

**A. M. Shah:** *Sociology and History: Dialogues towards integration.* Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2016, 254 pp., Rs. 625 (hb). ISBN 978-81-25060-13-0

Professor Shah has been one of the few practitioners of social sciences in India who integrates sociology and history well in his researches. The present collection of essays is yet another effort on his part to insist on the importance of history to the sociologist and of sociology to the historian. The historian, he says, may use sociological concepts loosely, for that is the nature of the data on which the researches are based. However, it still behoves the historian to be sensitive to sociological ideas, theories and concepts, since that would enable them to come up with a description of the past that may be more nuanced. This was said in the context of his comments on the theory that Romila Thapar tried to establish about the emergence of a state system out of the lineages that dominated Rg Vedic India.

Shah's review of Thapar's seminal book on the transition of Indian society from lineages and the state was one of the few visible efforts made by the sociologists of India to engage publicly with the works of historians. Sadly, that exchange remained a one-off exercise with both sides being nice and polite to each other, appreciative of deigning to look across disciplinary boundaries. Shah is grateful enough that Thapar abjures simplistic evolutionist etc. paradigms from sociology while Thapar is grateful that Shah appreciates the lack of control that historians have over data while trying to create an explanation for the past. He does not even respond to Romila Thapar's dismissal of sociology as a craft that looks at reality synchronically while ignoring the diachronic view, while Thapar remains silent on his poke on having forgotten to study marriage patterns in ancient India. This is ironic, for most of Shah's own writings, many of which are reproduced in this volume, were essentially examination of issues diachronically.

The Shah-Thapar exchange is placed at the centre of this volume since it happened in the late 1980s. The seven essays that precede and the five that succeed are thus placed to show the diachronicity of Shah's own engagement with the discipline of sociology in which he examined the

social and political systems of Gujarat culminating in the writing of a trend report on historical sociology for the ICSSR in 1973.

The last three essays of this collection, the most interesting ones, are a history of India's engagement with sociology of which an interesting one was through the Anthropological Society of Bombay. On a more politically committed note was the pop-sociology of the kind that was peddled in the radical nationalist journal the Indian Sociologist followed by the Indian Journal of Sociology that tried to bring in a higher degree of scientificity to the study of Indian society.

For bringing together all these diverse essays in a single book we need to be thankful to Professor Shah.

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