

“If the determination of the rationality of the human action is left to the “freely” competing forces, the inevitable result would be the domination of the more organised groups over the less organised ones.”

Matter and Method in Sociology & Ideology

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RURAL
AND THE INDIAN PEASANTRY

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Prefatory

Asked to characterise the culture of India, one often hears “Unity in Diversity”. Whether the pre-1947 India was a Nation or even today it is a Nation is a very controversial question.¹ Politicians, ethnographers, and sociolinguists have often joined this controversy and could clarify till today only few issues. My main purpose here is not to answer the questions like whether, culturally speaking, the proclaimed unity of India is metaphorical, or metaphysical, or a very living reality. My interest lies elsewhere. How is the unity related to the diversity? And what is there in the diversity enabling its subject matters or elements to bring under a unity or class? The first question is methodological and the second one substantive. In the second part of my paper I propose to briefly refer to the identity of the Indian peasantry and the process of transformation it is undergoing. The questions have been discussed in depth by many competent economists, sociologists, and social anthropologists.² I would like to correlate some explanatory concepts and hypotheses within a new methodological perspective and without going into details here. The poverty of methodological orientations of the working social scientists in India, with some notable exceptions found particularly among the economists, are indeed very shocking. The lack of interpenetration between theories and factual data has resulted in retarded and distorted growth both in the field of theoretical enterprise and in the processing of empirical data. What is badly needed today is a critical and continuous dialogue between the theoretician and the field worker. If possible, this dialogue should be institutionalised in a more constructive fashion.

Sociology and Methodology

Broadly speaking, there are two ways unifying and organising the sociological facts, nomothetic and ideographic.³ Nomothetic method is

marked by a generalising tendency and pro-naturalistic in character. Ideographic method is very much influenced by the peculiarities and the objective characteristics of the subject matter of sociology. The field worker is guided, of course pre-reflectively, by the ideographic motivation. And the theoretician is generally but not necessarily nomothetically disposed. But in the either case the methodological disposition of the sociologist should be reflective, careful and critical, bearing always in mind the aims of his enquiry, macro or micro, and the objective characteristics of the facts to be dealt with.

One must first be careful about the relevance and the limitation of methodology in sociological enquiries.⁴ The pre-reflective use of the method results in the production of shapeless views and unintended consequences. So, having gone through a lot of monographs and field studies, even a sympathetic scholar might always pertinently raise that cynical question, "So what?" The other pitfall to be avoided is the exaggerated importance at times attributed to methodology. Method is after all a method. It has of course an importance and a value. But that value is a means-value and the importance must not be over-estimated.

The pre-reflective or the inadequate methodological orientation results in two types of mistakes, *grand theoretical system-building* and crass empiricism or *fact-fetish*⁵ A lot of half-empty theoretical systems or edifices have been built up on the avowed ground of strict methodological considerations and/or factual and valuational taxonomy. Often it has been found that the factual content of a theory and its shape and size are inversely related. The opposite error is found in fact-fetish, aimless craze for facts and more facts, resulting in crass sociological empiricism. Unless facts are found and organised from a conscious *point of view* and in accordance with a theoretical *end in view*, facts *qua* facts are of no consequence either in sociology or in natural science.⁶ It is the conceptual backdrop of facts and their theoretical orientation which lend them meaning and bring out their rational to the fore.

At first the sociologist has to be careful about the sociological aspect of a fact and then he must clearly distinguish it from its natural aspect, those who work under the fact-fetish are eloquent on the glorification of facts—"hard facts". Reflection and analysis reveal that sociological facts are indeed "soft" and never "hard". It is the conceptual or symbolic aspects of a fact and also its hidden act-character which account for the softness of the concerned fact. For instance, a building may be viewed as (a) a sociological fact made up of some materials like mortar and steel, and also as (b) a piece of architecture, an intentional action of providing shelter to some beings or things. Obviously a building has some definite and quantifiable physical characteristics. But, sociologically speaking, the more interesting aspect about the building is the aim and the act underlying its construction. Fact is relevant in sociology only in so far as it is an intended or unintended result of the human act. It is the human origin or the motive-factor

If the determination of the rationality of the human action is left to the "freely" competing forces, the inevitable result would be the domination of the more organised groups over the less organised ones. And the equal course of action followed by the dominant group is rationalised *ex post hoc* and that passes for contemporary ideology. This sort of ideology is bound to be *ad hoc*, conservative and capitalist in character.

