
UNIT 5 HISTORICAL METHOD*

Structure

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- Use of historical method for explanations in sociology, and
- Trace the way that the use of the historical method has changed over a period of time.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The changes in the historical method are linked to the changes and growth of Sociology as an academic discipline. The earliest scholar to write on the use of the historical method was the British social anthropologist A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. In the first few sections we will be dealing with the use of the historical method from the perspective of Radcliffe-Brown. Consequently, we will be looking at the method as it was used by the evolutionists and later by the ethnologists. In the later sections we will discuss the use of the historical method by the social anthropologists and later by scholars in the 20th century. In the concluding section we will examine the use of the historical method in India.

5.2 THE HISTORICAL METHOD IN SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY: DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGES

The historical method, as the name implies, is a method which uses history to understand societies. The historical method began when we first started to

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systematically study societies. The use of history helps us understand the way in which the past has impacted and influenced the present day societies. This method traces the development of society or social institutions over a period of time. It may also trace the causes of change and the direction of change (*Srinivas, 1983*)

Sources of History

The sources of this history can be many. On the one hand history could be accessed through sources like government records and written accounts of societies. The other sources of history include accounts on artefacts, clothes, ornaments, weapons and so on. The kind of sources used to gather information about societies is dependent on the nature of societies. Sources like written accounts of societies, documents and government records etc. are typically resources that are available in complex societies and not in simple societies. In complex societies, one has access to written material. There is often a lot of information available through written documents like official gazetteers, archives etc. In simple societies since the level of technological development is lesser than complex societies there are no written records. In this case the sources that are available would include artefacts, weapons, clothes or even oral histories etc.

Amongst the earliest thinkers to write on the use of the historical method was A. R. Radcliffe Brown (17 January 1881 - 24 October 1955), the British social anthropologist. Radcliffe-Brown while analysing the use of the historical method for explanations traces the development and changes in the use of history in sociology and social anthropology. Radcliffe-Brown's seminal work on Research Methods which was edited by M.N. Srinivas deals at length with the history of social anthropological research.

5.3 EARLY TIMES

The first section of the essay will focus on tracing the trajectory of the use of the historical method. According to A. R. Radcliffe Brown methodologically historical explanations can either be deductive or inductive (*Srinivas, 1983*).

- The *deductive method* is what characterised the growth of the discipline in the middle of the 19th Century. This method was used by the earliest anthropologist. They relied on indirect or direct evidence. The historical explanations offered by evolutionists were often based on conjecture. This method was also later used by those that Radcliffe Brown refers to as ethnologists. The ethnologists focussed on the study of particular aspects of societies or on culture. The ethnologists were also critical of the evolutionists. For the ethnologists the use of historical explanations are limited to a particular society or culture. It is not based on universal laws or explanations.
- In the second case the method used to explain societies is *inductive*. This method is directed towards discovering the general laws governing societies. This method according to Radcliffe-Brown was used by these social anthropologists. The inductive method in sociology and social anthropology is based on field work and it may offer historical explanations that are evidence based. It is directed towards discovering universal laws or general explanations.

5.4 THE INDUCTIVE METHOD: THE EVOLUTIONISTS

The use of the historical method can be traced to the second half of the 19th century. It was the time when the systematic study of societies first started to appear. The earliest approach to the study of societies was evolutionary in nature. The evolutionary method was used to write about the history of societies. The focus of those who used the evolutionary method in this way was on discovering the origins of everything. They studied societies and cultures from the point of view of societies passing through successive stages. The assumption was that all societies follow the same path of development. The progress of societies was viewed from a unilinear perspective.

Amongst the first to use the method of social evolution was Herbert Spencer (27 April 1820 - 8 December 1903), an English philosopher, biologist and anthropologist. Spencer used the historical method when writing on the large scale transformations in society. He wrote about the changes in society from simple to compound due to changes in population size.

The French philosopher and social visionary Auguste Comte (19 January 1798 - 5 September 1857), like Spencer used the historical method. Comte was writing at the time of the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. He was trying to understand the changes taking place in society. In his six volume work, *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-1842) (The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte) he set forth an evolutionary perspective on the development of society (Peel 1996). Using the historical approach he deliberates the origins of human thought in his *Law of Three Stages*. In this work he traces the origin of all human societies from a theological to a metaphysical stage (based on conjecture) to finally a positivist stage i.e. a stage in which scientific explanations dominate.

