



LBSNAA
1959-2009

Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration

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August 17, 2010

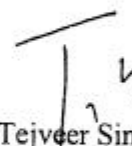
Dear Participants,

It gives me great pleasure to put together a series of readings for the 85th Foundation Course syllabus on Indian History & Culture. The relevance of the study of history in general often gets undermined in teaching curricula albeit not as part of any conscious attempt to belittle its importance but more on account of it losing to competing claims from disciplines where a direct set of skills is sought to be imparted. This is buttressed by the general belief that every entrant to civil services possesses a basic knowledge of India's history and culture. However, it is important for budding civil servants to be able to discern certain broad historical trends and to inculcate in themselves a spirit of enquiry and an appreciation for viewing developments, both in the past and present, more objectively.

The syllabus on Indian History & Culture would broadly cover inputs on the relevance of history and culture, the development of Indian historiography, the evolution of the Indian State as well as certain broad currents in social and economic history. There would be coverage of the contribution of Gandhi in the national movement, the rise of communalism and partition and movements of resistance against the British rule. We would also expect participants to familiarize themselves with the broad contours of the major religious and cultural traditions of the country.

I hope you find this manuscript useful and informative.

With best wishes,


(Tejveer Singh)
Deputy Director (Senior)

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History and the Enterprise of Knowledge*

- By Amartya Sen

In an often-quoted remark, Henry Ford, the great captain of industry, said, "History is more or less bunk." As a general statement about history, this is perhaps not an assessment of compelling delicacy. And yet Henry Ford would have been right to think, if that is what he meant, that history could easily become "bunk" through motivated manipulation.

This is especially so if the writing of history is manoeuvred to suit a slanted agenda in contemporary politics. There are organized attempts in India, at this time, to do just that, with arbitrary augmentation of a narrowly sectarian view of India's past, along with undermining its magnificently multireligious and heterodox history. Among other distortions, there is also a systematic confounding here of mythology with history. An extraordinary example of this has been the interpretation of the Ramayana, not as a great epic, but as documentary history, which can be invoked to establish property rights over places and sites possessed and owned by others. We see this for example in the confusing story of a recent statement by a Director of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) announcing exact knowledge of where Rama, the avatar, was born (not surprisingly precisely where the Babri Masjid mosque stood — from which the property rights for building a temple exactly there is meant to follow!), combined with the assertion that the Masjid itself had no religious significance (followed by an embarrassed dissociation of the ICHR itself from these remarkable pronouncements), thus illustrating the confounding of myth and history. The Ramayana, which Rabindranath Tagore had seen as a wonderful legend ("the story of the Ramayana" is to be interpreted, as Tagore put it in a Vision of India's History, not as "a matter of historical fact" but "in the plane of ideas") and in fact as a marvellous parable of "reconciliation," is now made into a legally authentic account that gives some members of one community an alleged entitlement to particular sites and land, amounting to a license to tear down the religious places of other communities. Thomas de Quincey has an interesting essay called "Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts." Rewriting of history for bellicose use can also, presumably, be a very fine art.

I note the contemporary confounding of historical studies in India as the starting point of this lecture, even though I shall not be directly concerned with addressing these distortions: there are many superb historians in India to give these misconstructions their definitive due. Instead, I shall be concerned with outlining some methodological issues that relate to the subject of truth and falsehood in general history. I will also try to develop and defend a view of history as "an enterprise of knowledge."

There will be occasional references to contemporary debates (because I shall

* Appeared in the "New Humanist" Summer 2001

illustrate the general points with examples from Indian history), but the overall focus will be on more general themes. There will be occasions, in this context, to take a fresh look at India's persistent heterodoxy, which includes not only its tendency towards multireligious and multicultural coexistence (a point emphasized in Rabindranath Tagore's "vision of India's history"), but also its relevance for the development of science and mathematics in India. For history is not only an enterprise of knowledge in itself, it cannot but have a special involvement with the history of other enterprises of knowledge.

The view of history as an enterprise of knowledge is, of course, very old-fashioned: I am not trying to innovate anything whatsoever. However, this and related epistemic approaches to history have taken some hard knocks over the last few decades. These have come not so much from sectarian bigots (who have barely addressed issues of method), but in the hands of sophisticated methodologists who are not only sceptical of the alleged virtues of modernity and objectivity (often for understandable reasons), but have ended up being deeply suspicious also of the idea of "truth" or "falsehood" in history. They have been keen, in particular, to emphasize the relativity of perspectives and the ubiquity of different points of view.

Perspectives and points of view, I would argue, are indeed important, not just in history, but in every enterprise of knowledge. This is partly because our observations are inescapably "positional." Distant objects, for example, cannot but look smaller, and yet it is the job of analysis and scrutiny to place the different positional views in their appropriate perspectives to arrive at an integrated and coherent picture. The elementary recognition of the "positionality" of observations and perceptions does not do away with ideas of truth and falsehood, nor with the need to exercise reasoned judgement faced with conflicting evidence and clashing perspectives. I shall not here reiterate the methodological arguments I have presented elsewhere, such as in "Positional Objectivity" in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* but will discuss their relevance to the interpretation of Indian history.

Indeed, describing the past is like all other reflective judgments, which have to take note of the demands of veracity and the discipline of knowledge. The discipline includes the study of knowledge formation, including the history of science (and the constructive influences that are important in the cultivation of science) and also the history of histories (where differences in perspective call for disciplined scrutiny and are of importance themselves as objects of study). I shall be concerned with each.

I should make one more motivational remark. I address this talk primarily to non-historians, like myself, who take an interest in history. I am aware that no self-respecting historian will peacefully listen to an economist trying to tell them what their discipline is like. But history is not just for historians. It affects the lives of the public at large. We non-historians do not have to establish our entitlement to talk about history.

Rather, a good point of departure is to ask: why is history so often invoked in popular discussions? Also, what can the general public get from history? Why, we must also ask, is history such a battleground?

Knowledge and its use

Let me begin by discussing some distinct motivations that influence the public's interest in history.

1. *Epistemic interest:* The fact that we tend to have, for one reason or another, some interest in knowing more about what happened in the past is such a simple thought that it is somewhat embarrassing to mention this at a learned gathering. But, surely, catering to our curiosity about the past must count among the reasons for trying to learn something about historical events. An ulterior motive is not essential for taking an interest in history (even though ulterior reasons may also exist often enough).

The simplicity of the idea of historical curiosity is, however, to some extent deceptive, because the reasons for our curiosity about the past can be very diverse and sometimes quite complex. The reason can be something very practical (such as learning from a past mistake), or engagingly illuminating (such as knowing about the lives of common people in a certain period in history), or largely recreational (such as investigating the chronology and history of India's multiplicity of calendars). Also, the historical questions asked need not be straightforward, and may even be highly speculative, such as Rabindranath Tagore's interesting but bold conjecture that the "mythical version of King Janamejaya's ruthless serpent sacrifice" may quite possibly stand for an actual historical event involving an "attempted extermination of the entire Naga race" by the dominant powers in ancient India. Whether or not it is easy to satisfy our curiosity (it may not always be possible to settle a debate regarding what actually happened), truth has an obvious enough role in exercises of this kind. In fact, curiosity is a demand for truth on a particular subject.

2. *Practical reason:* Historical connections are often invoked in the context of contemporary politics and policies. Indeed, present-day attitudes in politics and society are often strongly influenced by the reading — or misreading — of the history of past events. For example, sectarian tensions build frequently on grievances (spontaneous or cultivated) linked to past deeds (real or imagined) of one group against another. This is well illustrated, for example, by the recent massacres in Rwanda or former Yugoslavia, where history — or imagined history — was often invoked, concerning alleged past records of hostilities between Hutus and Tutsis, or between Serbs and Albanians, respectively. Since these uses of history are aimed primarily at contemporary acts and

strategies, the counteracting arguments, which too invoke history, though in the opposite direction, also end up being inescapably linked to current affairs. Given the dialectical context, we may be forced to take an interest in historical disputations on battlegrounds that have been chosen by others — not ourselves.

For example, in defending the role of secularism in contemporary India, it is not in any way essential to make any claim whatsoever about how India's Mughal rulers behaved — whether they were sectarian or assimilative, whether they were oppressive or tolerant. Yet in the political discussions that have accompanied the activist incursions of communal politics in contemporary India (well illustrated, for example, by the rhetoric that accompanied the demolition of the Babri Masjid), a heavily carpentered characterization of the Mughal rule as anti-Hindu was repeatedly invoked. Since this characterization was to a great extent spurious and based on arbitrary selection, to leave that point unaddressed would have, in the context of the on going debate, amounted to a negligence in practical reason, and not just an epistemic abstinence. Even the plausibility or otherwise of the historical argument that some of the juridical roots of Indian secularism can be traced to Mughal jurisprudence (a thesis I have tried to present in my paper, "Reach of Reason: East and West"), even though a matter of pure history, ends up inescapably as having some relevance for contemporary politics (even though that was not a claim I made).

