spirit of questioning in the minds of his pupils and associates (Befeille, 1075).

All scholars interested in the accounts of tribes in India will remain indebted to Verrier Elwin for his valuable monographs on the Baiga, Muria and Agaria of Madhya Pradesh and the Saura of Orissa. All these are based on his first hand studies. But, Indian sociologists and anthropologists have failed to follow his advocacy for the protection of the Indian tribes from the more advanced sections of the populace. It seemed to encourage an "isolationist policy" for the tribals. You will learn more about this in Block 5 Perspective on Tribes in India, Unit 3 of this course.

1.11 Sociology and Independent India

The study of sociology and social anthropology gradually and slowly became professionalised during 1910-1950. Autonomous departments on these two subjects did not exist in more than half-a-dozen universities, and Bombay University was the only centre of post-graduate research in sociology (which included anthropology) when India became independent. Sociology and anthropology seemed to be overshadowed by economics and political science, the practitioners of which seemed to have the ability of answering questions by the nationalist leaders of the country. The association of sociology with European and American traditions made it suspect in the eyes of Indian academics. Anthropology was suspected as nationalist opinion regarded as an instrument of colonial policy (Srinivas, 2003:495). There was an additional reason for dislike of anthropology. To be studied by anthropologists often suggested that those who were studied were considered primitive, and nationalists resented this implication particularly when the anthropologists were largely from the ruling race. But, in spite of this unfriendly, if not hostile, intellectual milieu, a small band of scholars continued their work analysing fundamental social institutions such as caste, joint family, untouchability, religion and sect. They published ethnographic accounts of particular groups recorded folklore and depicted the material culture of tribes and rural people. Sociology in India at least academically could find a solid base to stand upon in the results of the work of these scholars.

Reflection and action 1.1

Interview at least three people of different ethnic/socio-cultural/class backgrounds. Tell them that you want to know about their 'marriage customs' or 'religious practices'. Have a set of questions with you to be asked from the interviewee. But silently note down your observation of her/his reaction to your request.

Write a note of about two pages on **"The Perception of Public About a Social Investigation"**. Compare your note with other learners at your study centre.

Independent India was looking for a dynamic society capable of keeping pace with the tempo of economic development promised by the freedom struggle from the tutelage of colonial government. To understand how the millions of Indians with their myriad beliefs and values would respond to the call of development of the new nation was a desideratum. Sociology seemed to hold the promise for effective assistance for the task. The undertaking of planned development in the country, and the creation of national Planning Commission which later formed a Research Programme Committee, generated the demand for reliable data about the life and activities of peoples all over the country. New opportunities became available for students of sociology. Separate University Departments of sociology sprang up all over the country.

1.12 Conclusion

A perusal of the history of beginning of sociology in India dispels the misconception that there was no tradition of social inquiry and interest in learning the material conditions of men and women in this country. Despite the philosophical metaphysical and otherworldly consideration, the ancient and medieval texts bear in many cases the evidence of interest of their authors in the reality of life of men and woman on the earth and their

problems. Before the coming of the British who brought the Indians in direct contact with the West, there were travellers of many races as well as native chroniclers who produced valuable documents about Indian society and culture as well as its economy. True, at a certain stage the society seemed to have lost its dynamism because of the perpetuation of certain institutions and customs that needed change in keeping with the changing times but that were not changing. The British colonial rule gave it a jolt. But the new historical forces did not and could not work in their full strength because of the exploitative policy of the British rules. They, of course, generated a huge volume of data regarding the social, cultural and economic conditions of the people of India. But, they were manipulated and used for their own material interest.

The British rule stressed the values of individualism and pursuit by Individuals of their own material interests ignoring at times those of the communities they belonged to. The British did, of course, bring to this country the values of freedom of inquiry and rationality. Their academic colonialism enchanted a section of native intellectuals though others questioned it. However, the spirit inquiry into the nature of their own society and culture was kindled in the minds of Indian intellectuals. This interest in and access to empirical data and the questioning spirit formed the ground for the emergence of sociology in India.

Still, the hangover of academic colonialism seems to have persisted with the Indian sociologists and social anthropologists who seem to be beholden to the international reference group. Since sociology came from the west, it seems only natural in the initial days. But its persistence beyond a length of time may prove unwholesome for the development of the discipline. The nationalist upsurge was more prominent among the pioneers though it did not display richness in formulation of concepts and theories. Their pupils and followers have a greater access to the international development in sociology and have their secure places in universities and research institutes, which stand upon the labour of love and dedication of those who toiled in the past. Their effort towards understanding the specificity of Indian people before its comparison with peoples in other lands seems to be ignored. May be, it is a reason why even today we cannot talk of an Indian Sociology.

1.13 Further Reading

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Srinivas, M.N. and Panini 1986. "The Development of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India" in T.K. Oommen & Partha N. Mukherji (eds) Indian Sociology Reflections of Introspections, Popular Prakashan, Bombay.

Unit 2

Emergence of the Discipline : Issues and Themes

Contents

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit you will be able to

- recall the historical roots of emergence of sociology in India
- explain the different socio-historical, political and cultural circumstances which led to the growth and development of sociology in India
- describe the growth and development of sociology as a profession
- explain various issues involved in the growth of sociology in post-Independence India
- discuss the expansion of teaching and research during the 1950s and 1960s
- outline some of the major research trends during the seventies, and finally
- describe briefly the theoretical and methodological orientations of sociologists in India.

2.1 Introduction

In the previous unit on **"Social Background and the Emergence of Sociology in India"** you learnt that in India, the emergence and growth of sociology discipline bears the imprint of Western sociology. Sociology as a science of society, studies its social institutions, social groups, social processes and organisations. It emerged in the Western society out of a socio-historical background which had its origins in the Enlightenment period. This period embodied the scientific and technological revolution, intellectual revolution and the commercial revolution in Europe, on the one hand, and the French revolution in 1789 on the other. The Enlightenment period stretched from the 14th century to the 18th century and had given rise to forces of social change which rocked the feudal monarchy, as well as, the Church in Europe. The Industrial revolution in England was the result of the technological developments which had taken place during the Enlightenment period brought very deep rooted changes in the nature of society and role of the individual. It had given rise to mass poverty, social evils and cultural problems. All these events gave the scholars and thinkers of that period reason to develop a science of society which could deal with these problems, find solutions, to

understand the nature of these problems and to ameliorate the condition of the poor masses who were living a life of abject poverty, crime and delinquency, and other social evils.

Besides the idea of social progress, these scholars also realised that poverty and its related social evils were not providential but had its roots in the forces of social change which the Industrial revolution in England had set in motion. Thus, the idea that poverty was socially created and could thereby be removed came to be accepted.

Here in this paper, we are going to focus more on the growth of sociology in India than its emergence. However, unless you know the social background of emergence of sociology, both in Europe, as well as, its emergence in India; the nature and growth of this discipline will not be clear to you.

2.2 Historical Roots of Sociology in India

Sociology is a "humanistic" social science even through it aims at objectivity in social observations. It has to take care of ideas and ideals, values and behaviour, aspirations and achievements, problems and predicaments of human beings in society. It cannot be seen irrespective of time and place, history and culture of societies being studied unlike the natural sciences. But sociologists have studied different human groups in particular historical circumstances and drawn generalisations about human relations from these studies.

As you learnt earlier in unit 1 of this course, sociology as a humanistic science found it difficult to fit in the mould of the natural sciences, such as, physics, chemistry, biology, etc. The debate regarding objectivity in social sciences has continued for a long time. However, our purpose to discuss this issue has been to bring to the attention the fact that sociology has developed in different countries in different manner according to their culture, tradition and historical circumstances. Its development in different countries bears the imprint of particular historical experiences and cultural configurations.

Indian sociologists being often trained in the West, were familiar with the basic concepts and categories of sociology as it had developed in the West. They borrowed these concepts and categories and applied them to the Indian context. Thus, unlike their predecessors in the West, such as, during the 19th century Europe, they did not' find the need to struggle hard to establish the legitimacy of sociology as a serious intellectual discipline. But this dependence over the Western pioneers of sociology made the Indian sociologists to forget that sociology in the West was "an intellectual response, a cognitive response to the problems which that society was facing as a result of industrialisation and the type of social upheavals and transformations that were taking place." (Singh, 1979; 107). Sociology emerged as an attempt to come to grips with the new situation which had emerged due to the social changes taking place in Western society; as mentioned earlier.

In India, however, no Industrial bourgeoisie arose when sociology was introduced. As European expansion increased, knowledge about the non-European World increased and the idea emerged under the influence of Darwin's theory of evolution and the Victorian idea of "progress" that the non-European societies represented various stages of evolution. The

European societies, it was believed, had already reached the higher stages of evolutionary growth.

Thus, the context in which sociology, and its kindred discipline, anthropology grew in India was largely a product of the European expansion of the world in the last three or four centuries. Both sociology and anthropology arose in India as a colonial attempt to understand Indian society and culture. This colonial context is very important to the emergence of sociology and anthropology in India.

Bernard Cohn (1968 : pp. 3-28), says that "with the establishment of British suzerainty in the later 18th century, the rapid acquisition of knowledge of the classical languages of India by a few British officials, the need for administrative purposes of knowledge of the structure of Indian society, and the intensification of missionary activities, systematic knowledge of Indian society began to develop very rapidly from 1760 onward. Three major traditions of approach to Indian society can be seen by the end of the 18th century; the orientalist, the administrative and the missionary. Each had a characteristic view, tied to the kinds of roles which foreign observers played in India and the assumptions which underlay their views of India." These have already been explained in the previous unit.