Lewis Henry Morgan (November 21, 1818 - December 17, 1881) was another prominent anthropologist using the evolutionary method. He worked on the origins of totemism, marriage, family etc.

The other notable names amongst the evolutionists were James Frazer whose work was on the origins of totemism. His method influenced scholars like Bachofen, Kohler and Durkheim.

Thus we see that the evolutionary approach believed that all societies evolve along a single path of development. This may be described as unilinear progression. Some societies were at an earlier stage of development compared to the others. The history of all societies was viewed from an evolutionary perspective. The evolutionist were criticised for their belief that all societies were similar and that they all follow the same path of development.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What are the various sources of history?

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2) What is the inductive method?

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3) What is the deductive method?

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4) What is the evolutionist method? Name some thinkers who have used this method.

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5.5 THE INDUCTIVE METHOD: THE ETHNOLOGISTS

The ethnologists were critical of the evolutionists for their belief that all societies evolve along a single unilineal path. For the evolutionists this implied that some societies were more developed than the others. The less developed societies they believed would develop along the same lines as the more developed ones. For the evolutionist history was thus an evolutionary one. The ethnologists on the other hand use history differently. They do not focus on evolution. The ethnologists use the historical method to study societies and their culture. (*Srinvas, 1983*). Such a method explains an institution or a particular aspect of culture by tracing its development over a period of time. It explains a change in society by linking it to a particular stage of development of society. If for instance, we are interested in the rights of women then we can understand them by linking them to various stages of development of feminism and feminist thought. Therefore, the theory

has been used in different context. However, the dominant theory is the study of human society.

The use of the historical method in this way establishes specific connections within a particular aspect of culture. The historical method in this case relies on both quantitative and qualitative data. For example, in order to study the government in England we will study its history from the point of view of changes over a period of time and trace its development to the present times. In this case we rely on factual data that is available through official records and other government sources. If there are no official records available then we do a hypothetical reconstruction of the past. For this we may also use indirect evidence in order to understand cultures and societies which were labelled as primitive and which were less well developed than the Western societies. Radcliffe-Brown gives the example of Madagascar, an island on the east coast of the African sub-continent as an illustration of the method (*Srinivas, 1983*). The study of the cultures of the people of Madagascar reveals that the culture and race of the people of Madagascar is influenced not just by Africa but also by South-East Asia. The ethnologists explained this based on migration of people from Asia to Madagascar sometime in the past. They offered conjectural dates and time periods of this migration. They reconstructed the history. This reconstruction could also rely on archaeological evidence. In this case there was no access to any kind of written historical records. The explanations that were offered were based on indirect evidence. Indirect evidence based on language, artefacts, physical features etc. was interlinked in order to explain these societies.

Thus for the study of simple societies where there is almost no official sources the ethnologists offer a historical explanation even when there are no records of history. To get a complete knowledge of society we often have to rely on indirect evidence of the kind that is derived from archaeology and history. Ethnological knowledge for Radcliffe Brown is a method of historical reconstruction of the past specific to a particular society or culture. It is not based on universal laws or explanations. It is often conjectural history particularly where documentary evidence is unavailable. Real history for Radcliffe Brown is where documentary evidence is available.

5.6 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ETHNOLOGICAL METHOD

The development of the ethnological method critiquing the evolutionary method began towards the end of the 19th century and early 20th century. The ethnological method explaining cultures using the historical method has varied over a period of time. It can be broadly divided into four phases as follows (*Goldenweiser, 1925*)

Graebner and his followers

In Germany, the cultural historical school was influenced by Fritz Graebner (4 March 1877-13 July 1934). Graebner believed that the task of ethnology was to reconstruct historical contacts between people and culture. Historical explanations about society were offered from the '*kulturhistorische*' or culture history point of view.

The German scholars, following Graebner, believed that culture was transmitted from one region to the other through the process of diffusion. They viewed this as a very important way for the development of culture the world over. For instance, in order to explain religion or an artefact like a pot, Graebner compared both the quantitative and qualitative features in the context of the two cultures. It is not necessary according to this school of ethnology for the two cultures to come into contact with each other. The contact could have happened sometime in the past. Graebner himself studied Africa, North America and South America using this method.