which negates or at least blurs the dualism between fact and act, between fact and value.⁷

Acts are expression or supersession of some or other intention. Deliberation precedes and motivation is a part of intention leading to action. One has to be careful about this "leading to". It is not causal. The stages of want, desire, deliberation, motivation, decision and intention are not causally related to action. Motivation or intention may underlie or influence but not cause action. Action has no compelling causal thrust behind it. It is never like a bullet triggered off a gun barrel. This distinction is important to bring out the difference between a pro-naturalistic sociology and a praxiological sociology.⁸

It is on the correctness of the analysis of the structure of action that depends the success or otherwise of the relation between sociology and ideology. The question whether ideology and sociology could possibly meet each other on a rational plane might positively be answered only when we use teleological concepts rather than causal ones in our analysis of the human action.⁹ Ideology can always be superimposed upon or regarded as an efflux of sociology. But that is not what we mean by "meeting on the rational plane".

Irrelevance of ideology to sociology has been announced by the conservative and the positivist. To the positivist "ideology" is a "spontaneous" process and never a deliberate plan or programme of action.¹⁰ He hates the term "ideology". The balance between the interacting and uneven social forces is said to be indicative of the rational course of action and which in turn has to be decided through a ruthless competition. Rational action has been characterised as a *means* between the extreme courses of action. It has also been defined in terms of *temporary equilibrium* between the competing demands of the conflicting interest-groups, e.g. the exploiter and the exploited.

Securedly placed at a vantage position of the society their groups can successfully dominate and control the motivation, thought and action, including the ideological projection, of the less privileged groups and classes. And therefore they are least interested in evolving a social consensus on ideology. Their "ideology" is "free enterprise" or "spontaneous action". It is true that classical capitalism is often credited with a

utilitarian or pragmatic ideology. And it is on this ground some thinkers say that the capitalist too has his ideology. This argument is to be taken with circumspection. It would be incorrect to ignore the difference between liberalism and conservatism because of their common capitalist parentage. Liberalism as an ideology may be attributed only to *some* classical capitalist thinkers and their political counterparts. When the practice of non-interference is presented or glorified as an ideology under the level of utilitarianism or whatever that might be, we ignore the important sociological distinction between "professing an ideology" and "attributing an ideology". While the liberal does profess an ideology, to the conservative it may only be attributed. The conservative does not like to hinder the operation of the "free" forces and the "enterprising" individuals, imposing "abstract" plans or blue-prints of action either on themselves and/or on others. But his defenders are very eloquent on the virtues of austerity, forbearance and sacrifice and equally firm in their metaphysical faith in the ultimate conservation of moral values. This is the ideology of non-interference. This "balance" of values, is objectively tilted in favour of the strong few and against the weak many. Its unmistakable implications are positivist in thought and capitalist in action.

Irrelevance of ideology to sociology has been championed also by the positivist who may or may not identify himself with the conservative capitalist. His main argument is very simple. The structure of human action is amenable with slight modification to the pro-naturalist casual analysis. The positivist analysis of the human action, taken to its logical end, reduces action to mere reaction, casually predictable response of the human organism to the external stimuli. The positivist rejects ideology or plan of action on the alleged ground that it proposes to abstract the ideal human conduct from the actual human environment. He is clearly in favour of keeping the man close or tied down to the actual social reality and maintaining *the gap between the actual and the ideal* and at the same time metaphysically asserting the identity of the two at bottom. Both the conservative and the positivist commit one common error : they refuse to see that the ideal of today may be actualised tomorrow. In other words, social reality is not given to man as a *totum simul*. Man stands in a perpetual dialectical relation to the society. He is both a creator and a creature of this society.

The structure of the human personality is very much shaped and influenced by the social structure.¹¹ But even then the man-society relationship cannot be fully grasped in terms of sociological isomorphism. The human psychology has its, though limited, structural autonomy. It is true not only of the human knowledge but also of the less durable psychological phenomena. Action-motive and aesthetic enjoyment admittedly have their sociological correlates. But there is always an irremediable subjectivity in all human minds, particularly in the creative ones.¹² It is by translating the subjectivity into action and objectively projecting its creative upshot into the society, operating on the totality of the other individuals' action and

in the historically given situation that man transforms a society and therewith himself.