The British administrative officials, along with the missionaries, made earnest efforts to collect and record information regarding the life and culture of Indian social groups. Some examples are of Dr. Francis Buchanan who conducted the ethnographic survey of Bengal in 1807 at the instance of Government-General-in Council. Cohn (1968 : 13) mentions that 'consistent with the relatively haphazard collection and reporting of sociological information, usually embedded in revenue reports or in historical works, the Company (i e the East India Company) directly supported surveys part of whose goal was acquisition of better and more systematic information about the peoples of India. One of the earliest and most famous endeavors to collect information was that of Dr. Francis Buchanan."

Abbe Dubois, a French missionary in Mysore, wrote in 1816, a book entitled, **Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies** which is still valuable to scholars of India. He was one of the first to study caste and inter-relations between castes. Francis Buchanan's work in Bengal and Bihar had set the precedent in various empirical studies undertaken by the British officials to collect, collate and publish for official as well as scholarly use detailed information about all aspects-physical, cultural and sociological of every district in India, which ultimately took the shape of Imperial Gazetteer of India published in the early 20th century. (Cohn B. 1968 : 15)

These early studies of Indian society and culture were the forerunners of more systematic attempts in the later part of the 19th century. In 1871 the first all-India census was undertaken by the British government. Census, as an institution, helped collect vast quantity of information which fell outside the normal purview by the British administrations. In 1901 attempts were made by Sir Herbert Risely to establish an ethnographic survey of India which would develop as part of the census.

As you read earlier as well, in the previous unit, the British officials were convinced about the justification and necessity for collecting this vast quantity of data about Indian Society and Culture.

It is the contributions of such officials as Wilson, Risely, Baines, Blunt, Thurston, O. Malley, Hutton and Guha that the census has become an invaluable source of information not only for the demographic studies but for social and cultural analysis as well. The range and quality of data collected have increased greatly since Independence but for an outstanding exception, the omission of the data regarding caste (Srinivas & Panini 1986 : 20).

The Census, had however, led to far reaching disturbance in the society. It had set into motion certain forces of change in Indian society and especially the caste system which has left strong impact. The attempts to collect data regarding castes and their hierarchy or social divisions in each Census sharpened the self-awareness of each caste and gave rise to competition among them to claim higher positions in the caste. This effort was generally proceeded by improvement in the economic status of these castes in their region particularly. Each caste, saw in the Census a ready-made avenue for obtaining the government's approval for social mobility. The Census officers were flooded with applications from caste leaders claiming higher status.

The 1941 Census omitted caste as a category for economic reasons. However, it was only in 1951 that the recording of data on a caste basis, except for data on the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, was omitted as a matter of policy. (Srinivas & Panini 1986 : 21)

Indological studies also simultaneously contributed to as well as received stimulus from the efforts made by the British scholars and officials in order to develop an in-depth knowledge of Indian society and culture. K.M. Kapadia (1954 : XI) mentions that as early as 1776, a treatise on Hindu law in English was prepared, with the assistance of Pandits, for the use of British Judges.

The contribution of the great British Orientalist, Sir William Jones was also immense. He began the study of Sanskrit and Indology and is well known for having established the **Asiatic society of Bengal** in 1787. One of the main activities of the society was the publication of a journal devoted to antiquarian and anthropological interests. The study of Sanskrit provided a powerful stimulus not only to Indology but to other disciplines as well, such as, philology, comparative mythology and comparative jurisprudence.

Another major development which led to the study of social institutions in India was the introduction of British education and its impact. It set several forces of social change in motion such as, developing a sensitivity amongst the Indian intellectuals and social reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar etc. regarding the social evils of sati; child marriages, illiteracy and poverty, orthodoxy of Hindu religion. Thus, the confrontation with an alien culture of the British rulers and the interpretation of ancient Indian literature by scholars like Max Muller, sharpened and redefined the self-awareness of Indian elites. It resulted in a critical appraisal and reinterpretation of Indian culture and led to its social reform.

There have been many other studies of Indian society and culture, village studies, studies of law, which together have sowed the seeds of the emergence and growth of sociology and anthropology in India. In the next section, you will learn about the growth of sociology and its professionalisation in India.

Box 2.01: Sociologists and Anthropologists in Pre-Independence India

Srinivas & Panini (1986 : 16-55) have highlighted a very significant point. According to them, it will not be an exaggeration to say that during the pre-Independence period In India, inspite of being very few in numbers, they i.e. the sociologists and anthropologists had made their presence felt as teachers, researchers and critics. This the sociologists and anthropologists did when their disciplines were not so well established and when they did not have abundance of funds for conducting research. They achieved a lot in terms of research and data collection at a time when the main task of a university Professor was lecturing and examining students.

2.3 Growth and Development of Sociology as a Profession

The discipline of sociology and anthropology has developed in India in broadly three phases; the first phase is the period between 1773-1900, when, as described earlier, the foundations for its growth were laid. The second phase is the period between 1901-1950, when the two disciplines became professionalised; and finally the third phase is the period after India gained Independence. During this phase, a complex of forces influenced the development of the two disciplines. Planned development, introduction of the Constitution and parliamentary democracy led to far reaching changes in the Indian society and its structure. During this period the Indian scholars were exposed to the work of their foreign colleagues which influenced their own work. Also availability of funds helped conduct research in several areas. (Srinivas & Panini 1986 : 19).

So it was in the beginning of the twentieth century that the two disciplines entered the early phase of professionalisation. Srinivas & Panini (1986 : 22) mention that 'although the bulk of the ethnographic work continued to be carried out by the British officials associated with the Census operations, professional sociologists and anthropologists in Europe began taking interest in India.' W.H.R. Rivers' published his study of **The Todas (1906)**, based on intensive fieldwork. This was one of the first monographs in the modern social anthropological tradition. Rivers did his fieldwork among the Todas, a tribe in the Nilgiri hills in South India, in the winter of 1901-2 and his interest in India continued almost until his death in 1922. He had also published papers on India, such as, on the origin of hypergamy; kinship and marriage in India in the first issue (1921) of the journal, **Man in India.** His posthumous work, edited by W.J. Perry, **"Social Organisation"** (1924) was intended to be delivered as a course of lectures in Calcutta University.

Two of his students, G.S. Ghurey and K.P. Chattopadhyaya came to play an important role in the development of sociology and social anthropology (which is a branch of anthropology) in India. His influence continued to exist in the works of G.S. Ghurey and K.P. Chattopadhyaya who held important academic positions in their respective universities of Bombay and Calcutta till the 1940s. Influence of Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown came later and they remained relatively unknown till the end of World War II. Radcliffe Brown studied the Andaman Islanders. During this period several European sociologists such as, C. Bougle, M. Mauss and Max Weber wrote on India relying on secondary sources.

Dhanagare (1998 : 37) says that the institutionalisation and professionalisation of sociology and social anthropology in India have two clearly identifiable phases - Before 1950 and after. Moreover, 1950-52 is also a watershed in a historical sense that it was then that free India embarked on programmes of planned development.

The pre. 1950 phase was essentially a phase of multi-level syntheses. It was not without significance that both the disciplines had their beginnings in the two cities of Bombay and Calcutta which symbolically represented colonialism. The beginnings were more or less simultaneous in the second decade of the present century (R. Mukherjee, 1977 : 1-193).

During the first two decades of the 20th century two Indian scholars, L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer and S.C. Roy made their mark in anthropology. Both lacked formal training in the discipline, but their achievements were note worthy. Anathakrishna Iyer studied the castes and tribes of Cochin and Mysore and also a study of the Syrian Christians of Kerela. Roy, who was a lawyer by profession, wrote monographs on some of the tribes in Bihar. He was also a 'champion' of his tribe. In 1921 he founded the journal, **Man In India** which is still in circulation. He also wrote a book called **Caste, Race and Religion in India** (1934).

The development of anthropology in India saw a new milestone in 1905 when the British government conceded the demand for establishing the Ethnographic Survey. The output of these surveys can be seen in the form of district gazetteers and Imperial Gazetteer of India (26 volumes, Calcutta 1908-1909). These covered details on different tribes and castes of each province. Many other efforts were made to collect collate and analyse data regarding different castes, communities and tribes in India. In the previous chapter you had a brief description of these developments. You had a brief overview of the growth of sociology and anthropology in Independent India. The next section will describe the later developments a little more elaborately.

2.4 Sociology in the Post Independence India

As mentioned earlier in the first unit, sociology and anthropology were gradually introduced in different universities, initially in other departments of studies, such as, economics, social philosophy, etc. but later several full fledged departments of sociology developed in different parts of India. During the years 1910-1950, the two disciplines became professionalised. But during this phase, too, sociology was not taught in more than half a dozen universities and Bombay was the only centre of post graduate research in sociology and social anthropology in the country. There were about a dozen teaching posts in these two disciplines in different universities. (Srinivas & Panini 1986 : 33) However, as its popularity increased, its acceptance in other universities began to take place. Slowly with the expanding demand for education at all levels, more and more teaching posts in sociology and anthropology in universities and colleges were introduced.