W.H.R. Rivers

William Halse Rivers (12 March 1864 - 4 June 1922), was an English anthropologist and ethnologist. Rivers used the historical method differently from Graebner and his followers. Rivers was an evolutionist to begin with. He later modified his stance and started focusing on the role of culture contact in the context of social evolution. He believed that when cultures come into contact with one another, then new features could appear. These feature could have been completely absent in either of the cultures. As a result of the contact new features appeared or developed. For him unlike Graebner contact between cultures was essential.

Elliot Smith and Willem James Perry

British ethnologists like Elliot Smith (15 August 1871 - 1 January 1937) and William James Perry (1887–1949) explained the similarities in culture from the point of view of diffusion from a common centre. If they find similarities in cultures which may be located in geographically unrelated regions then they explain it from the point of view of diffusion from a common centre in the historical past. They deny that they may have developed in an unrelated manner. Unlike Rivers and Graebner they believed that culture flows from one centre to the rest of the world. Both Smith and Perry believed that Egypt was the centre for all cultural diffusion. The primary diffusion for them happened to nearby areas like Syria, Crete, East Africa, Southern Arabia and Sumer. Secondary diffusion then occurred to other parts of the world from these areas.

The American Historical School

In America, Lewis Henry Morgan (November 21, 1818 - December 17, 1881) following in the footsteps of Rivers mapped the genealogy of the American Indian tribes. He believed that there were similarities in their kinship structures. By studying kin terms across tribes Morgan attempted to classify kinship systems. The data that he collected was largely on the disappearing of Red Indian tribes. He published a seminal work 'Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family' in 1871. In his work Morgan used extensive data to establish the unity of various kinship systems. He examined the way in which the structure of the family and social institutions change and develop (*Mary Bouquet, 2015*).

After Morgan, Franz Boas (1858–1942), a German-born American anthropologist and later his student A. L. Kroeber (June 11, 1876 - October 5, 1960) focussed on explaining data through the use of historical explanations. Boas was critical of the evolutionary perspective and instead proposed that cultures develop historically through the process of diffusion when people interact with one another. He was also critical of the evolutionists' ideas that some cultures were more

developed than the others. Kroeber through his work further exemplified this approach. Edward Sapir (January 26, 1884 - February 4, 1939) was an American anthropologist-linguist, and also a student of Boas applied historical method to study the indigenous languages in America. For Boas and his students historical explanations were based on diffusion. They used statistical data to compare different aspects of cultures. The similarities between cultures was explained through diffusion.

The American anthropologists used the historical method in several ways. It was used as a method of convergence, as a statistical method, as a genealogical method and also as a psychological method. American anthropologists like Boas also used the statistical method. For instance Boas in his study of myths numerically counted the similarities in myths across cultures. He used this quantitative comparison to establish a connection between cultures. Boas method was very different from the genealogical method used by Lewis Henry Morgan. The American anthropologists also believed that cultural similarities that could not be explained through diffusion could be explained through convergence. Two cultures with diverse historical features may have come together and later the cultural features may have knit together into a unified culture. This was the method of convergence. According to the psychological method, it is believed that the process of diffusion is not simply a mechanical one but is also a psychological one. People coming into contact with one another or with a different culture have to psychologically also adapt themselves. Thus, in American anthropology one sees the use of the historical method in different ways.

5.7 THE ETHNOLOGICAL METHOD

In the 18th and 19th Century there is a shift from the evolutionary perspective to the ethnological perspective. For the ethnologists development of cultures could be explained through cultures coming into contact. The contact between cultures was viewed differently in different parts of the world. There was a lack of agreement amongst the ethnologists on the use of the historical method.

In Germany Graebner and his followers used the '*kulturhistorische*' or cultural history approach. For them cultures developed when they came into contact with one another through the process of diffusion. In Britain, Rivers, Elliot Smith and Perry too believed in the process of diffusion. For Rivers culture contact was essential for the development of cultures. Perry and Smith believed in a single centre of diffusion. The American Historical School differed from the German and British ethnologists. Boas and his students used the statistical method to explain cultures. The other Americans used the method of convergence, the genealogical method and the psychological method too.