The enterprise of knowledge links in this case with the use of that knowledge. However, this does not, in any way, reduce the relevance of truth in seeking knowledge. The fact that knowledge has its use does not, obviously, make the enterprise of acquiring knowledge in any way redundant. In fact, quite the contrary.

3. *Identity scrutiny:* Underlying the political debates, there is often enough a deeper issue related to the way we construct and characterize our own identities, in which too historical knowledge — or alleged knowledge — can play an important part. Our sense of identity is strongly influenced by our understanding of our past. We do not, of course, have a personal past prior to our birth, but our self-perceptions are associated with the shared history of the members of a particular group to which we think we "belong" and with which we "identify." Our allegiances draw on the evocation of histories of our identity groups.

A scrutiny of this use of history cannot be independent of the philosophical question as to whether our identities are primarily matters of 'discovery' (as many 'communitarian' thinkers, such as Michael Sandel, claim), or whether they are to a significant extent matters of selection and choice (of course, within given constraints — as indeed all choices inescapably are). Arguments that rely on the assumption of the unique centrality of one's community-based identity survive by privileging — typically implicitly — that identity over other identities (which may be

connected with, say, class, or gender, or language, or political commitments, or cultural influences). In consequence, they restrict the domain of one's alleged "historical roots" in a truly dramatic way. Thus, the increasing search for a Hindu view of Indian history not only has problems with epistemic veracity (an issue I discussed earlier), but also involves the philosophical problem of categorical oversimplification.

It would, for example, have problems in coming to terms with, say, Rabindranath Tagore's description of his own background in the Religion of Man as "a confluence of three cultures, Hindu, Mohammedan and British." No less importantly, it cannot but be in some tension with the sense of pride that an Indian may choose to have, irrespective of his or her own religious background, at the historical achievements of, say, Ashoka or Akbar, or Kalidasa or Kabir, or Aryabhata or Bhaskara. To deny the role of reasoned choice, which can draw on the knowledge of the past, can be a very serious loss indeed. Even those who want to identify with India's historical achievements and perhaps take some pride in them (a legitimate enough concern) must also examine critically what to take pride in, since it is easy to be misled into a narrow alley through incitements to ignore India's capacious heterodoxy in favour of a constricted sectarian identity. While discovery and choice compete as the basis of identity, knowledge and choice are essentially complementary to each other. Engagement with issues of identity enriches the enterprise of knowledge and extends its reach.

Science and Intellectual Heterodoxy

Let me now move to a more active view of the enterprise of knowledge, and turn to the history of science, which is among the historical subjects of study. As has already been argued, history is not only an enterprise of knowledge, its subject matter includes other enterprises of knowledge. The issue of heterodoxy, to which reference was made earlier, is particularly important here. Indeed, I would argue that there is a general connection between intellectual heterodoxy and the pursuit of science, and that this connection deserves more attention than it tends to get.

Heterodoxy is important for scientific advance because new ideas and discoveries have to emerge initially as heterodox views, at variance with established understanding. One need reflect only on the history of the scientific contributions of say, Galileo or Newton or Darwin, to see the role of heterodoxy in the process. The history of science is integrally linked with heterodoxy.

If this interpretation is correct, then the roots of the flowering of Indian science and mathematics that occurred in and around the Gupta period (beginning particularly with Aryabhata and Varahamihira) can be intellectually associated with persistent expressions of heterodoxies, which pre-existed these contributions. In fact, Sanskrit and Pali have a larger literature in defence of atheism, agnosticism and theological scepticism than exists in any other classical language.

The origins of mathematical and scientific developments in the Gupta period are often traced to earlier works in mathematics and science in India, and this is indeed worth investigating, despite the historical mess that has been created recently by the ill-founded championing of the so-called "Vedic mathematics" and "Vedic sciences," based on very little evidence. What has, I would argue, more claim to attention as a precursor of scientific advances in the Gupta period is the tradition of scepticism that can be found in pre-Gupta India — going back to at least the sixth century B.C. — particularly in matters of religion and epistemic orthodoxy. Indeed, the openness of approach that allowed Indian mathematicians and scientists to learn about the state of these professions in Babylon, Greece and Rome, which are plentifully cited in early Indian astronomy (particularly in the Siddhantas), can also be seen as a part of this inclination towards heterodoxy.

Observation, Experience and Scientific Methods

Indeed, the development of Indian sciences has clear methodological connections with the general epistemological doubts expressed by sceptical schools of thought that developed at an earlier period. This included the insistence on relying only on observational evidence (with scepticism of unobserved variables), for example in the Lokayata and Charvaka writings, not to mention Gautama Buddha's powerfully articulated agnosticism and his persistent questioning of received beliefs. The untimely death of Professor Bimal Matilal has robbed us of the chance of benefiting from his extensive programme of systematic investigation of the history of Indian epistemology, but his already published works, particularly *Perceptions* bring out the reach of unorthodox early writings on epistemology (by both Buddhist and Hindu writers) in the period that can be linked to the flowering of Indian science and mathematics in the Gupta era.

Similarly, the expression of hereticism and heterodoxy patiently — if somewhat grudgingly — recorded even in the Ramayana (for example, in the form of Javali's advice to Rama to defy his father's odd promise) presents methodological reasons to be sceptical of the orthodox position in this field. Indeed, in *A Vision of India's History*, Rabindranath Tagore also notes the oddity of the central story of Rama's pious acceptance of banishment based on "the absurd reasonabout the weak old king [Rama's father], yielding to a favourite wife, who took advantage of a vague promise which could fit itself to any demand of hers, however preposterous." Tagore takes it as evidence of "the later degeneracy of mind," when "some casual words uttered in a moment of infatuation could be deemed more sacred than the truth which is based upon justice and perfect knowledge."

In fact, Javali's disputation goes deeply into scientific methodology and the process of acquiring of knowledge:

There is no after-world, nor any religious practice for attaining that. Follow what is within your experience and do not trouble yourself with what lies

beyond the province of human experience. (Translation from Makhanlal Sen, Valmiki Ramayana)

As it happens, the insistence that we rely only on observation and experience is indeed a central issue in the departures in astronomy — initiated by Aryabhata and others — from established theological cosmology. The departures presented in his book *Aryabhatiya*, completed in 421 Saka or 499 A.D., which came to be discussed extensively by mathematicians and astronomers who followed Aryabhata (particularly Varahamihira, Brahmagupta and Bhaskara, and were also discussed in their Arabic translations), included, among others: (1) Aryabhata's advocacy of the diurnal motion of the earth (rather than the apparent rotation of the sun around it), (2) a corresponding theory of gravity to explain why objects are not thrown out as the earth churns, (3) recognition of the parametric variability of the concept of "up" and "down" depending on where one is located on the globe, and (4) explanation of lunar and solar eclipses in terms respectively of the earth's shadow on the moon and the moon's obscuring of the sun. Observational arguments, based on what Javali calls "the province of human experience," are central to the departures initiated by Aryabhata in these and related fields (more on this presently). In the enterprise of knowledge involving the natural sciences, the intellectual connections between scepticism, heterodoxy and observational insistence, on the one hand, and manifest scientific advances, on the other, require much further exploration and scrutiny than they seem to have received so far.

History of Histories and Observational Perspectives

The observational issue is important also for the particular subject of history of histories, or metahistories (as we may call them). Given the importance of perspectives in historical writings, history of histories can tell us a great deal not only about the subject of those writings, but also about their authors and the traditions and perspectives they reflect. For example, James Mill's *The History of British India*, published in 1817, tells us probably as much about imperial Britain as about India. This three-volume history, written by Mill without visiting India (Mill seemed to think that this non-visit made his history more objective), played a major role in introducing the British governors of India (such as the influential Macaulay) to a particular characterization of the country. There is indeed much to learn from Mill's history — not just about India, but more, in fact, about the perspective from which this history was written. This is an illustration of the general point that the presence of positionality and observational perspective need not weaken the enterprise of knowledge, and may in fact help to extend its reach.

James Mill disputed and rejected, practically every claim ever made on behalf of Indian culture and intellectual traditions, but paid particular attention to dismissing Indian scientific works. Mill rebuked early British administrators (particularly, Sir William Jones) for having taken the natives "to be a people of high civilization, while they have in reality made but a few of the earliest steps in the progress to

civilization." Indeed, since colonialism need not be especially biased against any particular colony compared with any other subjugated community, Mill had no great difficulty in coming to the conclusion that the Indian civilization was at par with other inferior ones known to Mill: "very nearly the same with that of the Chinese, the Persians, and the Arabians," and also the other "subordinate nations, the Japanese, Cochin-chinese, Siamese, Burmans, and even Malays and Tibetans".