Sociology, being a discipline at this time which did not draw from the knowledge of mathematics and statistics, such as, economics did came to be preferred by a large section of students who found it to be a 'soft option'. It is only later that sociology syllabi became more standardized, and some universities made provision for teaching research methodology and statistics at the masters level. In due course of time sociology gained a prestige and

it is at present one of the coveted subjects chosen by students at college and university levels.

Reflection and Action 2.1

Interview five students who have opted for sociology courses at B.A. or M.A. level at your study centre. Ask them for the reasons for choosing this subject. Now compare their reasons with your own and write a note of one page on "Relevance of Sociology : Nature and Scope."

You may discuss your note with your Academic Counsellor at your Study Centre.

2.5 Expansion of Teaching and Research During the 1950's and 1960's

In the post-Independence period, with the introduction of planned development in the country and creation of the National Planning Commission, significant changes started taking place in the growth and development of sociology and anthropology in India. Research and training institutes began to multiply in India to meet the demand for information introduced by the state, to analyse and evaluate their functioning. Also, qualified, trained people were needed to man the various institutes, as well as the government agencies which had cropped up during this period.

A Research Programme Committee for funding the social science research related to planning and development was created by the Planning Commission. The creation of a Programme Evaluation Board in the Planning Commission with branches in each state created jobs for sociologists and anthropologists. Along with this development another important development took place, which was an increase in the awareness of the relevance of the social sciences to the process of planning amongst the educated. This, was reflected in the Planning Commissions recommendation in 1966 to found an Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). V.K.R.V. Rao, member in-charge of Education in the Commission, was responsible for this recommendation. ICSSR came into existence in September, 1969 with the late D.R. Gadgil as its first Chairman. (Srinivas & Panini, 1986 : 37)

Reflection and Action 2.2

Find out a few details about either, Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) or University Grants Commission (UGC). The area of research currently going on and being funded by these organisations these days. You may visit their website, if possible, at any Cyber Cafe, near your home. Write a note including these details and discuss it with other students of sociology at your Study Centre.

The increase in the awareness of the relevance of sociology and social anthropology by the educated elites and government officials and policy makers in Independent India can also be seen reflected in the development grants for starting new departments or expanding existing university departments given by the University Grants Commission (UGC). This euphoria of 'development', says Dhanagare (1993 : 46), explains to a large extent the institutionalisation and expansion of sociology and social anthropology in Indian universities after 1950. To facilitate this expansion the UGC sanctioned new posts in different universities all over India through the Five Year Plan development grants.

In the pre-1950 period, Indian sociology and social anthropology had followed the dominant trends in British social and cultural anthropology especially that of B. Malinowski's functionalism with its culturalogical strain. After 1950 the influence of American rural sociology started being seen on Indian sociology and social anthropology in addition to the British. (R Mukherjee, 1977 : 47). The reasons for this development lay in the increased contacts with America, particularly the role of Ford Foundation was significant and there was acceptance of the ideology and programme of Community Development by the Indian government.

The Ford Foundation in India succeeded in transplanting the idea of community development into Indian planning between 1951 and 1970. Its indispensability as a crucial tool of social reconstruction and as an agency of development, especially in the rural areas, was accepted by the government. It was this package of community development, Dhanagare (1993 : 47) says, that opened up job opportunities for Indian social scientists in general and sociologists and social anthropologists in particular. They could obtain funds for research projects to study Indian villages, to investigate the impact of the community development programmes on the villages and their response to the programme. Large-scale surveys were conducted to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the community development programmes for the purpose of administrators. This required the sociologists and social anthropologists in India to get acquainted with modern survey research methods and procedures of empirical social sciences developed in the West, particularly in the United States. To meet these demands courses on research methodology were introduced into the teaching curriculum of sociology and social anthropology in India. (Beteille, 1973 : 224-31)

The community development programmes in many ways helped in the growth and development of the twin disciplines, sociology and social anthropology in India but it had its negative side as well. Most of these research studies were quantitative rather than qualitative. The state controlled directly and indirectly the nature of these studies. Thus these studies could not come of age in the true sense of the term. They failed to develop their own identity even after 1950s.

According to Dhanagare (1980 : 25-26) it was primarily the official patronage and the Ford Foundation largesse which attracted a number of sociologists and social anthropologists to this area of study. There was nothing inherently wrong with this trend of research in the two disciplines but the problem was that research priorities were practically dictated by the state whose action as well as policy concerns came to be echoed in social science seminars and conferences.

Another significant impact of the community development programme on sociology and social anthropology in India was that its proximity with the state and government policy formulating bodies became "an index of academic status and recognition. This new status transformed the earlier interaction between two or more disciplines into an almost pathological competition for resources as well as recognition". (Dhanagare, 1993 : 48)

There was stiff competition among various social science disciplines to get the best projects and assignments from the establishment. This competition hampered any inter disciplinary dialogue or cooperation between the different disciplines in social sciences and as a result their growth and development

became compartmentalized and narrow. Although, there was at that time considerable discussion on the desirability of an inter disciplinary approach; in reality the social sciences remained confined to their rigid boundaries until 1970. Dhanagare (1993 : 49); says that not only were sociology and social anthropology estranged from economics, history, political science and philosophy with which they had either co-existed and often interacted in pre-1950 period, but also, in this process they themselves became estranged from each other. In the pre-1950 phase they had maintained a very productive and symbiotic relationship. In the 1960s and 1970s the trend was clearly in favour of a separation of sociology and social anthropology in most of the Indian universities except for Bombay and Saugar. The newly started central universities, like Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi), NEHU (Shillong) and Hyderabad favored the older pattern by setting up a joint department of sociology and social anthropology.

In Delhi, (i e Delhi University) although sociology and anthropology were separate departments from the beginning, the Sociology department, situated in Delhi School of Economics, emphasised social anthropology. According to Dhanagare (1993 : 49) without the interaction with sociology, anthropology was invariably reduced to ethnology and physical anthropologists and social/ cultural anthropologists had little in common except shared office space and administrative and financial control. It is due to these reasons that the relationship between sociology and social anthropology in India have an ambivalent status. Even ICSSR which was set up by Government of India in 1969, decided to conduct a combined survey (trend reports) on sociology and social anthropology in India, but for some reason maintained a separate panel of experts for both the disciplines. UGC also followed the same trend.

The ICSSR contributed immensely to the growth and development of sociology and social anthropology in India. It more or less replaced the Research Programmes Committee of the Planning Commission in terms of the functions that it performed. It is an autonomous body and financially independent which has supported several university departments through funds for research projects, seminars and workshops, publication of books and journals, data analysis and consultancy. It also offers short term or long term fellowships both for junior or senior members of the profession. Dhanagre (1993 : 50) writes that ICSSR's many schemes were sufficiently broad based as well as egalitarian to inspire confidence among all social scientists including sociologists and social anthropologists. It has played a positive and constructive role in the growth of both the disciplines in India since 1969 onwards.

2.6 Some Major Research Trends During the Seventies

The seventies period saw a further continuation and diversification of interests and specialisations in substantive areas of research and teaching since the nineteen sixties M.S.A. Rao (1986 : 168-178) says that while village community studies dominated researches earlier, interests in such problems as agrarian relations, land reforms, peasants, agricultural labourers, scheduled castes and tribes began to attract increasing attention of sociologists and social anthropologists. The seventies could be reviewed under three heads: (i) areas of interests and specialisations which get crystallised, (ii) areas of interest which have developed but not yet got crystallised; and (iii) emergence of new approaches in the established areas.

Peasant studies and agrarian social structure emerged as a distinct area of research interest in the seventies (Beteille 1974, Oomen 1975, 1977, Alexander 1975, Joshi 1975, Joan Mencher 1978). These studies marked a departure from the earlier village community studies with emphasis on caste and village solidarity, However, village studies continued to hold the attention of some sociologists (For example Srinivas 1976).

Closely related with the area of peasant studies is the study of peasant movements which attracted the attention of some sociologists (Dhanagare 1974, Ranga Rao 1978, PN Mukharjee 1978, Rajendra Singh 1978 and A R Desai 1979). Besides the sociologists, historians have also developed a major interest in agrarian history. The studies on peasant movements is, however, a part of the study on social movements in general which became crystallized during the 1970s. Studies on several types of movements, such as, the backward classes movements, sectarian movements have been published (M.S.A. Rao 1978, 1979 a, 1979nb).

Three other areas of interest in sociology which got crystallized during the seventies were — (1) industrial sociology, (2) urban sociology, and (3) social stratification.

In industrial sociology there have been works of N.R. Sheth and P.J. Patel (1979) which trace the trends in the development of industrial sociology. There have been studies of trade unions and industrial relations (E.A. Ramaswamy 1977, 1978). A few university departments are teaching industrial sociology at the M.A. and M. Phil levels. Urban sociology had long been neglected in India due to the misconception that India was a village society. But during the 1970s it gained importance. Problems of rural-urban migration, urban development and slums attracted the attention of the sociologists and social anthropologists. Different aspects of urban sociology have been studied, such as, rural-urban migration, demography, and neighbourhoods, slums, stratification, education, ethnic conflict, etc. (M.S.A. Rao 1970, 1974, Saberwal 1976, 1978, Sylvia Vatuk 1972 and Richard Fox 1970). Urban slums also attracted special attention (Desai and Pillai 1970, 1972, Weibe 1975; Alfred De Souza 1979 and others).