Ethnologists as we have seen, contributed greatly to the use of the historical method to study society. Such a method explains an institution or a particular aspect of culture by tracing its development over a period of time. It explains a change in society by linking it to a particular stage of development of society. This labelling as ethnology was an attempt by Radcliffe Brown to break away from historical studies. It was an attempt to establish the independence of Sociology and Social Anthropology as independent disciplines. The term ethnology is not popularly used any more. However, the contribution of the thinkers discussed in the preceding sections, to the historical method is immense.

They in several ways, laid the foundations for the use of history in Sociology and Social Anthropology.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What is the ethnological method?

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- 2) How have Graebner and his followers used the ethnological method?

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- 3) Trace the development of the ethnological method in America.

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5.8 THE DEDUCTIVE METHOD: THE SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS

In the preceding section we have seen that ethnologists focus on particular societies and cultures. The use of the historical method as we have seen so far was very different amongst those whom were labelled as ethnologists. Ethnologists were more focussed on understanding the development of culture. They often used sources of history that were not written which could include artefacts, customs and so on. Official sources and documents were also used but they were used more in terms of understanding specific events or occurrences.

As opposed to the methodology of the ethnologists Radcliffe-Brown proposes the use of the term social anthropology for those who formulate general laws for society. Their focus is not on specific aspects of society unlike the ethnologists.

The task of social anthropology in this method was to discover universal laws of society. For instance, Radcliffe-Brown himself in his work “Structure and Function in Primitive Societies” uses this method to study societies. He focusses on studying the social morphology and social physiology of societies in order to discover universal laws governing them. A knowledge of history helps discover social structure and function. This is however an indirect use of history. The focus is on societies at present and not on events that have happened earlier.

According to Radcliffe-Brown the historical explanations by historians are concerned with particulars and are not generalizing in nature. Social anthropology on the other hand uses history in a different way. Social anthropology for Radcliffe Brown explained societies in terms of sociological laws and not in terms of reconstructed history. Ethnology according to him used unverifiable guesses which could not be verified. Proper history for him relied on facts that were available through written documents. Facts and data for anthropologists had to be gathered through field work. Sociologists began to take more of their data from contemporary societies, whether they used official statistics or carried on fieldwork.

5.9 THE HISTORICAL METHOD: LATER TIMES

In the preceding sections we have seen the way in which history has been used to understand societies when we began studying societies. This method has been used by the evolutionists, the ethnologists and the social anthropologists. In this section we will discuss the use of the historical method in the 19th century by those who were not classified as evolutionists, ethnologists or social anthropologists but contributed to the historical method in Sociology.

We see the use of the historical method in the works of Emile Durkheim (15 April 1858 - 15 November 1917), a French sociologist. He drew from the works of Fustel de Coulanges, a French historian, for his books—*The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) & *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). He also wrote on the history of education in France. Durkheim also made it a policy in the journal *L'Année Sociologique* (Kando, (1976).), that he founded, to review books on history.

Ferdinand Tönnies (26 July 1855 - 9 April 1936), a German sociologist, retained an interest in the past. Vilfredo Federico Pareto (15 July 1848 - 19 August 1923), in his treatise on Sociology developed the notion of the circulation of elites in society. He discussed classical Athens, Rome and Spartan society, took examples from history of Italy in middle ages. Albion Small (May 11, 1854 - March 24, 1926) the chairman of first Sociology department in Chicago, in 1892, was previously a professor of History.

In Germany, under the influence of Leopold von Ranke (21 December 1795 - 23 May 1886) in late 19th Century one also sees the use of official sources in order to document history. There was an attempt in Germany to write a more objective or scientific history on the basis of official documents (Burke, 1980). The Germans used elaborate techniques to establish the authenticity of documents they used. In contrast the works of social historians looked unprofessional.

Some scholars made an extensive use of archives by historians in Germany. Karl Marx's (5 May 1818-14 March 1883) famous Communist Manifesto of 1867,

was based completely on archival material. Max Weber (21 April 1864 - 14 June 1920) wrote extensively on the agrarian history of Rome in 1889 and again using archival materials. Weber also wrote books on trading companies of the middle Ages. When he studied economic and social organization, he did not give up history but drew on history for material and on historians for material and concepts like patrimonial state, charisma. His work on the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is also historical in nature.