Mill was particularly dismissive of the alleged scientific and mathematical works in India. He denied the generally accepted belief that the decimal system (with place values and the placed use of zero) had emerged in India, and refused to accept that Aryabhata and his followers could have had anything interesting to say on the diurnal motion of the earth and the principles of gravitation. Writing his own history of histories, Mill chastised Sir William Jones for believing in these "stories," and concluded that it was "extremely natural that Sir William Jones, whose pundits had become acquainted with the ideas of European philosophers respecting the system of the universe, should hear from them that those ideas were contained in their own books."

A Contrast of Perspectives

It is, in fact, interesting to compare Mill's History with another history of India, called *Ta'rikh al-hind* (written in Arabic eight hundred years earlier, in the 11th century) by the Iranian mathematician Alberuni. Alberuni, who was born in Central Asia in 973 A.D., and mastered Sanskrit after coming to India, studied Indian texts on mathematics, natural sciences, literature, philosophy, and religion. Alberuni writes clearly on the invention of the decimal system in India (as do other Arab authors) and also about Aryabhata's theories on the earth's rotation, gravitation, and related subjects.

These writings contrast sharply with Mill's history from a dominant colonial perspective well established by the beginning of the nineteenth century. The interest in Mill's dismissive history in imperial Britain (Macaulay, as quoted by John Clive in his introduction to Mill's History, described Mill's History of British India to be "on the whole the greatest historical work which has appeared in our language since that of Gibbon") contrasts with extensive constructive interest in these Indian works among Islamic mathematicians and scientists in Iran and in the Arab world.

In fact, Brahmagupta's pioneering Sanskrit treatise on astronomy had been first translated into Arabic in the 8th century by Muhammad ibn Ibrahim alFazari, and again by Alberuni three hundred years later in the eleventh century (since Alberuni had certain criticisms of the previous translation). Several Indian works on medicine, science and philosophy had Arabic rendering by the 9th century, and so on. It was through the Arabs that the Indian decimal system and numerals reached Europe, as did Indian writings in mathematics, science and literature, in general.

Indeed, history of histories, particularly about science, can tell us a great deal about the nature of political and social relations between the different countries (such as Iran and Gupta India, on the one hand, Britain and colonial India, on the other). As it happens, Alberuni's history also provides interesting illumination on scientific discussions within India, and particularly on the constructive role of heterodoxy in this context. Even though Alberuni himself tended to reject Aryabhata's theory regarding the diurnal motion of the earth, he describes patiently the Indian arguments in defence of the plausibility of Aryabhata's theory, including the related theory of gravity.

Conservatism, Courage and Science

It is, in this context, particularly interesting to examine Alberuni's discussion of Brahmagupta's conservative rejection of the exciting departures proposed by Aryabhata and his followers on the subject of lunar and solar eclipses. Alberuni quotes Brahmagupta's criticism of Aryabhata and his followers, in defence of the orthodox religious theory, involving Rahu and the so-called "head" that is supposed to devour the sun and the moon, and finds it clearly unpersuasive and reactionary. He quotes Brahmagupta's supplication to religious orthodoxy, in Brahmasiddhanta:

Some people think that the eclipse is not caused by the Head. This, however, is a foolish idea, for it is he in fact who eclipses, and the generality of the inhabitants of the world say that it is the Head that eclipses. The Veda, which is the word of God from the mouth of Brahman, says that the Head eclipses On the contrary. Varahamihira, Shrishena, Aryabhata and Vishnuchandra maintain that the eclipse is not caused by the Head, but by the moon and the shadow of the earth, in direct opposition to all (to the generality of men), and from the enmity against the just-mentioned dogma. (Alberuni's India)

Alberuni, who is quite excited about Aryabhata's scientific theories of eclipses, then accuses Brahmagupta (a great mathematician himself) for lacking the moral courage of Aryabhata in dissenting from the established orthodoxy. He points out that, in practice, Brahmagupta too follows Aryabhata's methods in predicting the eclipses, but this does not prevent Brahmagupta from sharply criticising — from an essentially theological perspective — Aryabhata and his followers for being heretical and heterodox. Alberuni puts it thus:

.....we shall not argue with him [Brahmagupta], but only whisper into his ear: Why do you, after having spoken such [harsh] words [against Aryabhata and his followers], then begin to calculate the diameter of the moon in order to explain the eclipsing of the sun, and the diameter of the shadow of the earth in order to explain its eclipsing the moon? Why do you compute both eclipses in agreement with the theory of those heretics, and

not according to the views of those with whom you think it is proper to agree? (Alberuni's India)

The connection between heterodoxy and scientific advance is indeed close, and big departures in science require methodological independence as well as analytical and constructive skill. Even though Aryabhata, Varahamihira and Brahmagupta were all dead for many hundred years before Alberuni was writing on their controversies and their implications, nevertheless Alberuni's carefully critical scientific history helps to bring out the main issues involved, and in particular the need for heterodoxy as well as moral courage in pursuit of science.

A Concluding Remark

To conclude, I have tried to illustrate the different ways in which history has relevance for non-historians — indeed the general public.

First, there are diverse grounds for the public's involvement with history, which include (1) the apparently simple attractions of epistemic interest, (2) the contentious correlates of practical reason, and (3) the scrutiny of identity-based thinking. All of them — directly or indirectly — involve and draw on the enterprise of knowledge.

Second, history is not only itself an enterprise of knowledge, its domain of study incorporates all other enterprises of knowledge, including the history of science. In this context, it is easy to see the role of heterodoxy and methodological independence in scientific advance. The intellectual connections between heterodoxy (especially theological scepticism) and scientific pursuits (especially big scientific departures) deserve more attention in the history of sciences in India.

Third, metahistories — or histories of histories — also bring out the relevance of an appropriate climate for the enterprise of knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge not only requires an open mind (the contrast between Alberuni's scientific interest and Mill's colonial predispositions radically differentiate their treatments of the same subject matter), it also requires an inclination to accept heterodoxy and the courage to stand up against orthodoxy (Alberuni's critique of Brahmagupta's criticism of Aryabhata relates to this issue). The plurality of perspectives extends the domain of the enterprise of knowledge rather than undermining the possibility of that enterprise.

Since the rewriting of Indian history from the slanted perspective of sectarian orthodoxy not only undermines historical objectivity, but also militates against the spirit of scientific scepticism and intellectual heterodoxy, it is important to emphasize the centrality of scepticism and heterodoxy in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. The incursion of sectarian orthodoxy in Indian history involves two distinct problems, to wit, (1) narrow sectarianism, and (2) unreasoned orthodoxy. The enterprise of knowledge is threatened by both.

PART ONE

The Many Worlds of Indian History

Introspection about their own location in society has not been too common among Indian historians. Our historiographical essays tend to become bibliographies, surveys of trends or movements within the academic guild. They turn around debates about assumptions, methods, ideological positions. Through these historians get pigeon-holed into slots: Neo-colonial, Nationalist, Communal, Marxist, Subaltern. The existence of not one but many levels of historical awareness attracts much less attention. But outside the world of metropolitan centres of learning and research there are provincial universities and colleges, schoolteachers, an immensely varied student population, and, beyond these, vast numbers more or less untouched by formal courses, yet with notions about history and remembrances of things past, the nature and origins of which it could be interesting to explore. What is neglected is the whole question of the conditions of production and reception of academic knowledge, its relationships with different kinds of common sense.¹ We lack, in other words, a social history of historiography.