Another major area of interest and specialisation was social stratification in the seventies. A large number of studies were published in seventies, such as, the efforts of Andre Beteille (1977), Yogendra Singh (1977), Victor D'Souza (1977). Several studies of elites appeared in the seventies (Singhi 1974; Sheokumar Lal 1974). Social stratification is a common course taught in almost all the universities and colleges teaching sociology.

Several studies in different areas of specialisation appeared during this period, such as, in the area of sociology of development, sociology of education, and so on. Many new areas appeared, such as, sociology of profession, sociology of organisation, medical sociology, studies on women, etc.

Dhanagare (1993 : 51) mentions that inspite of a lot of changes taking place in the field of sociology and social anthropology since the 1950s, not all the research concerns were abandoned. Infact, the continuity of research concerns is striking. New trends have emerged too, but the old ones came to be consolidated in the 1950s and 1960s. Most important of these themes were such as caste and stratification, family and kinship, religion and ritual, and village social organisation. These topics continued to preoccupy

sociologists and social anthropologists. Above all, caste and stratification proved to be such a significant structural reality in Indian society that it continued to hold the attention of Indian sociologists and social anthropologists. But, here too, one can observe a qualitative difference in the caste stratification studies conducted in recent years.

Srinivas's studies of caste and religion (1952, 1959, 1962, 1966) employed not only the structural-functional nature of caste and religion but also the dynamics of caste system in Indian villages. He developed the conceptual tools to study the processual aspects of caste such as, sanskritisation, westernisation; concept of 'dominant caste' to understand the power relations with in the village society. YB Damle (1968 : 95-102) advocated the use of reference group theory in explaining caste mobility, Andre Beteill'e (1965) used the Weberian framework of class, status and party to study 'caste, class and power' in a Tanjore village.

Box 2.02: Relevance of Sociology : An Opinion

D.N. Dhanagare opines (1993 : 28) about the role and relevance of sociology in strong words. He says that "vast sections of the under-privileged in the Indian society, who have failed to make it through the 'mobility' route, are going to resort to the alternative 'mobilization' route to social transformation. What are the prospects of 'mobilization', where is it likely to lead, and would social scientists, including sociologists, like to be just silent, indifferent spectators of the transformation process or would they like to contribute to it in some measure? These are some of the questions the sociology profession as a whole must address itself to, sooner than later."

Louis Dumont, a French sociologist studied caste in India using the structuralist method in his famous book **Homo Hierarchicus** (1970). He revived the interest in 'caste' studies in the 1970's. He focused on the need to understand the ideology of caste as given in the Hindu scriptures and classical texts. He advocated the use of an Indological and strucluralist approach to the study of caste system and village social structure in India.

Different aspects of caste and stratification system attracted the attention of sociologists and social anthropologists. Political developments in India, impact of community development programmes, panchayati raj, democratic decentralisation and several other developments during the 1950's had far-reaching consequences. Indian sociologists and social anthropologists were concerned about studying the impact of these changes on the Indian social and rural social structure. (S.C. Dube, 1969, RN Haldipur, 1974). Studies on caste and power structure in rural society came to occupy a predominant position. (Dhanagare, 1993 : 52)

A new trend in sociological research developed in the 1960's and 1970's in the area of rural sociology. The new interests focused on the basic changes in the rural social structure initiated through land reform measures since Independence. The new trends gave more attention to class formation among the peasantry, social mobility among different rural strata and the newly emerging contradictions in the rural areas. This new trend turned from 'micro' level inquiries to 'macro' level analytical exercises. (Yogendra Singh, 1977 : 22-23)

Closely affiliated to the new trend in agrarian studies in sociology has been

the trend of studying social movements, particularly among the peasantry. AR Desai's (1948) study of the Indian National Movement and its social background, describing its class character and its inherent contradictions was a very significant and pioneering contribution from the pre-1950 era.

During the 1980's several of the areas of interest from the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's onwards continued to gain strength. Many new areas also emerged, such as of sociology of deviance, sociology of law, sociology of knowledge, sociology of science, etc. These and several other areas have been increasingly been the focus of study of sociologists and social anthropologists in India.

Along with the areas of interest even the sociological approach to study these areas have varied. The theoretical underpinnings of the research studies and the methodology used by different sociologists has been different.

2.7 Theory and Methods Used by Sociologists in India

According to Dhanagare (1993 : 63) the theoretical orientations of Indian sociologists and social anthropologists seems to have changed. It may be said that the appeal of 'philosophical theoretical orientation' (a la Radha Kamal Mukherjee), and 'structural-functional' and 'culturological' approach (a la Radcliffe Brown. MN Srinivas. etc.) is declining. Dialectical historical orientation-often based on Marxist methods and propositions - has, of late, shown a profound capacity for adaptation and innovation (Singh, Y. 1977 : 25-26). This orientation has now become popular amongst the younger generation of sociologists.

The 'structuralist' approach or theoretical orientation too has been quite popular and is reflected in the works of such sociologists as J.P.S. Oberoi (1974, 1978), T.N. Madan (1975) and Veena Das (1977). This trend is likely to gain more popularity in the coming years. (M.S.A. Rao, 1979 b : 1812) The systemic theoretic orientation is seen in some of the writings of MS Gore, Yogendra Singh, Y.B. Damle, Yogesh Atal and a few others. But no significant advances have been made on this front in recent years. P.N. Rastogi has been the lone follower of the cybernetic approach (See Rastogi, 1973, 1975).

Briefly described, these are some of the major trends of research in sociology and social anthropology in India. The theoretical approaches and methods to conduct research has been very many and some of the important theoretical approaches used by different sociologists has been mentioned here only as an example to explain to you the rich literature that exists in the field of sociology and social anthropology.

2.8 Conclusion

The first paper "Social Background of the Emergence of Sociology in India" of this block Number 1 **Emergence of Sociology in India**, and the present paper on "Emergence of the Discipline : Issues and Themes" are the introductory papers on the general theme of this course on **Sociology in India**. The social background which enabled the discipline of sociology and social anthropology to take root in the rich soil of India where a classical

literary tradition already existed laid the intellectual moorings of the new discipline and its institutions.

As described in the beginning of both the papers, sociology and social anthropology bore a strong imprint of the sociology in the Western society. It came as a product of an intellectual response of the Indians to the Western interpretation of Indian society and culture by the Westerners. As the European invasion and expansion over the non-European territory increased, the need to understand the new societies and communities developed. For several reasons, some philanthropic, some pragmatic, the scholars from the Western societies tried to interpret social reality in India and use this knowledge for other purposes, of proselytisation, for amelioration of social evils and orthodoxy of the traditional Hindu society, welfare of the tribals etc.

Thus, the colonial impact and the confrontation of the Western outlook with the Eastern way of life produced a body of literature which became the foundation for the emergence of the sociology and social anthropology disciplines.

Later, in the present paper the description of the professionalisation of the discipline from 1900-1921 onwards has been described. It was not a coincidence that the disciplines developed professionally first in cities like, Bombay, Calcutta and Lucknow and slowly spread throughout the country after the 1950's. The colonial context, therefore, cannot be denied. It was during the 1950's that later professional developments and acceptance of the discipline in different universities took place. The prestige of sociology and social anthropology grew, after the Independence period when planned development was introduced. Trained manpower to staff the Institutes etc. and to conduct research and training for collecting information about the impact of the various Community Development Programmes, Panchayati raj, etc. developed.

ICSSR was founded in 1969 and the University Grants Commission (UGC) provided funds for research to the social scientists. Relevance of the social sciences generally and sociology and social anthropology particularly developed.

Finally, we have described some of the research trends in Indian universities in sociology and social anthropology from the 1950's, 1960's, 1970's till the 1980's. Briefly the theoretical orientations have been described to explain the development of the disciplines in India.

2.9 Further Reading

Dhanagare, D.N. 1995 *Themes and Perspectives in Indian Sociology;* Rawat Publications, New Delhi

Singh, Y.1986 *Indian Sociology : Social Conditioning and Emerging Concerns;* Vikas Publications, New Delhi

Unit 3

Village Studies in India

Contents

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Provide a historical background to the emergence of 'village studies' in India
- describe the general context in which the village studies were undertaken
- explain the how and why sociologists/social anthropologists chose this field of study
- discuss why the study of villages in India came to gain importance
- outline the general features of the village
- describe the social structure of the village which involves the description of caste, class and gender as significant aspects, and finally
- explain the nature of the 'field view' and the fieldwork done by the sociologists/social anthropologists.

3.1 Introduction

So far you have learnt about the social background of the emergence of sociology in India, its later development and growth and some major issues and themes of research. Village studies, during the 1950s and 1960s constituted a major area of concern and several monographs and papers were published during this period of growth and professionalisation of the discipline. In the present unit you will learn more about these village studies.

Village occupies an important place in the social and cultural landscape of contemporary India. Notwithstanding India's significant industrialisation over the last five or six decades, and a considerable increase in its urban population, a large majority of Indians continue to live in its more than five lakh villages and remain dependent on agriculture, directly or indirectly. According to the 2001 Census, rural India accounted for nearly 72 per cent of India's total population. Similarly, though the share of agriculture has come down to around one-fourth of the total national income, nearly half of India's working population is directly employed in the agricultural sector.