The human actions on analysis are found to be of different types, scientific and/or technological, social and/or aesthetic.¹³ Under these broad types there are many other sub-types. The technological or applied scientific actions are subject to well-defined rules and limits. The social actions are also governed by certain forms and norms, but their initial conditions are less defined and boundary conditions more liberal. In the sphere of aesthetic action man is still less subject to the external forms and norms. But let there be no mistake about the fact that all actions are subject to a set of teleological conditions defining the end-means relationship in an appropriate and a restrictive way.

Some social actions are more imitative and less innovative. And some others are more innovative and less imitative. It is always a question of more or less. And there is no absolute line of demarcation between the two types. *Traditional continuity* and the scope for *change* are always there in all types of human actions. Technology could be taught but not artistic creativity. Even then a technologist may be innovative and an artist blindly imitative.

The innovative-creative is a qualitative pair of classificatory concepts. There are also other pairs of classificatory concepts, viz. positive-normative, micro-macro. By permutation and combination of these pairs of classificatory concepts further pairs of classificatory concepts could be generated.

The point to be noted here is again methodological. The methods of studying and classifying human actions cannot be uniform. The traditional methods of scientific study like the *deductive*, *inductive* or *probabilistic* ones are too general to be of any use.¹⁴ Even *inverse deductive*, *hypothetico-deductive* or *analytic induction* are not of substantial value, unless of course they are prefaced by necessary definitions or at least descriptive concepts and accompanied by appropriate classificatory concepts. Method must be appropriate to the nature of the matter to be studied or dealt with. Methodological hegemonism of natural science is bound to destroy the really interesting and the peculiar problematic characters of the different types of the subject of sociological studies. For instance, science as a social action may be studied (a) in order to test the validity of its theories, (b) in order to find its sociological motivation, and also (c) relevance and utility. There cannot be any single method which can be fair to all types of facts, considerations and questions pertaining to (a), (b) and (c). What is true in respect of this particular case is more or less in respect of all other sociological cases.

In sociology, as in all other branches of rational inquiry, the starting point must be questions and problems. And then consistently with the character, composition and level of problems and questions we have to find out a method, an appropriate method. We must be modest and realistic in our methodological expectations. We must not address ourselves to the over ambitious question, "what is *the* method of sociology?"

The main defect of the structuralist, the functionalist and also of the structural-functionalist is to generalise and thereby trivialise their methods in order to make them both necessary and sufficient to tackle all types of sociological problems and questions. I have argued elsewhere pointing out the inadequacy and shortcomings of these methods.¹⁵ The trivial generality of these well-known sociological methods could be gathered from the simple fact that they are amenable to both the deductive and the inductive models and, with slight modification, perhaps also to the analytic inductive and the inverse deductive models. A method which could be cast into so many moulds and models can hardly be said to have any definite character of its own. The inadequacy of functionalism becomes clear in the face of dysfunctional phenomena in a functional framework. Similarly a dysstructure cannot be explained in terms of "its" structure. Dysfunction may be attributed to any function or dysstructure to any structure only and if only we are prepared to trivialise the concepts of that structure and function and denuding them of all their real contents.

The *method of situational logic* provides the necessary and sufficient conditions for tackling different types of sociological problems. Elements of structuralism and functionalism may be admittedly found in the method of situational logic. But their rigidity and indefensible generality do not impair its fertility. The main idea of the situational method is that every social problem can be best tackled by *the logic of its situation*. The situation has to be defined or constructed in terms of individuals (individuals *qua* holding some *status* and playing some *role* and not as *specifically identifiable* individuals) and their tradition, convention and social movement. This method is also known as *institutional individualism* or *methodological individualism*.¹⁶ It combines the flexibility of individualism and the objectivity and the generality of institutionalism. At the same time it avoids the pitfall of social monadism and the triviality and the generality of *methodological holism*. Methodological individualism has nothing to do with ideological individualism. *Methodological individualism and ideological socialism are perfectly consistent*.