This problem of levels has become exceptionally acute in India in recent years, with the growth of right-wing Hindu communal forces, and the multiple responses to the Mandal proposals for affirmative action in favour of 'backward' castes. In very different

¹ Which, as Gramsci reminded us, must be understood as a 'collective noun', and as 'a product of history and a part of the historical process. . . . "Common sense" is the folklore of philosophy, and is always halfway between folklore properly speaking and the philosophy, science and economics of the specialists.' Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York, 1971), pp. 325-6.

ways, both these sets of developments have in effect projected views of Indian history at variance with what generally holds sway in today's high-academic circles. More specifically, I have in mind the debate around the Ramjanmabhumi issue, where well-established academic knowledge has had to confront, not too effectively, one kind of organized and largely manufactured common sense. Secular historians refuted, with ample data and unimpeachable logic, the justifications put forward by the Hindu Right, for its eventually successful campaign to demolish a four-hundred-year-old masjid at Ayodhya. They undeniably had the better of the intellectual – and human – argument. Yet for a decisive year or two the views of the leading historians of the country, most notably scholars at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, had less impact than pamphlets of the order of *Ramjanmabhumi ka Rakta-ranjita Itihas* (Bloody History of the Birthplace of Ram). This, however, was very far from being a simple triumph of age-old popular faith over the alienated rationalism of secular intellectuals. Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) pamphlets, and audio and video cassettes, systematically combined an ultimate appeal to faith with a battery of their own kind of historical facts: quotations from (real or spurious) documents, a certain amount of evidence fielded by archaeologists of some stature, a parade of alleged facts and dates about precisely seventy-six battles fought by Hindus to liberate the birthplace of Ram from the evil 'descendants of Babar'. 'Faith' was deployed as the final weapon usually only when such 'historical' arguments were seen to be in danger of total refutation.²

What this VHP quest for historical facticity revealed was that history of one kind or another has come to occupy a position of exceptional importance in a variety of Indian discourses, but that in the moulding of many such histories the best scholars often have a very limited role. Historical consciousness, even when fairly organized, systematic, and far from spontaneous, evidently cannot be equated with the thinking of professional historians alone, still less with that of its highest echelons. Both the importance of history and its multiple levels require further probing.

Some 'presentist' explanations, relating to the conditions of

² For analysis of the 'historical' literature of the Ramjanmabhumi movement, see Neeladri Bhattacharji, 'Myth, History and the Politics of Ramjanmabhumi', in S. Gopal (ed.), *Anatomy of a Confrontation* (New Delhi, 1991), and Pradip Kumar Datta, 'VHP's Ram: The Hindutva Movement in Ayodhya', in G. Pandey (ed.), *Hindus and Others* (New Delhi, 1993).

production and dissemination of historical awareness in today's India, are fairly obvious, and helpful — up to a point. The leading members of the historians' guild write and teach mainly in English for easy inter-regional and international communication. The majority of universities and colleges, however, have switched over to Hindi or regional languages, translations are far from abundant, and the historical common sense of the bulk of students and teachers is determined much more by textbooks of very poor quality, or media influences. After independence, history, and particularly narratives of the 'freedom struggle' or the 'national movement', became a major means of legitimizing ruling groups in the post-colonial nation-state through claims of continuity with a glorious past. A very eclectic range of 'national heroes' therefore had to be projected as knights in shining armour, abstracted from real-life contradictions and contextual pressures. Through the media and the majority of schools, the message that has been constantly broadcast is that history is valuable because it stimulates pride in one's country. The other meaning of history, in these days of 'objective' tests and proliferating quiz culture, is of random facts and dates that have to be efficiently memorized. Patriotism and quiz culture combine to ensure a very low priority, in the bulk of history-teaching, to techniques of critical evaluation of narratives about the past and the development of questioning attitudes. History, in other words, tends to become hagiography, and this opens the way towards giving hagiography the present-day status and aura of history. Sometimes the links with current chauvinistic developments are even more direct, most notably through the enormously popular state television screening of the *Ramayana*, just before the Ayodhya movement got into its stride. The epic heroes were presented there as national figures, and Ram returned to Ayodhya in triumph amidst wildly anachronistic twentieth-century slogans of 'Long Live Mother India'.

But a merely presentist explanation will not take us very far. The centrality of history today, as well as its markedly multi-level features, are not universal or natural phenomena. They are evidently related to the ways in which history came to be taught, written, and exceptionally valorized under colonial and then postcolonial conditions. My essay, then, will have to go back to the nineteenth century, when specifically modern ways of thinking about history are generally supposed to have begun in India. My own area of competence, as well as the early location of colonial power and cultural influence, justify a primary focus on Bengal material.

There is a second reason, too, why a retrospect, at once historiographical and social-historical, is relevant for my argument, and once again the polemics around Ramjanmabhumi provide a point of entry. The importance given to apparently scientific history, complete with facts, dates and evidence, as well as the central assumption of Hindus and Muslims as homogenized blocs existing fundamentally unchanged across a thousand years, expose the 'tradition' deployed by the Sangh Parivar as overwhelmingly invented, moulded by colonial and postcolonial conditions and influences. No great effort is required to recognize it to be as 'modern' as its secular-rationalistic Other. Our glance back at colonial Indian historiography will incidentally confirm that the 'history' used by the Ramjanmabhumi movement was not any spontaneous welling-up of folk or popular memories, but made up of bits and pieces from the academic wisdom of an earlier generation of nationalist historians, as orchestrated by a very modern political machine. A generalized critique of post-Enlightenment modernity and Orientalizing colonial discourse, therefore, might seem to offer an effective ground for the rebuttal of Hindutva's claims to indigenous authenticity. More generally, the moods stimulated by Edward Said's *Orientalism* which have been transplanted to South Asia by Partha Chatterji and the later volumes of *Subaltern Studies* have provided for many intellectuals an overall framework that combines the virtues of apparent radicalism with a satisfactory distance from the Marxism of yesteryear, now widely assumed to be finally and deservedly dead.

Many of the essays in this volume express my sense of disquiet with this current turn in South Asian scholarship. Very briefly, at this point, what had started as an understandable dissatisfaction with the economistic reductionisms of much 'official' Marxism is now contributing to another kind of narrowing of horizons, one that conflates colonial exploitation with Western cultural domination. Colonial discourse analysis abstracts itself, except in the most general terms, from histories of production and social relationships. A 'culturalism' now further attenuated into readings of isolable texts has become, after the presumed demise of Marxism, extremely nervous of all 'material' histories: the spectre of economic reductionism looms everywhere. Colonial-Western cultural hegemony, secondly, tends to get homogenized, abstracted from internal tensions, and presented as all-pervasive, virtually irresistible within its own domain — those touched by it become capable of only

discourses'. A total rupture then has to be presumed e-colonial and colonial, and a temptation sometimes make the former a world of attractive *ur*-traditions, of confronting Western power-knowledge.³ A more fundamental problem is the abandonment in practice of or immanent critique through the elision of possibilities by conflicting groups taking over and using in diverse, autonomous ways, elements from dominant structures and What is ignored, in other words, is precisely that which central to Marxist analysis: the dialectical search for con- within structures. If modern power is total and irresistible own domain, autonomy or resistance can be located only outside its reach: in a 'community-consciousness' that is either or somehow untainted by post-Enlightenment power- or in fleeting, random moments of fragmentary resistance become the only valid counterpoints against the repository of that power-knowledge — the colonial or the 'nation-state'. We have moved, then, from perspectives of relationships between capitalist imperialism and multiple within anti-colonial movements had constituted the basic , to one where the post-Enlightenment modern state is reduced to community. Questions of exploitation and power have collapsed into a unitary vision of the modern bureaucratic as the sole source of oppression.

These caveats, summarized in a telegraphic manner, represent the problems I have been encountering in my own work and research, and I intend to elaborate them in specific contexts, as, hopefully, invitation to dialogue rather than confrontational polemic. An exploration of colonial and post-colonial historical consciousness, vital for understanding today's worlds of history, can be useful also as the first of texts. A framework grounded in the assumption of colonial cultural domination has naturally paid consideration to the development of 'modern' attitudes towards the past and in fact this provides at first sight exceptionally

3. The 'derivative discourse' argument was elaborated by Partha Chatterji in *Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Delhi, 1986). In a text published three years before, Ashis Nandy had sought to defend the innocence which confronted modern Western colonialism and its various psychological offshoots in India. *The Intimate Enemy* (1983), p. ix.

suitable material for a colonial discourse approach. I show that the assumptions I have just catalogued are restrictive, even when deployed on such a favourable part, then, I will have to go over already familiar ground hopefully making new points and sometimes arguing for fundamental departures. Three temporal cross-sections are particularly relevant: the apparently total early-nineteenth-century rupture with which 'modern' Indian historiography crystallized; nineteenth and early twentieth-century crystallizations of 'nationalist' and 'communalist' historical assumptions and modernity's predicaments.

II

Pre-colonial India, with its very long traditions of writing, produced numerous texts of recognizable historical interest: Puranic king-lists, dynastic chronicles, histories of castes and sects, biographies of holy men, genealogies of prominent families. As elsewhere, there were evident links between the quantitative abundance of texts or documents and levels of organized, bureaucratic power. In ancient Indian historiography, not surprisingly, never of the stature of that of China with its unique bureaucratic control. In the historical accounts became much more numerous under the Sultanate and the Mughal empire. (Islam, with its single religion, also brought in a new chronological certitude.)