Apart from it being an important **demographic** and **structural** reality characterising contemporary India, village has also been an important

ideological category, a category through which India has often been imagined and imaged in modern times. The village has been seen as the ultimate signifier of the "authentic native life", a place where one could see or observe the "real" India and develop an understanding of the way local people organise their social relationships and belief systems. As Andre Beteille writes, 'The village was not merely a place where people lived; it had a design in which were reflected the basic values of Indian civilisation' (Beteille1980:108). Institutional patterns of the Indian "village communities" and its cultural values were supposed to be an example of what in the twentieth century came to be known as the "traditional society".

This unit will provide you an overview of the tradition of "village studies" among sociologists and social anthropologists in India. Apart from looking at the manner in which the village social life was studied, the methods used and issues/questions focussed on, the unit will also offer a critical assessment of the tradition of village studies.

3.2 Historical Background

Though one may find detailed references to village life in ancient and medieval times, it was during the British colonial rule that an image of the Indian village was constructed by the colonial administrators that was to have far reaching implications — ideological as well as political — for the way Indian society was to be imagined in the times to come.

Along with the earlier writings of James Mill, Charles Metcalfe's notion of the Indian village community set the tone for much of the later writings on rural India. Metcalfe, in his celebrated remark stated that 'the Indian village communities were little republics, having nearly everything they wanted within themselves, and almost independent of foreign relations. They seemed to last where nothing else lasted. Dynasty after dynasty tumbled down; revolution succeeded revolution but the village community remained the same.' (as in Cohn, 1987:213). Though not all colonial administrators shared Metcalfe's assessment of the Indian village, it nevertheless became the most popular and influential representation of India. The Indian village, in the colonial discourse, was a self-sufficient community with communal ownership of land and was marked by a functional integration of various occupational groups. Things as diverse as stagnation, simplicity and social harmony were attributed to the village which was taken to be the basic unit of Indian civilisation. 'Each village was an inner world, a traditional community, self-sufficient in its economy, patriarchal in its governance, surrounded by an outer one of other hostile villages and despotic governments.' (Inden, 1990:133).

In many ways, even in the nationalist discourse, the idea of village as a representative of authentic native life was derived from the same kind of imagination. Though Gandhi was careful enough not to glorify the decaying village of British India, he nevertheless celebrated the so-called simplicity and authenticity of village life, an image largely derived from colonial representations of the Indian village. The decadence of the village was seen as a result of colonial rule and therefore village reconstruction was, along with political independence, an important process for recovery of the lost self (see Jodhka 2002).

In the post-Independence India also 'village' has continued to be treated as

the basic unit of Indian society. Among the academic traditions, the study of village has perhaps been the most popular among the sociologists and social anthropologists working on India. They carried-out a large number of studies focussing on the social and cultural life of the village in India. Most of these studies were published during the decades 1950s and 1960s. These "village studies" played an important role in giving respectability to the disciplines of sociology and social anthropology in India.

Generally basing their accounts on first-hand fieldwork, carried out mostly in a single village, social anthropologists focused on the structures of social relationships, institutional patterns, beliefs and value systems of the rural people. The publication of these studies also marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of Indian social sciences. They showed, for the first time, the relevance of a fieldwork based understanding of Indian society, or what came to be known as **"field-view"** of the India, different from the then dominant **"book-view"** of India, which was developed by the **Indologists** and **orientalists** from classical Hindu scriptures.

3.3 The Context

After the colonial administrators/ethnographers, it was the "young" discipline of social anthropology that took up the study of Indian village during 1950s and 1960s in a big way. This new interest in the village social life was a direct offshoot of the newly emerged interest in the study of the peasantry in the Western academy.

Emergence of the so-called "new states" following decolonisation during the post war period had an important influence on research priorities in the social sciences. The most significant feature of the newly emerged 'third world' countries was the dependence of large proportions of their populations on a stagnant agrarian sector. Thus, apart from industrialisation, one the main agenda for the new political regimes was the transformation of their "backward" and stagnant agrarian economy. Though the strategies and priorities differed, 'modernisation' and 'development' became common programmes in most of the Third World countries.

Understanding the prevailing structures of agrarian relations and working out ways and means of transforming them were recognised as the most important priorities within development studies. It was in this context that the concept of 'peasantry' found currency in the discipline of social anthropology. At a time when primitive tribes were either in the process of disappearing or had already disappeared, the "discovery" of the peasantry provided a new lease of life to the discipline of social anthropology.

The 'village community' was identified as the social foundation of the peasant economy in Asia. It is quite easy to see this connection between the Redfieldian notion of 'peasant studies' (Redfield 1965) and the Indian 'village studies'. The single most popular concept used by the anthropologists studying the Indian village was Robert Redfield's notion of **'little community'**. Among the first works on the subject, *Village India: Studies in the Little Community* (edited by M. Marriot, 1955) was brought out under the direct supervision of Redfield. He even wrote a preface to this book.

Having found a relevant subject matter in the village, social anthropologists (many of whom were either from the West or were Indian scholars trained

in the Western universities) initiated field studies in the early 1950s. During October 1951 and May 1954 the *Economic Weekly* (which later became *Economic and Political Weekly*) published a number of short essays providing brief accounts of individual villages that were being studied by different anthropologists. These essays were later put together by M.N. Srinivas in the form of a book with the title *India's Villages* in 1955. As mentioned above Mackim Marriot's book *Village India* also appeared in the same year. Interestingly, the first volume of *Rural Profiles* by D.N. Majumdar also appeared in 1955. S.C. Dube also published his full length study of a village near Hyderabad, *Indian Village* in the same year.

Box 3.01: Views of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru on Village in India

Mahatma Gandhi in his letter to Shri Jawaharlal Nehru on October 5, 1945 orignially written in Hindi expressed his views on village, in general and specially in India. He wrote **"**..... I am convinced that if India is to attain true freedom and through India the world also, then sooner or later the fact must be recognised that people have to live in villages, not in towns, in huts, not in palaces. Crores of people will never be able to live in peace with each other in towns and palaces. They will then have no recourse but to resort to both violence and untruth. I hold that without truth and non-violence there can be nothing but destruction for humanity. We can realise truth and non-violence only in the simplicity of village life..... .**"**

Jawaharlal Nehru, in his reply to Bapu's letter, wrote amongst other things, that, **"**The whole question is how to achieve this society and what its content should be. I do not understand why a village should necessarily embody truth and non violence. A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow-minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent.**"** (The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi Vol. IV. Selected Letters General Editor Shriman Narian. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad. pp. 98-101)

There was a virtual explosion of village studies in the sixties and seventies. 'Although social anthropologists were the first in the field which they dominated throughout, scholars from other disciplines — political science, history, economics, and so on — were also attracted to it' (Beteille, 1996:235). Though most of the studies provided a more general account of social, economic and cultural life of the rural people, some of the later studies also focused on specific aspects of the rural social structure, such as, stratification, kinship, or religion.

3.4 Field and the Fieldwork

An anthropologist typically selected a single **"**middle**"** sized village where he/she carried-out an intensive fieldwork, generally by staying with the **"**community**"** for a fairly long period of time, ranging from one to two years, and at the end of the stay he/she was supposed to come out with a **"**holistic**"** account of the social and cultural life of the village people.

The most important feature that qualified these studies to be called anthropological was the fieldwork component and the use of **"participant-observation"**, a method of data collection that anthropologists in the West

had developed while doing studies of tribal communities. The "participant-observation" method was seen as a method that understood social life from within, in terms of the values and meanings attributed to it by the people themselves.

Box 3.02: Participant Observation

The method of participant observation also provided continuity between the earlier tradition of anthropology when it studied the tribal communities and its later preoccupation with the village. As Beteille writes:

In moving from tribal to village studies, social anthropologists retained one very important feature of their craft, the method of intensive field work.... Those standards were first established by Malinowski and his pupils at the London School of Economics in the twenties, thirties and forties, and by the fifties, they had come to be adopted by professional anthropologists the world over (Beteille, 1996:233-4).

3.5 Perceived Significance of the Village

The discovery of peasantry thus rejuvenated the discipline of social anthropology. In the emerging intellectual and political environment during the post war period, anthropologists saw themselves playing an important role in providing authentic and scientific account of the "traditional social order", the transformation of which had become a global concern. Many of the village monographs emerged directly from the projects carried-out by sociologists and social anthropologists for development agencies. These included studies by Dube (1955), Majumdar (1958), and Lewis (1958). Lewis, who studied a village near Delhi writes:

> Our work was problem oriented from the start. Among the problems we studied intensively were what the villagers felt they needed in housing, in education, in health; land consolidation programme; and the newly created government-sponsored panchayats (Lewis, 1958:ix).

Lewis was appointed by the Ford Foundation in India to work with the Programme Evaluation Organisation of the Planning Commission to help in developing a scheme for the objective evaluation of the rural reconstruction programme.

A typical anthropologist, unlike his/her economist counterpart, saw the village 'in the context of the cultural life lived by the people' and the way 'rural life was inter-locked and interdependent' which 'baffled social engineers as it could not be geared to planned economy. It was here that the economists needed the assistance of sociologists and anthropologists' (Majumdar, 1955:iv).

Though they were supposed to only assist the 'big brothers' economists in the planning process, the anthropologist viewed their perspective as being "superior" because 'they alone studied village community as a whole, and their knowledge and approach provided an indispensable background for the proper interpretation of data on any single aspect of rural life. Their approach provided a much-needed corrective to the partial approach of the economist, political scientist and social worker (Srinivas, 1955:90).