Social phenomena, as I have referred before, may be understood and explained in different ways, viz. (a) synchronically, (b) diachronically, (c) sociologically and (d) ideologically. Reflective analysis of the human action makes it abundantly clear that the distinction between the terms of the pairs is a matter of degree only, a question of emphasis and of difference in points of view. The essential character of the human action is the freedom underlying the choice of a particular course of action in preference to other alternative courses of action. The exercise of the notional freedom as such does not make an action rational. It has to be in accordance with the (flexibly defined) specifics of the situation. In other words, in our choice of a particular course of action in a given situation if we do not follow the logic of the situation, our chosen course of action or ideology is likely to fail to transform the existing situation and bring about the one. Proper understanding of the situation is the basic require-

ment for changing it towards a definite goal. In the context of exercising our choice of ideology the question of methodology assumes primarily a practical relevance. I can choose my ideology or it can be imposed upon me. The same is true in respect of a group or class. It can choose rightly or wrongly its ideology on the basis of its own understanding of its situation, interests and objectives. Alternatively, it could be attributed to or imposed upon it by others on the basis of their understanding of its situation, interests and objectives. It is *theoretically* quite conceivable that under certain circumstances a group or class might fail to assess its own strength or weakness, aims and objectives. But if on this *otherwise* rational ground an alien or extraneous ideology is imposed on it and it is asked to act accordingly, the result is not likely to be in accordance with the interests and aims of the group in question itself. If an ideology is decided abstractly, isolating it from its appropriate sociology or the social setting, then its strength or weakness might be of theoretical interest, but in an action programme its value would be negligible or nil. The sociological relevance of ideology is extremely important. But this importance should not be taken in a one-sided fashion. The ideology must not blindly reflect the concerned "sociology", it must exceed it at least in some respects. The ideology which merely reflects a sociology and does not propose to change or exceed it in any way is merely a description of the latter. A mere description or even an evaluation of a fact makes no difference to the character and composition of the fact itself. Ideology is a chosen means for changing a state of society. Methodology helps us in defining the relation between sociology and ideology and in ascertaining the gap, if any, between the two.

With these few conceptual remarks I propose to refer to a concrete case-study to clarify my position further.

II

The Peasantry of India: Its identity and transformation.

The Indian peasantry is very much a part of the Indian social milieu. India's economy being predominantly agrarian the problems and prospects of the peasantry will continue to rate high among the factors facilitating or impeding the progress of the country as a whole.¹⁷ In the economic classification of the workers of India (1971), cultivators account for 42.9 per cent, agriculture labourers 25.8 per cent, and other workers 31.4 per cent, the total numbers of these three categories being 78.7 million, 47.3 million and 57.6 million respectively. Of the total population of 548 million, 438.6 million live in the rural areas. The relative number and percentage of population living on land are going down. Correspondingly the number and percentage of the population depending on industry and urban-based occupations are increasing. But the number of landless labourers is increasing.

One can look at the peasant society in two different ways, diachronically and synchronically. As a synchronic segment of society the identity

of the peasantry has to be gathered primarily as a *product* of history and tradition. In that case we will be having a still picture of the moving society. The synchronic study has its own advantages. It enables us to look closely into the *static factors* which account for the stability and structure of the whole society. Here I am using the terms *stability* and *structure* in a purely descriptive sense and not in any evaluative one. While studying a society synchronically one must not over-estimate its advantages and ignore the limitations it is subject to. In relation to the urban society admittedly the rural society and therewith the peasantry are changing at a slower rate. Even then the peasantry is in transition and its characters and contours as a *process* are more noteworthy than as a *product* of history.

To understand the peasantry properly we must look at the peasant against his social background. Social background is an umbrella term or a very comprehensive concept. It includes so many concepts under it, (a) *family*, (b) *caste*, (c) *community*, (d) *class*, and (e) *system*.¹⁸ The identity of the peasant assumes and loses different traits in relation to these different reference groups. The disposition and the behaviour of the peasant in his family context are somewhat different from the same in relation to his caste or community reference groups. The comprehensiveness of the reference groups and the subjectivity or the objectivity of the psychological factors could be definitely co-related in a graded scale. This sort of study has its own intrinsic merits. Firstly, it could exhibit, for example, how the peasant is opening up to or withdrawing from his immediate and remote reference groups. Secondly, it can bring out the motivation and orientation of his individual action and of the concerned group action. Thirdly, the results of this synchronic study can also be fruitfully exploited in the diachronic context, indicating how and to what extent his motivation and action influence the process of social transformation. Finally, these five reference groups, taken as five graded social units, may also serve as excellent explanatory categories, enabling us to tackle different types of sociological problems. For example, family, analysis of the peasant might shed considerable light on the labour, i. e. economic, demographic and other related problems like nature and size of the land holdings. Caste analysis and community analysis may indicate, among other things, voting pattern, political trend, political leadership composition and other factors facilitating and retarding integration of the reference group in question to the rest. It has often been pointed out that explanation of action and motivation of any individual, in this case of the peasant, in terms of his immediate reference group is bound to be inadequate, if not fallacious. Because the family identity of the peasant or for that even his caste identity is not the only identity he is subjectively and primarily conscious of; he has his other identities, e. g. religious and linguistic.¹⁹ While for the analytic-explanatory purpose we might objectively highlight his immediate reference group identities, under-estimating or ignoring altogether his dominant but subjective identity consciousness, one might pertinently and