As the discipline of sociology and social anthropology evolved the study of culture from a historical perspective became a part of the methodology. They often used the 'unofficial sources' like artefacts, customs and institutions to explain societies. Gradually the historical method began to rely not just on official sources but also on unofficial sources. Those who studied cultures were now not labelled as ethnologists. Their work and methodology became a part of main stream sociology and social anthropology.

In The 20th Century

Social anthropologists following Radcliffe-Brown were more focussed on discovering general laws of society. This was in an attempt to make Sociology and Social Anthropology as scientific as the natural sciences. In the endeavour to establish Sociology as a science Radcliffe Brown, and the others focussed more on discovering general laws for society.

In the 1920s, one sees a break in the use of the historical method in Sociology. Those who studied societies from the perspective of their cultural past were critical of the approach used by Radcliffe-Brown and other social anthropologists to study society. The German thinkers studying societies considered this approach to the study of society to be a mechanical one. The social anthropologists on the other hand following Radcliffe Brown used the method of doing field work in order to discover general laws governing society. Bronislaw Malinowski, a British Social anthropologist too focussed more on the scientific study of society based on field work. This meant that the specificity of societies was often overlooked.

The historical approach used by Ranke and his followers and which dominated the German intellectual tradition for a considerable time, was criticised for its focus on only official documents. Karl Lamprecht (25 February 1856 - 10 May 1915) criticized the German establishment for its emphasis on political history. He called for a collective history which would draw on other disciplines like psychology and economics (Chickering, 1993).

In the 1920s, Karl Mannheim wrote extensively on the Sociology of Knowledge using the historical approach. In 1930s, R.K. Merton in his work *Science, Technology and Society in 17th-Century England* uses the historical method. His work establishes a link between Puritanism and Science in England, in the tradition of Weber.

As the discipline of Sociology has evolved, interdisciplinarity has increased. For a discipline to grow it's important to rethink the methodology used. For a more enriching knowledge researchers use a mix of methods. Anthony Giddens, Peter Burke, Charles Tilly and several others have extensively used the historical method in conjunction with other methods.

Check Your Progress 3

Historical Method

- 1) According to Radcliffe-Brown how do social anthropologists differ from ethnologists in the use of the historical method?

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- 2) Discuss Durkheim's contribution to the use of the historical method.

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- 3) Elucidate on Ranke's contribution to the use of the historical method? Discuss his impact on the development of sociology in Germany.

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- 4) Compare the use of history in the works of Radcliffe-Brown and Ranke and his followers.

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5.10 THE USE OF THE HISTORICAL METHOD IN INDIA

In India too we find the extensive use of the historical method. In the early years we find that the sociologists in India used historical texts to understand social reality. Many of them were Indologists . Prominent amongst them were G.S. Ghurye (1969), Louis Dumont (1983), Ketkar (1909), M.H. Kapadia (1945) and, Iravati Karve (1953, 1961, 1991). The latter day sociologists to use these ancient texts include Veena Das (1987), T.N. Madan and Amrit Srinivasan (1980). At the Bombay School of Economics and Sociology, Ghurye and his students extensively used historical and Sanskrit texts to study contemporary social structures and institutions. This exemplified the use of history for a macro analysis (Dhanagare 2007 a) (*Dhanagare, 2007 b*).

We also see the metaphoric use of history (*Dhanagare, 2007 a*) (*Dhanagare, 2007 b*). This meant that their research was rooted in the history of ideas. Their actual research did not reflect the use of historical sources unlike in the works of Ghurye and others discussed in the preceding section. This approach was followed by Radhakamal Mukherjee, D. P. Mukerji, D.N.Majumdar, P.C. Joshi, Yogendra Singh and others. This approach was prominently used by the Sociologists of the Lucknow School.

The substantive use of history in the study of societies is seen in the works of A. R. Desai, D.N. DhanagareYogendra Singh, P.C. Joshi, A.M. Shah, M.S.A. Rao, and several others. A substantive use of history implies that history is used to explain societies. The use of history is not just limited to ideas. Historical sources are used as a tool of explanation. They used archival sources, primary sources and also secondary sources. In the recent times the some of the sociologist in India who have used the historical method include Ramachandra Guha, Gail Omvedt, Sharit Bhowmik, V.Xaxa, Sujata Patel and S. Jodhka amongst others. (*Dhanagare, 2007 a*)(*Dhanagare, 2007 b*).