Anthropologists criticised economists and official planners view because they tended 'to treat people like dough in their hands. The fact that people had

resources of their own, physical, intellectual and moral, and that they could use them to their advantage, was not recognised by those in power' (Srinivas, 1978:34).

While economists used **quantitative techniques** and their method was "more scientific", the anthropological approach had its own advantages. Anthropological studies provided **qualitative analysis**. The method of anthropology required that its practitioners selected 'a small universe which could be studied intensively for a long period of time to analyse its intricate system of social relations' (Epstein, 1962:2).

However, not all of them were directly involved with development programmes. In fact most of them saw the relevance of their works in professional terms. Taking a position against the close involvement with official agencies, Srinivas argued that 'the anthropologist has intimate and first hand knowledge of one or two societies and he can place his understanding at the disposal of the planner. He may in some cases even be able to anticipate the kind of reception a particular administrative measure may have. But he cannot lay down policy because it is a result of certain decisions about right and wrong' (Srinivas, 1960:13). Thus maintaining a "safe" distance from the political agencies was seen to be necessary because, unlike economics, social anthropology did not have a theoretical grounding that could help them become applied sciences.

The relevance of studying the village was viewed more in methodological terms. The village and its hamlets represented **"India in microcosm"** (Hoebel in Hiebert, 1971:vii). For the anthropologist, they 'were invaluable **observation-centres** where he/she could study in detail social processes and problems to be found occurring in great parts of India' (Srinivas 1955: 99). Villages were supposedly close to people, their life, livelihood and culture and they were 'a focal point of reference for individual prestige and identification'. As 'an important administrative and social unit, the village profoundly influenced the behaviour pattern of its inhabitants'. Villages were supposed to have been around for 'hundreds of years', having 'survived years of wars, making and breaking up of empires, famines, floods and other natural disasters'. This perceived 'historical continuity and stability of villages' strengthened the case for village studies (Dasgupta, 1978:1).

Carrying-out village studies during the fifties and the sixties was also important because the Indian society was changing very fast and the anthropologist needed to record details of the traditional social order before it was too late. Underscoring this urgency Srinivas wrote 'We have, at the most, another ten years in which to record facts about a type of society which is changing fundamentally and with great rapidity' (Srinivas, 1955: 99)

3.6 General Features of the Village

Unlike the tribal communities, the Indian villages had a considerable degree of diversity. This diversity was both internal as well as external. The village was internally differentiated in diverse groupings and had a complex structure of social relationships and institutional arrangements. There were also different kinds of villages in different parts of the country. Even within a particular region of the country, not all villages were alike.

The stereotypical image of the Indian village as a self-sufficient community

was contested by anthropological studies. Beteille, for example, argued 'at least as far back in time as living memory went, there was no reason to believe that the village (he studied) was fully self-sufficient in the economic sphere (Beteille, 1996:136-7). Similarly Srinivas too contested the colonial notion of the Indian village being a completely self-sufficient republic. The village, he argued, 'was always a part of a wider entity. (Srinivas, 1960:10).

However, despite this contention about the village having links with the outside world and explicating the diversities that marked the rural society of India, it was the **'unity'** of the village that was underlined by most anthropologists. The fact that the village interacted with the outside world did not mean it did not have a design of its own or could not be studied as a representative unit of Indian social life. While villages had horizontal ties, it was the vertical ties within the village that governed much of the life of an average person in the village.

Village provided an important source of identity to its residents. Different scholars placed different emphasis on how significant the village identity was when compared to other sources of identification, such as those of caste, class or locality. Srinivas argued that individuals in his village had a sense of identification with their village and an insult to one's village had to be avenged like an insult to oneself, one's wife, or one's family (Srinivas, 1976:270). Similarly, Dube argued that though Indian villages varied greatly in their internal structure and organisation, in their ethos and world-view, and in their life-ways and thought-ways, on account of variety of factors, village communities all over the Indian sub-continent had a number of common features. The village settlement, as a unit of social organisation, represented a kind of solidarity which was different from that of the kin, the caste, and the class. Each village was a distinct entity, had some individual mores and usages, and possessed a corporate unity. Different castes and communities inhabiting the village were integrated in its economic, social, and ritual pattern by ties of mutual and reciprocal obligations sanctioned and sustained by generally accepted conventions. Notwithstanding the existence of groups and factions inside the settlement, people of the village could, and did, face the outside world as an organised, compact whole (Dube,1960:202).

Reflection and Action 3.01

Read a sociologists study of an Indian village and then read a novel, such as, Shreelal Shukl's 'Ragdarbari' in Hindi or R.K. Narian's Malgudi Day's in English.

Write down an essay on the depiction of an Indian village, as given by a sociologist and compare it with the account of an Indian village by a creative writer. Compare your essay with those of other students at your Study Centre.

It was W.H. Wiser who had initially, in his classic study of *The Hindu Jajmani System*, first published in 1936, had conceptualised the social relationships among caste groups in the Indian village in the framework of **'reciprocity'**. The framework of reciprocity implied that though village social organisation was hierarchical, it was the 'interdependence' among different caste groups that characterised the underlying spirit of the Indian village. Reciprocity implied, explicitly or implicitly, an exchange of equal services and non-exploitative relations. Mutual gratification was supposed to be the outcome of reciprocal exchange.

> Each serves the other. Each in turn is master. Each in turn is servant (Wiser 1969:10).

Though the later studies were much more elaborate and contained long descriptions of different forms of social inequalities and differences in the rural society, many of them continued to use the framework of reciprocity particularly while conceptualising 'unity' of the village social life. However not everyone emphasised the unity of the village the way Srinivas and Dube or earlier Wiser did. Some of the anthropologists explicitly contested the unity thesis while others qualified their arguments by recognising the conflicts within the village and the ties that villagers had with the outside world. For instance, Paul Hiebert in his study of a south Indian village, although arguing that the caste system provided a source of stability to the village, also underlined the fact that 'deep seated cleavages underlie the apparent unity of the village and fragmented it into numerous social groups' (Hiebert, 1971:13). Similarly, Beteille had argued that his study of village 'Sripuram as a whole constituted a unit in a physical sense and, to a much lesser extent, in the social sense'(Beteille, 1996:39).

Among those who nearly rejected the idea of the communitarian unity were Lewis and Bailey. F.G. Bailey, for example provided a radical critique of the 'unity-reciprocity' thesis and offered an alternative perspective. Stressing on the coercive aspects of caste relations, he writes:

> ... those who find the caste system to their taste have exaggerated the harmony with which the system works, by stressing the degree of interdependence between the different castes. Interdependence means that everyone depends on everyone else: it means reciprocity. From this it is easy to slip into ideas of equality: because men are equally dependent on one another, they are assumed to be equal in other ways. Equality of rank is so manifestly false when applied to a caste system that the final step in the argument is seldom taken, and exposition rests upon a representation of mutual interdependence, and the hint that, because one caste could bring the system to a standstill by refusing to play its part, castes do not in fact use this sanction to maintain their rights against the rest. In fact, of course, the system is held together not so much by ties of reciprocity, but by the concentration in one of its parts. The system works the way it does because the coercive sanctions are all in the hands of a dominant caste. There is a tie of reciprocity, but it is not a sanction of which the dependent castes can make easy use (Bailey, 1960:258).

However, this kind of a perspective did not become popular among the sociologist anthropologists during 1950s and 1960s. They continued to work largely within the 'unity-reciprocity' framework, with varied degrees of emphasis.

3.7 Social Structure of the Village: Caste, Class and Gender

The intellectual and historical contexts in which social anthropologists worked largely guided the kinds of research questions they identified for their studies. The tradition of studying tribal communities that emphasised a 'holistic' perspective also had its influence on the way village was visualised.

Despite their primary preoccupation with kinship, religion and ritual life of

the 'little communities', documenting their internal structures and village social life could not be completed without looking at the prevailing social differences. Theoretically also the emphasis on 'unity' did not mean absence of differences and social inequality. Neither did it mean that these questions were not important for social anthropology. Though not all of them began their work with a direct focus on understanding the structures of inequalities, almost every one of them offered detailed descriptions of the prevailing differences of caste, class and gender in the village social life. Being rich in empirical description, one can construct a picture of the social relations, which may not necessarily fit within the framework with which these studies were actually carried out.

i) **The Caste System**

Caste and hierarchy have long been seen as the distinctive and defining features of the Indian society. It was during the colonial period that caste was, for the first time, theorised in modern sociological language. The colonial administrators also gathered extensive ethnographic details and wrote detailed accounts of the way systems of caste distinctions and hierarchies worked in different parts of the sub-continent. Social anthropology in the post-independence India continued with a similar approach that saw caste as the most important and distinctive feature of Indian society. While caste was a concrete structure that guided social relationships in the Indian village, **hierarchy** was its ideology.

An individual in caste society lived in a hierarchical world. Not only were the people divided into higher or lower groups, their food, their dresses, ornaments, customs and manners were all ranked in an order of hierarchy. Anthropologist invariably invoked the *varna* **system of hierarchy** which divided the Hindu society into five major categories. The first three, viz., Brahmins (the priests or men of learning), Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors) and Vaishyas (traders) were regarded as *dvijas* or the twice born. The fourth category was that of Shudras, composed of numerous occupational castes that were regarded as relatively 'clean' and were not classed as "untouchables". In the fifth major category were placed all the "untouchable" castes. Hindus all over India, according to Dube, accepted this classification.