If the peasantry itself is not class-conscious or system conscious, then a class analysis or system analysis of the peasantry might serve a purely academic analytic purpose from a particular theoretical point of view. But on the basis of that an action programme cannot be executed.

critically observe here that sociology is after all sociology and must not bother itself so much with the individual psychology or the group psychology. This sort of impatience is responsible for the elimination of "understanding" as an important explanatory category and for the reduction of sociology into behaviourology. The danger underlying this sort of impatience and the resulting positivism has been pointed out, among others, by Lenin in *the State and Revolution*.²⁰ If a particular revolutionary leadership is carried away in its subjective enthusiasm and fails to understand the subjective consciousness and the preparedness of the working class, it might give an untimely call to the working class and the peasantry for launching a revolutionary struggle. But in that case it would not be adequately responded to and as a result of that it would prove abortive and lead to disaster. Another bad effect of this positivist method is the failure of communication not only between the individuals belonging to the different social system but also between the individuals of the remotely related reference groups belonging to the same social system. When a Levy-Bruhl²¹ says that the primitive man was pre-logical in his motivation and thought and therefore it could not be understood by the modern logical mind, or when a William Archer says that India is a land of gigantic polytheism and rank superstition, we come across the worst specimens of breakdown of inter-cultural communication. In a lesser form this sort of breakdown of communication is evident in between the different groups of the same society. A highly sophisticated University Professor of Delhi, Bombay or Calcutta can hardly communicate with a fellow travelling peasant (I assume—of course unrealistically—that they are sharing the same compartment). In exceptional cases if the conversation falteringly starts at all it cannot progress far. The point is that two individuals while may live in or share the same or similar physical space, their social spheres being altogether different, they can falteringly converse but rarely communicate. In a different way once again this brings the subjective aspect of social reality to the focus.

To obviate the difficulties involved in this type of immediate reference group analysis it has been suggested that we should resort to more comprehensive analysis, e.g. analysis in terms of class or in terms of social system. Class analysis or system analysis is unexceptionable in principle. But it serves only a limited *analytic* purpose but not any *explanatory* one. Analysis is not necessarily explanatory. It may or may not be.

Now let us look into the sociological factors responsible for the relatively static character of the Indian peasantry and the relative lack of

consciousness of the remote reference groups, class and system. Among the various factors I would like to mention only few; (1) tradition (2) religion (*dharma*), (3) custom, (4) convention, (5) rite, (6) myth, (7) *karma*, (8) *samskara*, (9) re-birth, (10) Hinduisation or Indianisation.

Each of these factors merits detailed discussion. But I propose to offer only few analytical and critical remarks. *Tradition* is hang-over of history without disclosing its rationale. It is more regulative and prohibitive than creative and prescriptive. A traditional society or community is generally backward-looking and therefore static in character. I say "generally" because there are non-static types of tradition as well, e.g. scientific and technological traditions. While in the former case traditional actions are imitative and repetitive, in the latter they are innovative and creative. The same is more or less true in respect of religion. Religion is a bad English equivalent of *dharma*. *Dharma* has both theological and ethical implications. Codification of religious ideas and institutionalisation of religious activities are primarily meant to preserve dead or dying value-systems lending them metaphysical sanctions. *Customs, conventions* and *rites* converge on a common end. They embody certain forms of action and in most cases these forms are observed or followed without questioning their content, meaning or consequence. Whenever these questions are raised one is referred to the sanctions of tradition, *dharma, shruti*, or *smriti*. The questions which are relevant in respect of customs, conventions and rites are relevant in respect of the sanctions as well. When I say this I do not intend to deny the positive aspects of *dharmacara* and *shastracara*, actions enjoined by religion and scriptures. A society bedevilled by anomie is required to provide some action parameters, however questionable they might be to its members. Even a normal society has its do's and don'ts and provides some guidance to its people to act and respond appropriately under different circumstances. These are also *mechanisms of adjustment and adaptation*. Consequently they are of little or no use in the matter of bringing about *social transformation*. All these factors objectively favour *status quoism*. The concepts of *karma* and *samskara* lend strong support to the *status quoist*. According to the concept of *karma* a man, whatever he is or has, is the result of his own action. It is a sort of inexorable moral causation and determinism. Every *karma* (action) has its momentum (after-effect) and *samskara*. I know it is quite possible to offer non-deterministic interpretation to the concepts of *karma* and *samskara*. But that will be theoretical rationalisation of these concepts and not how *in fact* they are accepted and practised by the bulk of the people of the country. Re-birth is an extension of the concepts of *karma* and *samskara*. The producer of *karma* must also consume its effect, if possible in this very life and, if not, then in the life beyond. It has been said that the *samskaras* generated by *karmas* are so deeprooted in the human being that even if the gross body (*sthula-sharira*) is destroyed, the *samskaras* remain active and effective in the subtle body (*sukshma-sharira*). These concepts, as anybody can well see, are too metaphysical or transcendental to be empirically tested. But the layman's life