Yet it remains undeniable that the impact and importation of Western historiographical models through English education and British Indian scholarship created a widespread sense of a rupture. Pre-colonial texts, since then, have always figured as 'sources' to be evaluated by modern Western canons, not as methodological precedents. In 1958 a competent survey of history-writing in nineteenth-century Bengal could assume that 'we have begun from scratch'.⁵

A convenient and much-used initial benchmark for this rupture is provided by Mrityunjay Vidyalkar

⁴ Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth-Century Perspective and Its Implications* (Calcutta, 1988); Partha Chatterji, *The Nation and Its Histories* (Princeton and Delhi, 1994), Ch. 1.

⁵ B.P. Mukherji, *History*, in a collection entitled, significantly, *History and Its Methods*, ed. A. Gupta (Calcutta, 1958), p. 1.

(Chronicle of Kings, Serampur, 1808).⁶ Its author was an orthodox Brahman commissioned by the British authorities to write the first overall historical survey in Bengali prose, to serve as a language text for Company officials being trained at Fort William College. The text began by expounding, in a manner totally unselfconscious and free of defensive apologetics, the standard Brahmanical concept of time as cyclical, with Satya, Treta, Dwapar and Kaliyuga endlessly succeeding each other. The moral trajectory across the four-yuga cycle was always imagined as inevitably retrogressive, and the present (invariably, in these texts, the Kaliyuga) was the worst of times, characterized by overmighty Shudras and insubordinate women. Time, in other words, was never abstract, empty duration: it was relevant primarily for moral qualities assumed to be inseparable from its cyclical phases. The principal role of the yuga-cycle in Brahmanical discourses, from the *Mahabharata* down to Mrityunjoy, was to suggest through dystopia the indispensability of right caste and gender hierarchy. The two have been necessarily imagined as interdependent, for purity of caste lineage is vitally related to male control over the reproductive capacities of women, ensured through marriage, within the permitted boundaries.

For the rest, *Rajabali* was a compendium of king-lists, many of them soon to be discarded as mythical by modern historians. The striking feature, for anyone trained in Indian history in the ways that became standard from around the 1820s, is really a notable absence. Mrityunjoy displayed no awareness at all of any breaks between 'Hindu', 'Muslim', and 'British' periods, but remained content with awarding good or bad marks to kings with a fine indifference to religious identities. The recurrent criteria, incidentally, for immoral behaviour are *strayinata* (subordination to women) and *nimakharami* (being 'untrue to one's salt', i.e. violating obligations of loyalty and obedience, and thus implicitly weakening proper hierarchical relationships). The link with standard Kaliyuga notions of disorder is fairly obvious.

As in the bulk of pre-colonial history-writing, the predominant note in *Rajabali* was didactic, with exploration of the uniqueness of historical situations less important than teaching obedience and morality through archetypes. A ninth-century Jaina text had described '*Itihasa*' (history) as 'a very desirable subject . . . it prescribes *dharma* [right conduct]', and even Kalhana, much praised by modern

⁶ It has been used in that way recently by both Ranajit Guha, and Partha Chatterji, op. cit.

historians for his unusually critical treatment of sources and striving for objectivity, claimed that his *Rajatarangini* would be 'useful for kings as a stimulant or a sedative, like a physic, according to time and place.'⁷

The contrasts with histories that English-educated Indians started writing after around the mid nineteenth century are obvious enough. British rule brought with it clocks and a notion of time as linear, abstract, measurable in entirely non-qualitative units, an independent framework within which events happen.⁸ The other major change was the imposition of the ancient/medieval/modern schema which had become standard in the post-Renaissance West. James Mill transplanted this into India by dividing the subcontinent's history into Hindu, Muslim and British periods. By the time of Nilmoni Basak's *Bharatbarsher Itihas* (History of India, Calcutta, 1857), which may serve as our second benchmark, the yuga cycle is mentioned only in a brief, defensive preface, after which the author quickly passes on to a periodization that distinguished the 'Age of Hindu Empires' from 'Muslim Kingdoms'.

Yet I think it is important to resist bland, homogenized presentations, both of pre-colonial notions of time and history as well as of the colonial rupture. It is now generally recognized that the cyclical/linear binary is not absolute, for duration, or sequentiality, is common to both.⁹ High-Hindu cyclical time, for

⁷ R.C. Majumdar, *Ideas of History in Sanskrit Literature*, in C.H. Phillips (ed.), *Historians of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon* (London, 1961), p. 21.

⁸ I have found very helpful Moishe Postone's recent suggestion that a concrete/abstract distinction is more relevant than the conventional cyclical/linear binary. Elaborating a suggestion of E.P. Thompson ('Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, 38, 1967), Postone argues that the concrete time of a pre-capitalist societies 'was not an autonomous category, independent of events, it could be determined qualitatively, as good or bad, sacred or profane.' It 'is characterized less by its direction than the fact that it is a dependent variable.' Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 200-16, *passim*.

⁹ Combinations of the two have been noticed in places and times as far apart as present-day Bali and pre-colonial Yucutan. Balinese notions of duration exhibit features of both cyclicity and linearity. The *Chilam Balam* texts of Yucutan described endless cycles marked out by specific moral qualities, but the Mayans also had chronicles of ruling dynasties which were entirely linear. L.E.A. Howe, 'The Social Determination of Knowledge: Maurice Bloch and Balinese Time', *Man*, New Series, 19, 1981; Nancy M. Farriss, 'Remembering the Future, Anticipating the Past: History, Time and Cosmology among the Maya of Yucutan', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 29, iii, July 1987.

encompassed an element of linearity, for within a *maha-* successive downward movement of Satya through Treta par to Kali was taken to be irreversible. The polarity concrete and abstract time is perhaps more fundamental, again further distinctions within both might become. Thus, generalizations of the order attempted by Mircea out a 'myth of the eternal return', supposedly characteristic andifferentiated 'Hindu' world or even of 'traditional n',¹⁰ really rest upon an unproven assumption of homot hat we know little — virtually nothing, in fact — of bout time among pre-colonial peasants or lower-caste surely no ground for assuming that they must have internalized the highly Brahmanical and hierarchized ich are inseparable from formulations of the four-yuga have come down to us. One needs to be open, rather, ssibility of work or task-oriented times, which could y in précision according to specific requirements. The l astrologer needed a precise fix on certain 'time points' ine auspicious ritual moments or make predictions.¹¹ our processes, in contrast, demanded little more than er general seasonal and daily rhythms.

more philosophical or speculative levels, some scholars rahmanical texts indicate the presence of not one but ers in pre-Islamic Indian notions of time. Raymondo or instance, refers to a tradition called Kalavada where ed above all gods and identified with images of death leveller of all distinctions, human and even divine. He is to have been 'a widely-held popular view, belonging o the less Brahmanic stratum of Indian tradition'.¹²

liade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Paris, 1949, trans., London, rs I, II, IV.

rete time of medieval European monasteries, Postone points out, pecific notion of time-discipline, through 'a series of time points, when various activities were to be done.' This, however, is quite capitalist forms of time-discipline, where 'commensurable, inter- id invariable' time-units become 'the *measure* of activity.' Once concrete/abstract distinction, which is crucial. Postone, pp. 203,

lo Panikkar, 'Time and History in the Tradition of India: Kala n L. Gardet, et al. (ed.), *Cultures and Time* (Paris, 1976). The interestingly, associates this view with Bali, a demon (Asura) chief ira, the king of the gods: 'In Time's course many thousands of

Orthodox Brahmanical denunciations of Kalavada or it with materialism, *nastika* views, and an epistemology called *pratyakshyavada*, according to which sense intuition constituted the sole criterion of valid knowledge or proof were lumped together in dominant philosophical tradition of Lokayata, said to have been founded by (evidently pejorative, meaning of Lokayata, incident which was prevalent among the common people'.) Qui Mrityunjoy's *Rajabali* at one point interrupts its plot of kings with a two-page diatribe against *nastika* view again associated the extreme empiricism of *pratyakshyavada* Kalavada: 'like trees in a mighty forest, the world disappears by itself, subject only to time.'¹⁴

Kaliyuga, we are always told, will end in an apocalypse with universal destruction (*yuga-pralay*), or, alternatively of Kalki-avatar (the last incarnation of the high-god) which another identical cycle will commence. In yet another interesting shift or variation, however, the apocalypse, and the entire framework of four-yuga cycles, seems to be somewhat downgraded over time. Yuga-pralay was put into the future, and so in practical terms the key mechanism of enduring the inevitable evils of 432,000 years through tightened-up rules of caste and patriarchal discipline and endless cycles themselves came to be considered part of *maya* (illusion, or, more exactly, inferior order of reality) increasingly dominant philosophy of Vedanta.¹⁵

Indras and deities have been swept off yuga after yuga. . . . master . . . wealth, comforts, rank, prosperity, all fall a prey to things that proudly raise their heads high are destined to fall. *Harata*, English translation by Pratap C. Roy, ed. Hiralal H. Calcutta, n.d.), vol. ix, pp. 140-56.