The legitimate occupations to be followed by people in these major categories (*varnas*) were defined by tradition. Within each category there were several sub-groups (jati or castes), which could be arranged in a hierarchical order within them. In this general framework of the varna system, with considerable variations in different regions there were several socially autonomous castes, each fitting into one of the five major divisions but otherwise being practically independent in their socio-religious sphere of life (Dube 1955: 35-36). Though the essence of caste lay in 'the arrangement of hereditary groups in a hierarchy', the popular impression derived from the idea of *varna* that arranged groups in an order with Brahmins at the top and Harijans at the bottom was right only partly. The empirical studies pointed out that 'in fact only the two opposite ends of the hierarchy were relatively fixed; in between, and especially in the middle region, there was considerable room for debate regarding mutual position' (Srinivas, 1994:5).

Caste divisions determined and decided all social relations. Most scholars saw caste as a **closed system** where 'entry into a social status was a function of heredity and individual achievement, personal quality or wealth had,

according to the strict traditional prescription, no say in determining the social status' (Majumdar, 1958:19). However, there were some who admitted that the way caste operated at the local level was 'radically different from that expressed in the varna scheme. Mutual rank was uncertain and this stemmed from the fact that mobility was possible in caste' (Srinivas, 1976:175).

Dube identified six factors that contributed towards the status differentiation in the village community of Shamirpet: religion and caste; landownership; wealth; position in government service and village organisation; age; and distinctive personality traits (Dube, 1955:161). Attempts to claim a higher ritual status through, what Srinivas called **sanskritisation**, was not a simple process. It could not be achieved only through rituals and life-style imitation. The group had to also negotiate it at the local power structure. Similarly, stressing secular factors, Dube pointed to the manner in which the caste panchayat of the lower or the menial castes worked as unions to secure their employment and strengthen their bargaining power vis-à-vis the land owning dominant castes.

However, a large majority of them viewed caste system as working within the framework of jajmani system and bound together different castes living in the village or a cluster of villages in enduring and pervasive relationships.

Reflection and Action 3.02

You just read about the sociologists' opinion about caste in India based on their own studies/field-work. As a person you may have come across caste as a social reality. Think about your own experiences and write a report on 'Caste in India' in about two pages.

Discuss your report with other students of sociology at your Study Centre, as well as, your Academic Counsellor.

ii) Land and Class

As is evident from the above discussion, the social anthropologists studying India during the fifties and sixties generally worked in the framework of caste. The manner in which social science disciplines developed in India, **class and land** came to be seen as the concerns of economists. However, since anthropologists advocated a perspective that studied "small communities" in holistic terms, agriculture and the social relations of production on land also found a place in the village monographs.

While some of them directly focused on economic life as one of the central research questions, most saw it as an aspect of the caste and occupational structure of the village. Land relations to them reflected the same patterns of hierarchy as those present in the caste system. 'There was a certain amount of overlap between the twin hierarchies of caste and land. The richer landowners generally came from such high castes as Brahmins, and Lingayats while the Harijans contributed a substantial number of landless labourers. In contrast to the wealthier household, the poor one was almost invisible (Srinivas, 1976:169).

Some others underlined the primacy of land over all other factors in determining social hierarchy in the village. Comparing a Brahmin dominated village with a Jat dominated village, Lewis argued that 'While the landowners are generally of higher caste in Indian villages, it is their position as landowners,

rather than caste membership *per se*, which gives them status and power' (Lewis, 1958:81). However, despite such references to the crucial significance of land ownership in village social life, village studies did not explore the details of agrarian social structures in different regions of the country. Caste, family, kinship and religion remained their primary focus.

iii) **Gender Differences**

It is rather interesting to note that although 'gender' as a conceptual category had not yet been introduced in the social sciences when the social anthropologists were doing their field studies during 1950s and 1960s, village studies were not completely "gender blind". Since the concept of gender and the accompanying theoretical issues had yet to be articulated, the social anthropologists did not look at man-woman relations in the manner in which it was to be conceptualised and studied later. Still, many of the village monographs provide detailed accounts of the patterns of social relations between men and women in the rural society of India. Some of these monographs even have separate chapters devoted to the subject.

In the absence of a critical theoretical perspective, the village studies constructed gender and patriarchy as a 'natural social order'. Further, accounts of man-woman relations provided in these studies were largely based on the data collected from male informants. Most of the anthropologists themselves being males, it would have been difficult for them to be able to meet and participate in the "private" life of the village people. Some of them were quite aware of this lacuna in their fieldwork and have written about it in their reflections on their fieldwork experience.

Most village studies looked at gender relations within the framework of the household, and participation of women in work. These studies highlighted the division of labour within the family and the overall dominance that men enjoyed in the public sphere. Women, particularly among the upper castes, were confined within the four walls of the house. 'The social world of the woman was synonymous with the household and kinship group while the men inhabited a more heterogeneous world' (Srinivas, 1976:137). Compared to men in the Central Indian village studied by Mayer 'women had less chance to meet people from other parts of the village. The village well provided a meeting place for all women of non-Harijan castes, and the opportunity for gossip. But there was a limit to the time that busy women could stand and talk while they drew their water and afterwards they must return home, where the occasions for talking to people outside their own household were limited to meeting with other women of the street' (Mayer, 1960:136). In the Telangana village also, Dube observed that women were secluded from the activities of the public space. 'It was considered a mark of respectability in women if they walked with their eyes downcast' (Dube, 1955:18).

The rules of patriarchy were clearly laid out. After caste, gender was the most important factor that governed the division of labour in the village. Masculine and feminine pursuits were clearly distinguished (Dube, 1955:169). Writing on similar lines about his village in the same region, Srinivas pointed out that the two sets of occupations were not only separated but also seen as unequal. 'It was the man who exercised control over the domestic economy. He made the annual grain-payments at harvest to the members of the artisan and servicing castes who had worked for him during the year. The dominant

'male view' thought of women as being 'incapable of understanding what went on outside the domestic wall' (Srinivas, 1976:140-1).

Men also had a near complete control over women's sexuality. In the monogamous family, popular among most groups in India, 'a man could play around but not so a woman. A man's sense of private property in his wife's genital organs was as profound as in his ancestral land. And just as, traditionally, a wife lacked any right to land she lacked an exclusive right to her husband's sexual prowess. Polygyny and concubinage were both evidence of her lack of such rights. Men and women were separate and unequal (*ibid*, 155).

Patriarchy and male dominance were legitimate norms. 'According to the traditional norms of the society a husband is expected to be an authoritative figure whose will should always dominate the domestic scene. As the head of the household he should demand respect and obedience from his wife and children. The wife should regard him as her 'master' and should 'serve him faithfully' (Dube, 1955:141).

Box 3.03: Village under Duress

Not every thinker, sociologist or anthropologist agrees with the general opinion of village India as an idyllic social reality. Infact, sociologist like Dipankar Gupta begs to differ. He says that — "The village is shrinking as a sociological reality, though it still exists as space. Nowhere else does one find the level of hopeless disenchantment as one does in the rural regions of India. In urban slums there is squalour, there is filth and crime, but there is hope and the excitement that tomorrow might be quite different from today.

Rarely would a villager today want to be a farmer if given an opportunity elsewhere. Indeed, there are few rural institutions that have not been mauled severely from within. The joint family is disappearing, the rural caste hierarchy is losing its tenacity, and the much romanticised harmony of village life is now exposed for the sham it perhaps always was. **If anything, it is perhaps B.R. Ambedkar's analysis of the Indian village that strikes the truest of all. It was Ambedkar who said that the village was a cesspool of degradation, corruption and worse.** That village India was able to carry on in spite of all this in the past was because there was little option for most people, rich or poor outside the confines of the rural space. (Gupta, Dipankar, Whither the Indian Village, Culture and Agriculture in 'Rural' India, EPW Vol. XL No.8, Feb. 19-25, 2005, pp. 751-758)

3.8 'Field-View' and the Fieldwork

More than anything else, it was the method of participant observation that distinguished the social anthropological village studies from the rural surveys that were conducted by economists and demographers. And it was this method of qualitative fieldwork that helped social anthropology gain a measure of respectability in the Indian academy.

The 'field-view' was a superior way of understanding contemporary Indian society as it provided a "corrective" to the "partial" 'book-view' of India constructed by Indologists from the classical Hindu texts. The 'book-view' was partial not only because it was based on texts written in "ancient times", it was partial also because, the texts used by the Indologists were all written by the 'elite' upper caste Hindus.

In contrast, the anthropological perspective which used a "scientific method" of inquiry and provided a "holistic" picture of the way social life was organised in the Indian society at the level of its "grassroots". Even though some of the scholars were themselves from India and therefore had pre-conceived notions about rural society, 'a proper scientific training' could take care of such biases.

However, despite this 'self-image' of a scientist and a repeated emphasis on "value-neutrality" towards the subjects being studied, a close reading of what these students of Indian village have written about their experiences of fieldwork provides a completely different picture. Apart from pointing to the kinds of problems they faced in getting information about the village social life from different sections of rural society, they give vivid descriptions of how their own location and social background influenced and conditioned their observations of the village society and their access to different sections of people in the rural society. The place they chose to live in the village during the field work, the friends they made for regular information, the social class they themselves came from, their gender, the caste status bestowed upon them by the village, all played important roles in the kind of data they could access.