and the commonsense view of life, though have their metaphysical origin and inspiration, are not reflective and critical in character. Popular *faith* and *myths* are enough to persuade the common man to accept the traditional life without question and query. For example, the myth of solar eclipse or lunar eclipse is enough to persuade him to accept it as valid, and therefore he does not bother the astronomer to tell him what we call the scientific explanation of this "strange" phenomenon. It is thus by uncritically accepting certain modes of thought and action that the common man easily adjusts himself to his own social milieu. He does avoid those questions and queries which might disturb his traditional ties with the other members of his family, caste, community and society. In the name of maintaining the homogeneity of a social unit, whatever that might be, and also in order to maintain the undisturbed continuity of its tradition he follows the path of least resistance. His uncritical eagerness to belong to his social unit and identify himself with it makes him feel easily inclined to *Hinduise* or *Islamise* himself. Now we are being told of the necessity of Indianisation as well.

This brief analysis of the static factors of the society is more or less true of all groups of people of the Indian society, depending more or less of course on the level of their education and the degree of their exposure to the urban-industrial influences. What is generally true of all people is specially true of rural people, and that again is related to their mode of production and the resulting mode of living. The peasant is interested more in the preservation of traditional values than in the transvaluation of the values handed over to him by the "wiser and older" generations and accepted by him in good faith.

The other side of the picture of rural India and of the peasantry has so many dynamic factors in it and is extremely complex. Like the static factors the dynamic ones are also of two types, conceptual and institutional. Of the institutional factors most important perhaps are (1) industrialisation and (2) education. Our educational system has been fashioned out and out in the British model. Since the impact of this education is not intensively felt beyond the urban and semi-urban areas, the peasantry has not been deeply influenced by it, except of course through its inevitable spill-over effects. The more the traditional systems of education have been replaced by the modern and completely alien model of education, the more the traditional system of life has been disturbed and distorted. It is true that education can work as a modernising factor. But there I draw a distinction between modernity and modernisation.

If a son of a rich farmer is educated say for 5-6 years in an urban environment and becomes a doctor or engineer, he hates to go back to his original or any other rural place. This is even more tragically true in respect of the students educated abroad.

Our education because of its alien character instead of making us conscious of our "true" identity it facilitates the process of alienation inherent in our feudal and capitalist modes of production. Given its present

Modernity is a superficial life-style, while modernisation brings about some fundamental change in the ways of thought and action. Our system of education touches only the superficial life-style of our students and in most cases fails to orient and motivate them in a very purposeful manner.

form, it will take away the student from his traditional mooring and objectively promote alienation. It is perversely related to the process of social change *via* alienation. Education is a printing machine for job voucher. Most of the job opportunities opened up by this irrelevant education system have hardly anything to do with the agricultural mode of production. And as a result of that the impact of this system on the peasantry is to a great extent disruptive and negative. When I say all these, I do not propose to deny that even the alien system of education imparts a sort of skill or understanding or both which may be positively related with the trend of the increased agricultural production. But that does not contradict my basic contention.