¹³ *Nastika*, often taken today as the equivalent of an atheistic position, more precisely in Indian philosophical traditions the denial that *sruti*, i.e. the *Vedas* have the status of valid proof (*pramana*) in arguments. The extreme empiricism of *pratyakshyavada* entailed and could lead also to the rejection of belief in gods or the immortal souls. Debiprasada Chattopadhyay, *Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Philosophy* (New Delhi, 1959, 1978), Chapter 1. Surendranath Dasgupta *Indian Philosophy*, vol. III (London, 1961), pp. 512-50.

¹⁴ Mrityunjoy Vidyalankar, *Rajabali* (Serampur, 1808; Calcutta, 1913). Mrityunjoy attributed the origin of these views to an Asura.

¹⁵ For a more detailed account of Kaliyuga and its variations, see below.

The relevant points, in considering the importance of these varied notions of time for perceptions of history, are that none of the alternative frameworks hindered the construction of narratives about the past connected to specific purposes, such as the glorification of dynasties, families or religious traditions; but neither did they require, or stimulate, a sense of overall social process or interest in its possible causes.¹⁶ The central high-Hindu ideal was the individual breaking out of the bondage of *karma* (endless rebirth, in which merits and sins accumulated in previous lives rigidly determined one's status in life, and therefore one's *dharma*, in the sense of appropriate rituals and duties). Unlike Christianity or Islam, with their notions of a day of judgement common to all, the idea of salvation here was not community-based, and so the conception of universal causality implicit, in a way, in the doctrine of *karma*, applied only to individuals. It did not lead to any interest in the causes of aggregate phenomena. The yuga framework did involve a sense of a moral texture common to an era, but then its lineaments and causes were already known: being fore-ordained, divinely determined, or related to the quality of kings — i.e. to the *lila* (game, or play), as it was said, of time, gods or kings. The purpose of history remained, therefore, a combination of royal propaganda and the teaching of *dharma* with examples, and its place in education, we shall see, seems to have been negligible or non-existent.

Historical texts became much more abundant under the Delhi sultanate, the Mughals, and their successor states, but it is doubtful whether there was a fundamental break with regard to the aims and presuppositions of history-writing. The Persian narratives are often impressive in the careful attention they pay to specific — usually military-administrative — events, and even to their secular, 'secondary' causes. Yet the overall aim remained, as earlier, a combination of exalting the rulers with religious and moral teaching via examples. 'Interest concentrated on how far a man conformed to an ideal prototype, not how far he diverged.'¹⁷ The dominant Islamic conception of time as 'piecemeal vision of . . . a sequence of instants . . . which are the signs and spaces of God's intervention' also did

¹⁶ Pre-colonial histories, Ranajit Guha has argued, consequently tended to be 'made up of discrete moments, recovered synchronically as the occasion required.' Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth Century Agenda and Its Implications* (Calcutta, 1988).

¹⁷ P. Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India* (London, 1960, 1966), pp. 113, 118.

not encourage, on the whole, any total view of history as diachronic social process.¹⁸

We may now be in a better position to evaluate the precise extent and lineaments of the 'break' brought about in the ways of constructing the past by colonial rule and English education. In the making of British Indian historiography, and 'colonial knowledge' in general, an important dimension of genuine curiosity and excitement, as a vast and varied subcontinent was opened up to the Western gaze, went along with fairly obvious links with the logic of colonial power. The British, as utterly alien rulers, needed to know something about the traditions and 'prejudices' of their subjects; extraction of revenue, dispensation of justice, and maintenance of order all demanded knowledge of past administrative practices; meticulous enquiry into possible causes became standard practice after every rebellion. The power-knowledge theme is very self-consciously present in much official writing: Risley's *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (1891), for instance, claimed that an ethnographic recording of the customs of people was 'as necessary an incident of good administration as a cadastral survey of the land and a record of rights of its tenants.'¹⁹

Notions of time, now assumed to be linear and abstract (i.e. no longer primarily perceived in terms of moral quality, as Kaliyuga had been), methods of collecting data and assessing its reliability, and, above all, levels of efficiency in the processes of accumulating knowledge had altered dramatically through the incursion of the post-Enlightenment West with its novel and expanding resources of bureaucratic power; less so, possibly, the basic motivations of more effective governance and legitimation of authority, which may not have seemed very novel to, say, Abul Fazl. Power-knowledge far antedates the modern West, as Umberto Eco so delightfully reminds us in his *The Name of the Rose*, set in a medieval monastic library where control over dangerous knowledge is defended through murder.

What *was* new was the unprecedented importance and reach that history quickly acquired in colonial times. History became the principal instrument for inculcating the stereotypical dichotomy between the backward, immobile Orient as contrasted with the dynamic, Christian and/or scientific West, thus simultaneously buttressing British self-confidence and reminding Indians of their lowly place in the world's scheme of things. Foreign rule, conversely, soon

¹⁸ L. Gardet, p. 201.

¹⁹ H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal: Ethnographic Glossary*, vol. 1 (Calcutta, 1891, 1981), p. vii.

ted a search for sustenance in past glories, real or imagined, as efforts to use history to probe the causes of present-day tunes. History thus came to acquire a new centrality in the ns of the Indian intelligentsia, for it became a principal 'way ing about the collective self, and bringing it into existence.'²⁰ s much is well known, and hardly in need of restatement. Very less explored, but perhaps more significant, is the vastly ed *reach* of history. While the transition from manuscript to obviously enlarged the potential readership of history books, object itself came to acquire a totally new position in structures al education. These structures themselves simultaneously be- more crucial, for the links between formal education and ble jobs, professions, and careers were now tighter than ever. It was no longer possible, for instance, under colonial 'law ler' for military adventurers to carve out kingdoms for them- while recruitment to administrative posts became dependent ninations. It had been possible for an Akbar to remain virtually e: not so for the meanest colonial Indian official or clerk. The on of alternative opportunities (of independent business enter- or instance, particularly in Bengal, with its overwhelming l economic presence) further enhanced the centrality of formal education. This became indispensable for a self-consciously -class' existence, one which combined the material and cultural s for entering high schools and colleges with a need for from jobs or professions. Such need was less acute for the ig zamindars or businessmen, and impossible to satisfy for majority of peasants.

place of history in the new educational system thus needs xplication. Derozio, we know, taught History to Hindu students, and is said to have inspired 'Young Bengal' through es from ancient history of the love of justice, patriotism, phy and self-abnegation.'²¹ But surprisingly little is known ie mundane details of college courses and texts, and there is o explore the patterns of change and continuity involved in lacement of traditional *pathshalas*, *tols* and *madradas* by the

ipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay rmation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (Delhi, 1995), p. 108.

ichand Mitra, *Biographical Sketch of David Hare* (Calcutta, 1877), p. 27, my 'Complexities of Young Bengal', *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 1973; reprinted in Sumit Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial India* (Calcutta, 20-1.

modern classroom ordering of space, time, and method.²² The new interest in Western education stimulated discourse analysis remains content, far too often, with critique of Macaulay's Minute.

For elementary education, however, Kazi Shahidulla *Pathshalas into Schools* does provide some illuminating details, diligent study of the surveys of Francis Buchanan and W. The traditional pathshala had concentrated on providing ly practical training in language, arithmetic and account the few written texts (manuscripts) were of a religious grammatical kind: history of any sort seems to have spicuously absent. The early Bengali printed textbooks p to pathshalas by the School Book Society from 1817 contrast, 'covered a variety of subjects like History, Ge Astronomy'. The publications of the Serampur mission for schools, similarly, included *Dig Darshan*, 'a miscella tion of Truths and Facts covering history, science and *Historical Anecdotes* took its place next to *Aesop's Fable* lessons 'illustrative of justice, fidelity, probity and hu take a final example, the hundred-odd vernacular villag up in some Bengal districts by Hardinge's orders in 1 have a curriculum of 'vernacular reading, writing, arith raphy, and history of India and Bengal.'²³ The missiona tion of Aesop with historical anecdotes is an importar that history of one sort or another was now being give place in general education, even outside its position subject. The pattern continues, and quite emphaticall textbooks for teaching Hindi today, for instance, tenc an enormous amount of crude 'historical' tales for i patriotism often difficult to disentangle from Hind assumptions and values.

History, then, acquired a new and vast pedagogical and domain in the nineteenth century. Content-wise, however be misleading to assume a simple, unambiguous or comp a leap from 'myth' to positivistic 'objectivity'. In fact the

²² Work like Barbara Metcalf's study of the transition from the Deoband seminary (*Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 18 ceton, 1982*) needs to be followed up. See now, however, the us of essays, Nigel Crook (ed.), *The Transmission of Knowledge in Sou OUP, 1996*).