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) How was the historical method used in India in the earlier times?

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- 2) What does a metaphoric use of history to study societies mean?

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5.11 LET US SUM UP

In this Chapter, we have discussed the use of the Historical Method. We have examined it in the context of the early times as well as the present. The earliest to use this method were the evolutionists followed by the ethnologists. The social anthropologists and sociologists across 20th and the 21st century continue to use the historical method. There is no one way in which history is used to explain society. There are diverse ways to use the historical method. Explanations vary from explanations based on diffusion theories to Indologists who use ancient texts to explain society. As the discipline of Sociology has progressed interdisciplinarity has also increased. The Sociologists today use a combination of methods to study society.

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5.13 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The sources of this history can be many. On the one hand history could be accessed through official sources like government records and written accounts of societies. The unofficial sources of this history could be artefacts, clothes, ornaments, weapons and so on. The kind of sources used to gather information about societies is dependent on the nature of societies. Sources like written accounts of societies, documents and government records etc. are typically resources that are available in complex societies and not in simple societies.
- 2) The *inductive* method is directed towards discovering the general laws governing societies. This method according to Radcliffe-Brown was used by those social anthropologists. The inductive method in sociology and social anthropology is based on field work and it may offer historical explanations that are evidence based. It is based on universal laws or explanations.
- 3) The *deductive method* is what characterised the growth of the discipline in the middle of the 19th Century. This method was used by the earliest anthropologist. They relied on indirect or direct evidence. This method was used by evolutionists and was often based on conjecture. This method was also later used by those that Radcliffe Brown refers to as ethnologists.
- 4) The focus of those who used the evolutionary method in this way was on discovering the origins of everything. They studied societies and cultures from the point of view of societies passing through successive stages. The assumption was that all societies follow the same path of development. The progress of societies was viewed from a unilinear perspective. The earliest to use the method of social evolution was Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte, Morgan, Frazer and Bachofen.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The ethnological method explains an institution or a particular aspect of culture by tracing its development over a period of time. It explains a change in society by linking it to a particular stage of development of society. If for instance we are interested in the rights of women then we can understand them by linking them to various stages of development of feminism and feminist thought. The use of the historical method in this way establishes specific connections within a particular aspect of culture. The historical method in this case relies on quantitative and qualitative data that is available.

- 2) In Germany, the cultural historical school influenced by Fritz Graebner believed that the task of ethnology was to reconstruct historical contacts between people and culture. Historical explanations about society were offered from the '*kulturhistorische*' or culture history point of view. The German scholars following Graebner believed that culture was transmitted from one region to the other through the process of diffusion. They compare both the quantitative and qualitative features in the context of the two cultures. It is not necessary according to this school of ethnology for the two cultures to come into contact with each other. The contact could have happened sometime in the past.
- 3) In America, after the work of Lewis Henry Morgan, the focus of studying societies shifted from a predominantly theoretical perspective to the collection of data. The data that was collected was largely on the disappearing Red Indian tribes. Franz Boas and later his student A. L. Kroeber focussed on explaining data through the use of historical explanations. Boas was critical of the evolutionary perspective and instead proposed that cultures develop historically through the process of diffusion when people interact with one another. The American anthropologists used the historical method in several ways. It was used as a method of convergence, as a statistical method, as a genealogical method and also as a psychological method.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) According to Radcliffe-Brown Social anthropology formulates general laws for society. Their focus is not on specific aspects of society unlike the ethnologists. A knowledge of history helps discover social function but it is different from historical explanations. Historical explanations deal with events that happened earlier and latter facts arise out of these. These are two essentially different methods. Social anthropology for Radcliffe-Brown explained societies in terms of sociological laws and not in terms of reconstructed history. Ethnology according to him used unverifiable guesses which could not be verified. Proper history for him relied on facts that were available through written documents. A historical explanation for him was very different from a sociological or functional explanation. Facts and data had to be gathered through field work. Sociologists began to take more of their data from contemporary societies, whether they used official statistics or carried out their surveys.
- 2) Emile Durkheim drew from the works of Fustel de Coulanges, a French historian, for his books- *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) & *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). He also wrote on the history of education in France. Durkheim also made it a policy in the journal *L'Année Sociologique* that he founded, to review books on history.
- 3) In Germany under the influence of Leopold von Ranke in late 19th Century one also sees the use of official sources in order to document history. There was an attempt in Germany to write a more objective or scientific history on the basis of official documents (*Burke*, 1980). They used elaborate techniques to establish the authenticity of documents. In contrast the works of social historians looked unprofessional. There was an extensive use of archives by historians in Germany. Karl Marx's famous Communist Manifesto of 1867, was based completely on archival material. Max Weber