Admittedly the products of this education system man the institutions and projects like (3) the Community Development and (4) the Rural Health Centres, including the Family Planning Centres and Camps. These projects and concerned personnel inject an effective element of dynamism into our relatively static peasant society. (5) The extensive network of roadways and communications and (6) the increasing coverage of the mass media are also partly responsible for breaking the cultural inertia of the rural society. In this connection we should better bear in mind that the physical and mechanical facilities of communication by themselves are not sufficient to remove the cultural gap between the urban society and the rural society and ensure uninterrupted and effective communication, facilitating the process of cultural integration and undoing, at least partly, mis-effects of stratification. (7) Generally speaking, the increasing sphere of State activities necessitating development of increasing number of officers and technologists and their complementary contingent is also strengthening the forces of social change in the rural area. If the resulting change is not that perceptible as one would otherwise expect of the mighty State initiative, the causes are not far to seek, viz. the bureaucratic structure of the government administration, unimaginative plans and programmes, lack of popular participation, and extremely poor level of peasant organisation and movement. In other words, those who are objectively responsible for introducing change in the rural life are not subjectively interested in promoting, organising and strengthening the rural leadership. The white collar's interest in the rural upliftment is typically oriented by his alien education and petty-bourgeois bias.

Among the conceptual factors of social change, I may mention, (8) Renunciation (*tyaga* or *vairagya*), (9) *yajna* (act of offering, oblation of

The landless wage-earner is bound to be prochanger. For he has nothing to lose but his under-paid servile occupation. In an ordinary situation not disturbed by the extraneous forces, the proprietary class is a motivationally anti-changer. Understandably he is a status quoist.

sacrifices) and (10) *moksha* (liberation or salvation). The motivation underlying these concepts is self exceeding, altruistic and therefore opposed to the vested interests. These concepts, rightly understood and practised, promote social *integration* and *mobility*. But, as it happened in the other cases of the concepts of *dharma-shastra*, feudal mode of production and its accompanying servile morality murdered the original motive-force of these dynamic concepts and in the course of time reduced them into routine rituals.

Substantial incursion of the urban-educated elements and the emergence of a thin layer of educated people have created a disturbed situation in the rural life. The composition of the rural people may be classified under three heads, (a) occupational, (b) motivational and (c) proprietary. These groups are not topologically isolable and overlap each other at many places. The landless wage-earner is bound to be prochanger. For he has nothing to lose but his under-paid servile occupation. In an ordinary situation not disturbed by the extraneous forces, the proprietary class is motivationally anti-changer. Understandably he is a *status quoist*. He is in favour of preserving the stratified character of the rural society and the agrarian economy. According to him, *stratification* promotes *cohesiveness* and *orderliness* in the society. But the picture of life to the poor peasant and to the landless peasant is quite different. He prefers *friction* to deceptive cohesiveness and illusive *integration* of the static society. Friction and conflict generate social commotion and promote the process of *socialization*, breaking, or at least weakening, the barriers of the stratified society. But this process of socialization is resisted not only by the landlord and the rich farmer but also by the professional and occupational groups consisting of village priests, pundits, maulanās, money-lenders and quacks, all of them have their vested interests in the static society.²⁵ It is true that each of these groups performs a positive role in the absence of corresponding pro-change professional group. Desperately in need of credit and with no nationalised bank near about to come to his help, the poor peasant is forced to go to the village money-lender, mortgage his land and hypothecate his crop on the field at a very low price to him. Similarly, the village with no qualified doctor or hospital near him is obliged to depend on the quack. He has little or no option before him: either he can see his relation dying untreated or treated by a quack. He just takes a chance.

Though the people having vested interest in the agrarian economy do not willingly produce and promote the forces of change, forces are *objectively* generated by a mixture of causes. I have already referred to the forces of transformation and *mobility* and spill-over effect of the urban life in the

rural area. Besides the purely urban streaks and shocks in the rural life, there operate also some semi-urbanised *feed-back peasant motivations*. For example, some landless peasants of Bihar and U.P. work for some months every year in the urban and semi-urban jute belt of Metropolitan Calcutta and then return to their village homes with new ideas and motivations. This annual migration of the rural masses and their co-existence with the unionised working class in the urban industrial environment and their counter-migration introduce many pro-change factors in the rural life. The peasant-cum-worker returning from the town often brings with him, besides new ideas and approaches, new life-styles, sartorial and otherwise, and also machines like transistor.