²³ Kazi Shahidullah, *Pathshalas into Schools* (Calcutta, 1987), pp.

so often made that the culture imposed through Western education was always rationalist and invariably dominated by 'post-Enlightenment' values seems in need of some questioning. An earlier historiography had hailed such rationalism as harbinger of a Bengal (sometimes Indian) 'renaissance' or 'awakening'. The critique of colonial discourse which today has largely displaced that old consensus inverts the value judgement but otherwise maintains a basic continuity through its assertion of a total rupture.²⁴ There was nothing particularly rational (or secular), surely, about the oft-repeated formula of British rule in India being an act of divine providence. Again, the missionaries used modern Western science to undermine the 'superstitions' of the Hindus, but their overall aim was conversion to another, not noticeably more rational, religion. Here I must add that I find Dipesh Chakrabarty's assertion in a recent article – that 'missionaries did not perceive much contradiction between 'rationalism and the precepts of Christianity' – difficult to understand. Chakrabarty refers in particular to Alexander Duff, and cites M.A. Laird (1972) as the source for his reading of the Scottish missionary.²⁵ Duff's own *India and India Missions* (Edinburgh, 1839), in striking contrast, recounts how much effort he had had to make to persuade the pupils of Derozio to accept the Reformation as their model in place of 'the terrible issue of French illumination and reform in the last century', and how happy he was when Krishnamohan Banerji's conversion to Christianity indicated that 'avowed atheism' was on the decline.²⁶

The myth of Kaliyuga vanished quickly from formal Indian historical writings or textbooks, but it continued to enjoy a vigorous if interestingly modulated life in other texts and contexts right down to the early twentieth century. Kaliyuga, I have argued elsewhere, became a whole language for expressing resentments about the new discipline of time being imposed under colonial rule in clerical office-work (*chakri*). It thus provides an important entry point into

²⁴ A similar continuity is noticeable in the focus, in 'renaissance' and 'Saidian' writing alike, on the high literati alone. For elaborations of this argument, as well as some efforts at developing an alternative approach, see Chapters 6 and 8.

²⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Radical Histories and the Question of Enlightenment Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of Subaltern Studies', *Economic and Political Weekly*, xxx, 14, 8 April 1995, p. 752.

²⁶ Alexander Duff, *India and India Missions* (Edinburgh, 1839), pp. 629, 667, cited in my 'Complexities of Young Bengal', *Critique of Colonial India*, pp. 20, 26.

a level of colonial middle-class life largely ignored so far by historians.²⁷ A recent thesis has emphasized the intertwining of what, by strict Enlightenment-rationalist standards, should have been dismissed as myth, with positivistic facticity in much nineteenth-century Bengal history writing. Nilmoni Basak may have been embarrassed by notions of cyclical time, but his *Nabanari* (4th ed., Calcutta, 1865) could still lump together two historical with seven mythical or legendary figures in biographies of exemplary women.²⁸ And Sudipta Kaviraj has drawn our attention to the combination of 'real' and 'imaginary' histories in the writings of major late-nineteenth-century figures such as Bankimchandra and Romeshchandra Dutt. Dutt, India's pioneer economic historian, was also the author of historical romances about Rajputs and Marathas, while Bankimchandra made several attempts to reconstruct bits and pieces of Bengal's past on the basis of carefully sifted evidence. Bankim, Kaviraj suggests, came to feel that 'the rational discourse of fact-gathering' could provide inadequate grounds for the kind of *itihasa* that 'Bengalis' needed if they were to become 'men', or in order to constitute themselves into a collective self: hence there was a shift in Bankim's later writings to the 'mythic discourse' of the historical novel.²⁹

This collective self, however, was for Bankim almost invariably Hindu, and pitted usually against Muslims, in language that sometimes turns downright abusive. This is a feature that Kaviraj seems disinclined to probe, but it does seem to suggest a high degree of the internalization of the tripartite schema in its most anti-Muslim form.³⁰ The far-reaching impact of James Mill's periodization of

²⁷ See Chapter 6, 'Renaissance and Kaliyuga: Time, Myth and History in Colonial Bengal', and Chapter 8, 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and Bhakti: Ramakrishna and His Times'.

²⁸ Indira Chowdhury Sengupta, 'Colonialism and Cultural Identity: The Making of a Hindu Discourse', Chapter II (unpublished thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, 1993). I am very grateful to Ms Sengupta for allowing me to read her thesis.

²⁹ Kaviraj, pp. 124, 131.

³⁰ Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, Bankim did not accept an idealized, golden-age view of the ancient 'Hindu' period, and went so far as to suggest that the conditions of the Shudras might have been worse in independent Aryan India than under British rule. Paradoxically, this recognition of discordances within the Hindu fold seems to have stimulated his passionate search in the 1880s for an imaginary history of Hindu war against an externalized Muslim Other. See the critical, yet nuanced, discussion of Bankimchandra in Tanika Sarkar, 'Bankimchandra and the Impossibility of a Political Agenda', *Oxford Literary Review*, xvi, 1-2, 1994.

history provides at first sight a particularly telling instance of 'derivative discourse' which lives on even today in many Indian books and syllabi, inadequately concealed by a nomenclatural ('medieval' in place of 'Muslim', but still beginning from the establishment of the Delhi sultanate). That the implications of this have often been communal is equally obvious. Even at its most obvious, the translation of ancient and medieval into Hindu-Muslim assumed the existence of homogenized entities, supposedly unified by religion, as the basic building blocks of all pre-modern history. In addition the stigma, commonly attached to the term in the ancient/medieval/modern schema evolved in Renaissance Europe, deepened when the British transplanted it to India. Islam had been the great enemy of Christendom, the Mughals had displaced Mughal emperors, the 1857 revolt and the Indian independence movement seemed to indicate Muslims to be on the whole more dangerous than the Hindus, and meanwhile Orientalist scholars claimed to have discovered a glorious 'classical' age of early Islam (which was embodied in a language generically related to Greek and Latin). Many of the central propositions of mainstream Indian history, Hinduism and Hindu communalism (and, with values inverted, Islam alter ego) can thus be shown to have originated in particular discursive patterns.

How much, really, do such origins explain? Marc Bloch warned us many years ago of the 'idol of origins', the tendency to think that 'a beginning — is a complete explanation.'³¹ If histories within the Saidian mould homogenize, they also often tend to close closures by suggesting ready answers to issues that could have developed into interesting inquiries. Even in cases where the conclusion is undoubted, we need to ask further questions as to what sometimes is not) being accepted or internalized, by precisely whom, and why. Western critiques of the conditions of Hinduism acquired an early resonance in Bengali middle-class circles: as so the equally trenchant attacks on caste and high-caste domination. The tripartite schema and the related myth of centuries of Hindu tyranny were very quickly taken over, but not the fairly common missionary or utilitarian denunciation of all Indian culture as embodied, in its most notorious form, in Macaulay. An incidental reference in Rajat Kanta Ray's recent account (in the context of politics and society around 1757) can provide an example

³¹ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (1954; Manchester, 1963), pp. 29-35.

of the kind of inquiry that has remained foreclosed, earlier 'Bengal Renaissance' historiography and in its inspired inversions.³³ Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyay's *Anachandra Raysva Charitra* (1805), the second biography we have in Bengali prose, contains a very early ex-Muslim tyranny myth that would become near-ubiquitous in nineteenth-century Bengali Hindu writing. Rajib Krishnachandra, the powerful zamindar of Krishna district), is shown to be taking a leading part in a Hindu zamindars, court officials, financiers and Mir the aid of the English in overthrowing Nawab Sir clearly formulated desire to end 'Yavana' misrule is the Hindu plotters (who, curiously, are described as organizing their anti-Muslim motivations in front of Mir Ja Kanta Ray points out, more contemporary texts, whether in English, or the odd Bengali village poems referring to the overthrow of Muslim tyranny (as distinct from the particular nawab).³⁴ Rajiblochan's text, interestingly, organized spread of English education, and for that tripartite schema of Indian history. It combines adulteration of Krishnanagar Raj family with flattery of the English from Muslim misrule, and seems to demand location of high-caste Hindu literati transiting from zamindari patronage. Rajiblochan had a family connection with Krishnanagar Raj, and had then been recruited, along with pandits, by William Carey to work for the Bengali press set up by Baptist missionaries at Serampur — from where he went on to Fort William College, established by 1800.³⁵ It may not be irrelevant to note that Maharajah Anachandra is remembered as a very major patron of orthodox Hindu culture, and that his power base was in a region notorious in the eighteenth century and beyond for its support of heterodox lower-caste sects: Kartabhaja, Saheb-dhar and many others.³⁶ It is tempting to suggest a link

³² Rajat Kanta Ray, *Palasir Sharayantra o Sekaler Samaj* (Calcutta, 1942).