wrote extensively on the agrarian history of Rome in 1889 and again using archival materials. Weber also wrote books on trading companies of the middle Ages. When he studied economic and social organization he did not give up history drew on history for material and on historians for material and concepts like patrimonial state, charisma. His work on the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism is also historical in nature.

- 4) In the 1920s, one sees a break in the use of the historical method in Sociology. Those who studied societies from the perspective of their cultural past were critical of the approach used by Radcliffe Brown and the other social anthropologists to study society. The German thinkers studying societies considered this approach to be a mechanical one. The social anthropologists on the other hand following Radcliffe Brown used the method of doing field work in order to discover the general laws governing society. Bronislaw Malinowski, a British Social anthropologist too focussed more on the scientific study of society based on field work. This meant that the specificity of societies was often overlooked.

The historical approach used by Ranke and his followers and which dominated the German intellectual tradition for a considerable time was criticised for its focus on only official documents. Karl Lamprecht criticized the German establishment for its emphasis on political history. He called for a collective history which would draw on other disciplines like psychology and economics.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) In India in the early years we find that the sociologists in India used historical texts to understand social reality. Many of them were Indologists. Prominent amongst them were G. S. Ghurye in 1969, Louis Dumont (1983), Ketkar (1909), M.H. Kapadia (1945) and, Iravati Karve (1953, 1961, 1991). The latter day sociologists to use these texts include Veena Das (1987), T.N. Madan and Amrit Srinivasan.
- 2) In India we also see the metaphoric use of history. This meant that their research was rooted in the history of ideas and their actual research did not reflect the use of historical sources unlike in the works of Ghurye and others discussed in the preceding section. This approach was followed by Radhakamal Mukherjee, D. P. Mukerji, D.N.Majumdar, P.C. Joshi, Yogendra Singh and others.
- 3) The substantive use of history in the study of societies is seen in the works of A. R. Desai, D.N. Dhanagare, Yogendra Singh, P.C. Joshi, A.M. Shah, M.S.A. Rao, and several others. A substantive use of history implies that history is used to explain societies. The use of history is not just limited to ideas. Historical sources are used as a tool of explanation. They used archival sources, primary sources and also secondary sources. In the recent times the some of the sociologist who have used the historical method include Ramachandra Guha, Gail Omvedt, Sharit Bhowmik, V. Xaxa, Sujata Patel and S. Jodhka amongst others.

GLOSSARY

Bombay School of Economics and Sociology: Ghurye and his students extensively used historical and Sanskrit texts to study contemporary social structures and institutions.

Deductive Method: The deductive method relied on indirect or direct evidence. This method was used by evolutionists and was often based on conjecture. This method was also later used by the ethnologists.

Ethnologists: The ethnologists focussed on the study of particular aspects of societies or on culture. The term was used by anthropologist A.R. Radcliffe-Brown.

Evolutionists: The focus of those who used the evolutionary method in discovering the origins of everything.

Functionalist Approach: The focus is on studying societies from the point of view of their functioning. The functionalists also used the organic analogy in order to study societies.

Historical Method: The historical method as the name implies means a method which uses history to understand societies.

Indologists: An Indologist is one who uses sacred texts to study traditional Indian society. They predominantly focus on Hindu ideology, values and institutions.

Inductive Method: The inductive method in sociology and social anthropology is based on field work and it may offer historical explanations that are evidence based.

Kulturhistorische: Historical explanations about society were offered from the cultural history point of view. This method was used in Germany.

Metaphoric Use of History: This meant that their research was rooted in the history of ideas and their actual research did not reflect the use of historical sources.

Substantive Use of History: A substantive use of history implies that historical sources are used to explain societies.

FURTHER READINGS

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