

## **DAVID HARDIMAN**

### **Life Sketch of David Hardiman**

David Hardiman was born in Rawalpindi in Pakistan in October 1947. He was brought up in England, studying at Sherborne School in Dorset, the London School of Economics. David Hardiman has studied and written on South Asian History since the late 1960s, and during this period has spent over a decade in all actually working in India. The main focus of his work has been on the colonial period in South Asian history, concentrating in particular on the effects of colonial rule on rural society, relationships of power at various levels, the Indian independence movement with a specific focus on the popular bases to Indian nationalism, and environmental and medical history.

In the late 1970s he became involved with a group of historians studying the social history of subordinate groups in South Asia. This led to the publication of a series of volume from 1981 onwards under the title Subaltern Studies. David Hardiman co-edited Volume VIII in this series and he continues to be a member of the editorial group of Subaltern Studies. The Gramscian term 'subaltern' - meaning 'subordinate group' - was chosen to emphasize the centrality of relationships of domination and subordination in a society in which class divides had not developed as in the industrialized world. The project sought for a sharp break from the predominant colonialist and nationalist paradigms of South Asian historiography, both of which were seen to validate the history of elites - whether colonial rulers or nationalist leaders - over and above the history of subordinate groups. The project has generated an internationally recognized body of writing. Over time, the project has moved forward in many innovative ways.

David Hardiman's main contributions to the project have been in a number of areas. He has carried out a detailed examination of the Indian nationalist movement at the local level in Gujarat, Gandhi's home region - bringing out the disjuncture between the aims and agendas of the Gandhian leadership and local peasant activists. He has examined the power-structures of rural society, carrying out for example a detailed study of the hegemonic controls exercised by users and the limits to that hegemony, as seen in particular in revolts. He has also studied a movement of assertion by adivasis (tribal people) against liquor dealers who had been granted a monopoly right of supply by the British and who had enriched themselves at the expense of the adivasis. In this

movement, which took place in 1922-23, a goddess was believed to have taken possession of spirit-mediums, who then commanded the people to give up liquor and boycott the dealers. In adjoining areas, the goddess was supposed to have commanded her devotees to put a stop to witchcraft, and in some cases, to give their allegiance to Gandhi. The popular memories, stories and songs that provide a particularly rich source material for South Asian history have informed all of this work. To this end, he has sought consistently to enhance archival material with information collected directly from the areas he has studied. This involved extensive tours and protracted periods living in villages, talking with people, attending their gatherings and recording their stories and songs. He has utilized anthropological methods and learnt much from debates within the discipline regarding the role of the ethnographer, the limits to our knowledge and the dangers of advancing claims to speak 'for' the people. He has supported the call for a more historical approach within anthropology, providing through his writing one example as to how this may be achieved.

From 1983 to 1989 he worked as a Research Fellow at the Centre for Social Studies, Surat in Gujarat, India. There was a strong emphasis there on the evaluation of government and NGO development projects, and, besides carrying on his historical research and writing, he became involved in a wide range of development-linked research projects. He often accompanied researchers on fieldwork, so as to learn about these many issues at first hand, and in some cases carried out his own independent research. This work made him aware in particular of the critical importance of environmental and health issues for the rural poor of South Asia. As a result of this experience he became involved in researching and writing on the history of the environment and the history of health and healing during the colonial period in India.

### **Writings of David Hardiman**

Among various writings of David Hardiman the most scholarly writings include

1. The Quit India Movement in Gujarat (1980)
2. The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India (1987)
3. Peasant Resistance in India: 1858-1914 (1992)
4. Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranjit Guha (1994)
5. Feeding the Baniya: Peasants and Usurers in Western India (1996)
6. Gandhi in his Time and Ours (2003)
7. Histories for the Subordinated (2006)