Endemic forces of transformation are also there in the rural life. The farmer who adopts *modern methods of cultivation* using chemical fertiliser and tractors is primarily interested to increase his income. But his income and affluence entail something not intended by him. The use of *diesel* and *electricity* exposes him and also those who work under him to a new set of forces which not only enriches him but also makes others conscious of his enrichment and their own gradual impoverishment. So under the existing constraints of agricultural economy like unimplemented land laws and non-existent or unenforced Minimum Agricultural Wages Act, green revolution or ambitious programme to augment the agricultural production cannot yield the desired result. I admit that merely by introducing modern methods of cultivation and without disturbing the static socio-legal framework of the peasant life, we may increase the agricultural production up to a point. This method of increasing production works only up to a point and not beyond that. Where and how the limit point is reached is an empirical question and cannot be generalised *a priori*. We must not be over-impressed by the green patches of the Green Revolution, for the country by and large continues to remain grey in terms of the rate of growth in agricultural production, spread of education, implementation of land laws and population explosion. Our population growth rate has outspaced the food production growth rate. What is further distressing to note is the growing affluence of the rich peasantry has not been proportionately reflected in the mobilisation of resources as evident from the Fifth Five-Year Plan document. The impact of the rich peasantry and its institutional ramifications in the rural area, politically speaking, are no less important than that of the industrial bourgeoisie on the national scene.

III

On the Sociology and the Ideology of the Indian Peasantry

Let us now briefly recapitulate the results of our preceding analyses. Of course it is possible to ape the method of natural science in Sociology. But that will not improve the quality of our sociological understanding and its purpose. And that is evident from the relative failure of the positivist strategy to tackle the problems of multi-dimensional man in a changing society. It

may be argued that understanding is an end in itself and further that if sociological understanding fails to provide any ideology of action programme, there is nothing wrong in it. My response is we may refuse to see the action of cognition or understanding and abruptly stop our enquiry on the non-existent border line between cognitive sociology and conative sociology, but that does not add to the depth of our understanding of that important area. It also fails to bring out the comprehensive significance of social action and interaction. Understanding and action are two aspects of the same and continuous psycho-sociological process. Consequently *any attempt to draw a sharp line of demarcation between sociology and ideology is bound to end up with blindness of the former and the emptiness of the latter.*

Ideology is the value-orientation of action. One's action is largely shaped by one's own interest. Man is affiliated in a graded fashion to different groups, primary and secondary, immediate and remote. He is *partially* free to choose his ideology in terms of his dominant interest-group or/and reference-group. In a static society his action and ideology are mainly shaped by his immediate reference-groups like family and caste. *Per contra* when due to the introduction and operation of the dynamic factors like industrialisation and conflict mobility is generated in an inert society, remote reference-groups like class and nation assume live character and start influencing the motivation and action patterns of the people concerned.

The rural India is waking up from its age-old slumber. In some parts of the country, one might say, the peasantry has already woken up. Its causes are mixed. So also are its effects. Some of the causes and effects have already been indicated before. The point now is that these causes and effects have to be *regulated in a rational manner* and cannot be left to the forces of "spontaneity". Unless this responsibility of regulation is given to (in fact it has to be taken up by) the people of the concerned group who are vitally and economically interested in the matter, it cannot be satisfactorily discharged. The interest of the Indian peasantry particularly of the middle and the poor peasant and of the landless labourer, cannot be defended and promoted by the urban-based upper middle class bureaucracy and political leadership whose education and orientation are a line to the reality of the situation and whose interests are related to the industrial bourgeoisie. Some individual officers or party leaders may be honest and well-meaning but that has little impact on the sad institutional state of affairs.

The operative part of the ideology consists of several factors. First, the structure of our education pyramid should be inverted, extensively broadening the base of primary education and making our education more concretely relevant to our social and economic conditions. It may sound a bit pompous, but I am absolutely clear that we badly need a *cultural revolution* drawing our cultural sustenance more from the rural life, its grass-root joys, sufferings and needs and less from the fun, frolic, or the existential agony and anguish of the alienated intellectual and the *babu*. Secondly, we badly and urgently need induction of peasant and working-class elements in the political leadership composition enabling it to be more

appreciative of and responsive to the genuine needs of the weaker sections of the society and little less pervious to the ideas of the well-organised city based middle-class professional groups. Finally, a word of caution. Our ideology must be based primarily on a correct understanding of our own social conditions and not uncritically borrowed, as it happened on several crucial occasions in the past, from the foreign experiences and experiments, interpreted either by the bureaucracy of the concerned countries or by the theoreticians, partisan or hostile. Short of a social revolution the present inequitable structure of our peasant economy cannot be changed. And to revolutionalise it will be a tremendously difficult task.²⁷ □

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"The object of government in peace and in war is not the glory of rulers or of races, but the happiness of the common man."

—Unknown