The manner in which an individual anthropologist negotiated his/her relationship with the village determined who was going to be his/her informant. One of the first questions asked of a visitor was regarding his/her caste. Accordingly the village placed the visitor in its own structure and allocated him/her a place and status. The anthropologist was not only expected to respect this allocation of status bestowed on him/her by the village, but he was also asked to conform to the normative patterns of the caste society. The anthropologist could not avoid negotiating with the village social structure mainly because the method of participant observation required that he/she went and stayed in the village personally for a fairly long period of time. The routine way of developing contact with the village was through the village leaders or the head of the panchayat who invariably came from the dominant upper caste. Most of the anthropologists themselves being from upper caste and middle class background, it was easier for them to approach and develop rapport with these leaders. This also helped them execute their studies with lesser difficulties. Majumdar is explicit about this:

> The ex-zamindar family provided accommodation and occasionally acted as the host, and this contact helped ... to work with understanding and confidence; little effort was needed to establish *rapport* (Majumdar, 1958:5).

However, finding a place to live was not merely a matter of convenience. It identified the investigator with certain groups in the village and this identification had its advantages as well as disadvantages. While it gave them access to the life ways of the upper castes, it also made them suspect in the eyes of the lower castes. Betelle, for example, was "permitted" to live in a Brahmin house in the *agraharam* (the Brahmin locality), 'a privilege', he was told, 'never extended to an outsider and a non-Brahmin before'. His acceptance in the *agraharam* as a co-resident was not without any conditions. I could live in the *agraharam* only on certain terms, by accepting some of the duties and obligations of a member of the community.... The villagers of Sripuram had also assigned me a role, and they would consider it most unnatural if I decided suddenly to act in ways that were quite contrary to what was expected (Beteille, 1975:104).

Living in the *agraharam* also gave him an identity of a Brahmin in the village. "I was identified with Brahmins by my dress, my appearance, and the fact that I lived in one of their houses"(*ibid*:9). For the Non-Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas, he was just another Brahmin from North India. This meant that his "access to these groups was therefore, far more limited than to the Brahmins"(*ibid*:9). His visits to the Harijan locality received loud disapproval from his Brahmin hosts and he was also suspected by the Harijans, who 'regard a visit to their homes by a Brahmin as unnatural, and some believe that it brings then ill luck'(*ibid*:278).

The village was not only caste conscious, it was also class and gender conscious. As Beteille writes:

> If I asked the tenant questions about tenancy in the presence of the landlord, he did not always feel free to speak frankly. If I arranged to meet the tenant separately to ask these questions, the landlord felt suspicious and displeased (*ibid*:284).

Underlining the role gender played in "fieldwork", Leela Dube, one of the few Indian women anthropologists who worked in a village writes, "I was a Brahmin and a woman, and this the village people could never forget" (Dube, 1975:165).

Srinivas tells us a similar story about his experiences in the field. Since his family originally came from the region where he did his field study, it was easier for his villagers to place him. For the villagers he 'was primarily a Brahmin whose joint family owned land in a neighbouring village' (Srinivas, 1976:33). The older villagers gave him the role of a Brahmin and a landowner. By so doing they were able to make him behave towards them in certain predictable ways, and they in turn were able to regulate their behaviour towards him.

More significant here perhaps is the fact that he very consciously conformed to the normative patterns and the local values as he came to understand them.

It did not even occur to me to do anything which might get me into trouble with the village establishment. I accepted the limitations and tried to work within them (*ibid*:47 emphasis added).

A similar kind of anxiety is expressed by Leela Dube when she writes:

> if I had to gain a measure of acceptance in the community, I must follow the norms of behaviour which the people associated with my sex, age, and caste (Dube,1975:165).

This conformist attitude towards the village social structure and its normative patterns as received through the dominant sections had such an important effect on their fieldwork that some of them quite consciously chose not to spend much time with the "low" caste groups. Srinivas, for example, admits that while he was collecting genealogies and a household census, he 'deliberately excluded the Harijan ward'. He thought that he 'should approach the Harijans only through the headman'. The consequence was that his account of the village was biased in favour of the upper caste Hindus. It was not merely the "insider" Indian scholars who, while doing "participant observation", had to negotiate with the social structure of the village, even the scholars from the West had to come to terms with the statuses that the

village gave them and which caste groups they would get more closely identified with. The British scholar, Adrian Mayer, who studied a Central Indian village writes that it was impossible for him merely to "observe" the caste system. He had to participate in it, merely by the fact of my living in Ramkheri. He was accorded the status of 'an undesignated upper caste' and by the time he left the village he was most closely identified with Rajputs, the locally dominant caste (Mayer 1975).

Though the village social structure invariably imposed itself upon the "participant observer", it was not completely impossible to work without being identified with one of the dominant castes. There were some who made concerted efforts to understand what the caste system meant to those who were at its receiving end. It is not surprising that the image of hierarchy as it appeared from the bottom up was very different from its "mainstream" constructions. Mencher, who chose deliberately to spend more time among the "Harijans" writes:

> ...most of the Harijans I got to know tended to describe their relations with higher-caste people in terms of power, both economic (in terms of who employed whom, or their dependence on the landed for employment) and political (in terms of authority and the ability to punish).

For Harijans both old and young, the exploitative aspect of hierarchy was what seemed most relevant, not the "to each his own" aspect....To them it was all quite clearly a system in which some people worked harder than others, and in which those who were rich and powerful remained so, and obviously had no intention of relinquishing their prerogative voluntarily (Mencher, 1975:119 and 127).

However, apart from a few exceptions of those doing agrarian studies (Mencher,1978; Djurfeldt and Lindberg,1975; Harriss;1982), it was only later when the Dalit movement consolidated itself in different parts of the country, that social anthropologists and sociologists began to examine the question of power and politics of caste relations.

3.9 Conclusion

The studies of Indian villages carried-out by social anthropologists during the 1950s and 1960s were undoubtedly an important landmark in the history of Indian social sciences. Even though the primary focus of these studies was on the social and ritual life of the village people, there are enough references that can be useful pointers towards an understanding of the political and economic life in the rural society of India during the first two decades of independent India.

More importantly, these studies helped in contesting the dominant stereotype of the Indian village made popular by the colonial administrators. The detailed descriptive accounts of village life constructed after prolonged field-works carried out, in most cases, entirely by the anthropologists themselves convincingly proved how Indian villages were not 'isolated communities'. Village studies showed that India's villages had been well integrated into the broader economy and society of the region even before the colonial rule introduced new agrarian legislation. They also pointed to the regional differences in the way social village life was organised in different parts of the country.

Social anthropological studies also offered an alternative to the dominant "book-view" of India constructed by Indologists and orientalists from the Hindu scriptures. The "field-view" presented in the village monographs not only contested the assumptions of Indology but also convincingly showed with the help of empirical data as to how the idealised model of the varna system as theorised in Hindu scriptures did not match with the concrete realities of village life. While caste was an important institution in the Indian village and most studies foregrounded caste differences over other differences, empirical studies showed that it was not a completely closed and rigidly defined system. Caste statuses were also not exclusively determined by one's position in the ritual hierarchy and that there were many grey and contestable areas within the system. It was from the village studies that the concepts like sanskritisation, dominant caste, segmental structures, harmonic and disharmonic systems emerged.

However, village studies were also constrained by a number of factors. The method of participant observation that was the main strength of these studies also imposed certain limitations on the fieldworkers, which eventually proved critical in shaping the image they produced of the Indian village. Doing participant observation required a measure of acceptability of the field worker in the village that he/she chose to study. In a differentiated social context, it was obviously easy to approach the village through the dominant sections. However, this choice proved to be of more than just a strategic value. The anxiety of the anthropologist to get accepted in the village as a member of the "community" made their accounts of the village life conservative in orientation.

It also limited their access to the dominant groups in the local society. They chose to avoid asking all those questions or approaching those subordinate groups, which they thought, could offend the dominant interests in the village. The choices made by individual anthropologists as regard to how they were going to negotiate their own relationship with the village significantly influenced the kind of data they could gather about village life. Unlike the "tribal communities", the conventional subject matter of social anthropology, Indian villages were not only internally differentiated much more than the tribes, they also had well articulated world views. Different sections of the village society had different perspectives on what the village was. Though most of the anthropologists were aware of this, they did not do much to resolve this problem. On the contrary, most of them consciously chose to identify themselves with the dominant caste groups in the village, which apart from making their stay in the village relatively easy, limited their access to the world-view of the upper castes and made them suspect among the lower castes.

Apart from the method of participant observation and the anxiety about being accepted in rural society that made the anthropologists produce a conservative account of the rural social relations, the received theoretical perspectives and the professional traditions dominant within the disciplines of sociology and social anthropology during the time of village studies also had their influences on these scholars. Anthropologist during the decades of fifties and sixties generally focussed on the structures rather than changes. This preoccupation made them look for the sources that reproduced social order in the village and to ignore conflict and the possible sources of social transformation.

3.10 Further Reading

Beteille, A. 1980 'The Indian Village: Past and Present' in E.J. Hobsbawm et. al. eds. *Peasants in History: Essays in Honour of Daniel Thorner*, OUP, Calcutta

Beteille, A. 1975 'The Tribulations of Fieldwork' in A. Beteille and T. N. Madan ed. *Encounters and Experience: Personal Accounts of Fieldwork*. Vikas, Delhi

Cohn, B.S. 1987, *An Anthropologist among Historian and other Essays*. OUP, Delhi