## **Subaltern perspective of Hardiman**

The Subaltern mode of narration can be treated as a reinstative mode where muted channels of history are voiced by facilitating the foregrounding of the hitherto unheard and the subordinated. Gaps in the narrative edifice that goes by the name of mainstream History of both the nationalist and the colonial variety are filled in by the mode of countering it by a meticulous interface of oral and archival sources. Hardiman enters his narrative premises with the declaration of being a facilitator rather than being a spokesperson; he does not “...advance any claim to speak for them, this they do for themselves... would like it to be of some value for people who have shown so much resilience in the face of continuing oppression”. Hardiman advocates the need to “...emphasize the fact that Subaltern Studies focuses on the relationship between elite and subaltern as a historical process... the bonds between the dominant and subordinate are always strong, and often mirror each other... Their relationship is being ever modified through an ongoing process of mutual dialogue”.

## **The Devi Movement**

“The Coming of the Devi” is a study of a popular movement which arose amongst the Adivasis of South Gujarat in the 1920s. Central to the Devi movement was the movement against “liquor, meat and fish” supported by the moralistic and reformist order on both the colonial and nationalistic sides and resistance to the elite and exploitative Parsi liquor barons, while Hardiman’s “work on the Devi movement” depicted the evolution of drinking from a traditional and customary practice amongst the subalterns to a regulated and highly taxed commodity, and the unsuccessful campaign by a considerate group of colonial officers to relax liquor laws and its continuous persistence through illegal practices like moonshining to the contemporary times.

Anti – Liquor movements were not only an attempt to reform the adivasis and initiate them into a rightful way of life, but also aimed at hitting at the resource base of the colonial government and dismantle the strong feudal and economic structure of the liquor barons. The Devi movement was a major movement against the colonial taxation policy as well as “on the Parsi liquor and toddy dealers. Parsis were subject to rigorous social boycott which destroyed their prestige. During the course of the movement, an influential element among them forged an alliance with the middle-class Gandhian nationalists of

Gujrat...”. However, Hardiman reveals that “contrary to expectations of the Congressmen and other high caste nationalists, prohibition did not bring about a significant decline” in the consumption of liquor and a social divide between the ‘varjelas’ (those who gave up drinking) and ‘sarjelas’ (those who went back to drink). In a movement for cultural revivalism, the adivasis opposed abstinence and championed a going back to the ways of the forefathers. Hardiman reveals that even during the Devi movement “there were many peasants who did not accept the need to change their habits”.

### **Feeding the Baniya**

It mostly reflects on the power exercised by the Usurers on the subaltern classes in rural India. It also has a strong political and cultural influence. It explores the relationship between peasants and Usurers which has been crucial to life in rural India. Hardiman attempts to understand how such a domain of power was forged; how, over the centuries, usurers managed to adapt their practice so effectively within succeeding state formations; and how the classes whom they exploited related to them and also resisted them. The Baniyas always have their own hegemony over the poor people of the village. As being the indebted peasantry feed the Baniya merchants through their never ending demands for agrarian produce, enriching the usurers and themselves getting trapped in a cycle of poverty.

It also reveals the integration of a small-scale agrarian society with a larger capitalist economy. Hardiman investigated the deep meanings involved in the relationship between the villager and the moneylender. It is quite a puzzle that the villages even prefer to take the help from the usurers than taking the help from bank or any formal institution which provides loan at much cheaper rates and without much difficulty. While answering to this puzzle Hardiman says that moneylender was located in a complex web of domination exercised by the local dominant classes. The moneylender himself might not always be the dominating person, but he definitely was the front for the other dominant sections of local society. In so far that there was a society not sufficiently suffused with capitalist relations and institutions, the money lender provided the small-scale agrarian producer with adequate means to relate to the wider capitalist world. Thus it explores the relationship between the peasants and usurers in rural India in a rounded way, examining how states extended support

to usurers, as well as how Baniyas exerted a power that was both economic and ideological.

### **Critical Appraisal**

Though Hardiman has talked about the hegemonic role of the usurers but has not tried to give any solution to this circle of poverty created by them. Ban on alcoholism, meat is not only a task of the adivasis or the tribes rather it should have a wider aspect also.