³³ See below, Chapter 6, for a discussion of the 'renaissance'.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 183-7 and *passim*.

³⁵ Brojendranath Banerji, 'Fort William College Pandit', pp. 2-3 in *Sadhak-Caritmala*, I (Calcutta, 1942).

³⁶ Sudhir Chakrabarti, *Sahabdhani Sampraday Tader Gan* (Calcutta, 1942).

between the easy acceptance of some key aspects of Anglo-Indian historiography, projecting the British as saviours of Hindus from earlier Muslim misrule, and possible late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century efforts at reasserting high-caste power. These came to be closely associated with the eventually more secure zamindari and tenure-holdings of post-Cornwallis Bengal, and the new importance of the 'liberal' professions – entry to which became restricted to the products of bhadralok-dominated higher education. For such a strata – privileged, benefiting in many ways from foreign rule, yet increasingly aware of a humiliating colonial dependency – the thought that British rule was a great improvement on 'medieval Muslim tyranny' could provide considerable solace as well as a safe and distant site for locating a largely imaginary history of Hindu prowess against – not British, but Muslim – invaders.

That colonial history, developed primarily to sustain and ratify British rule, quickly became the ground for contradictory and limited yet powerful assertions of patriotism is a well known and quite undeniable feature of nineteenth-century Bengali intellectual history. Yet some minutiae of dating and language indicate that it still puts the framework of derivative discourse under some strain. Partha Chatterji feels impelled to add the phrase 'curiously enough' to the fact that 'the new Indian literati, while it enthusiastically embraced the modern rational principles of European historiography, did not accept the history of India as it was written by British historians'.³⁷ Ranajit Guha pushes the moment of autonomous assertion forward to Bankimchandra's historical essays of the late 1870s and early 1880s. Chatterji, through a survey of school textbooks, brings it back to the 1860s. Neither mention the plenitude of very similar material in the proceedings of the Derozian Society for Acquisition of General Knowledge (1838–43), i.e. emerging precisely from a group often accused of being, quintessentially, denationalized Anglicists, who in Guha's framework should have displayed 'unquestioning servility to the ruling power'.³⁸ Pyarichand Mitra's *State of Hindoostan under the Hindus*, for instance, combined warm references to the 'Xatries' (Kshatriyas) as 'great warriors', akin to 'the Rajpoots and Marhatas who are but their descendants', with much celebration of ancient Hindu cultural glory. Such Hindu nationalistic themes had been inserted, it goes without saying, into the general tripartite framework

³⁷ Partha Chatterji, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton, 1993; Delhi, 1994), p. 88.

³⁸ Ranajit Guha, pp. 17–18.

of ancient Hindu glory/medieval Muslim tyranny and decline/modern reawakening, and other contributors to the SAGK proceedings extended the formula to conditions of women and the history of the Bengali language.³⁹ A decade later Nilmoni Basak, who had also been a member of that Derozian society,⁴⁰ likewise accepted without question Mill's periodization, but then launched into a bitter attack on British writings on Indian history for denigrating Hindu achievements. A trend-setting feature of Basak's *Bharatvarsher Itihas* was the effort to shift the focus within the 'Hindu' period from politics to culture and religion. Relegating to a closing section the 'brief description' of Hindu kingdoms – difficult to reconstruct, full of fables, without a firm chronology – Basak embarked upon an enthusiastic account of theories of statecraft and law, religion, literature and science, even Hindu colonies and cultural influences allegedly in places as far distant as Bali and Peru.⁴¹

These are matters of detail, relevant only for their symptomatic value: far more crucial are the constraints and closures late-Subalternism is imposing through its key assumption of statism as the root of all evil in modernity. The corollary often drawn is that modern history-writing is necessarily state-centred: it is either narrowly political in subject matter, or looks at other processes from the point of view of the making or unmaking of states. Several recent essays by Gyanendra Pandey, in particular, assume almost as a matter of course that all post-Enlightenment historiography has been the 'grand narrative' of the nation-state – till, presumably, the present moment of liberation achieved through the contemplation of 'fragments'.⁴² For Partha Chatterji, similarly, the important thing about late-nineteenth-century Bengali history textbooks is that in them 'history had become merely the struggle for power'. 'Hindu nationalism', it seems, is unacceptable for Chatterji (and Pandey)

³⁹ Pyarichand Mitra, *State of Hindoostan under the Hindoos*; Maheshchandra Deb, *A Sketch of the Condition of Hindu Women*; Udaychandra Addya, *Bangla Bhasha Uttamrupa Shikshakaraneer Abashyakata*, in Gautam Chattopadhyay, *Awakening in Bengal in Early Nineteenth Century: Selected Documents*, vol. 1 (Calcutta, 1965), pp. 94, 131, 156, 178–80, and Appendix, i–ii.

⁴⁰ See the list of members of the SAGK in Chattopadhyay, pp. lxiv–v.

⁴¹ Basak, Preface, and Chapters 2–7. Mrityunjay's text in contrast had been entirely about kings.

⁴² Gyanendra Pandey, 'In Defence of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, 1991, and 'The Prose of Otherness', in *Subaltern Studies VIII* (Delhi, 1995).

art because 'like other modern ideologies, it allows for a role of the state in the modernization of society -- in this framework of its reasoning is entirely secular.'⁴³ This is close to that of Ashis Nandy, who has been critiquing for a number of years now from a consistently anti-secular position.

many differences with such assertions, which I intend to discuss in several of the essays that follow. For the moment, my concern is only with the homogenizing silences they impose on Indian, and specifically Bengal, historiography. For, a critique of much late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century story-writing and thinking about the past was precisely its critique of state-centred, merely political, histories. This critique, further, that at times deployed arguments uncannily common in common use today, for central to it was the notion that statism was a principal instrument of modern cultural domination. Such recurrence appears both significant and worthy of exploration.

The prioritization of culture over narratives of kings and wars in the work of Mitra or Nilmoni Basak had been a response to the lack, at that time, of firm, chronologically grounded data about the pre-colonial or 'Hindu' period, which was consequently then in some ways being dismissed by British scholars as having no history or no use of worthwhile past politics. An absence of information about castes and wars had become much less of a problem by the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century, and yet it was then, notably in and around the Swadeshi years, that *samaj* (community) came to be regularly counterposed to *rashtra* (state, the political domain). The real history of India, it was asserted, was located in the first, not the second, and embodied the distinctive qualities peculiar to the genius, the mind and religion of the Indian people.

These are the theoretical lineages of which go back to Herder and romantic nationalisms in many parts of the world have often valued value and authenticity with difference, with what is distinctive and unique to a particular language, culture, and people. A politics of identity grounded in the recognition of difference has thus been repeatedly counterposed to that of liberty and universal rights -- to borrow the terms of a

seminal recent analysis by Charles Taylor.⁴⁴ The for its flowering in late-colonial Bengal still require but there certainly were connections with what, he had described as a 'constructive swadeshi' trend culminated against the Partition of Bengal. This valorized self-help efforts in indigenous enterprise, education, organization over the politics of both 'Moderate' varieties, and was embodied most notably in the activities of Rabindranath Tagore and Satish Mukherjee (Dawn, founder of the Dawn Society, and key figure in the education movement of the Swadeshi years).⁴⁵

The appeal of the state / society disjunction in this historical conjuncture was clearly related to intelligibility both with 'improvement' under colonial hegemony, and the possibilities of oppositional politics of the kind to come to be termed the 'mendicant' kind — a dualism that was not always accompanied by enthusiasm about the extremist or terrorist varieties. Certain structures of colonial rule also provided a basis for the conceptualization of the nation as autonomous from *rashtra*, and identifiable in terms of religious community rather than territorial nationhood. The classification and enumeration helped to consolidate categories defined in terms of religion and caste, while the codification made personal and family laws into distinct religious laws which textualized norms of high-caste or *ashraf* society and sought to be universalized in unprecedented ways.

⁴⁴ Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition', in *A Theory of Multiculturalism* (Princeton, 1994).

⁴⁵ Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (Calcutta, 1973), Chapter II, and *passim*.

⁴⁶ Warren Hastings laid down in 1772 that 'inheritance, other religious usages or institutions' were to be administered to Hindus and Muslims, according to the 'Shaster' and Islamic law respectively: pandits and ulema were therefore appointed to preside over courts in a system which continued till 1864. In form, this was a continuation of Mughal practice which had been marked by a similar dualism between the *darul-ud-din* and *darul-ahd*, where Muslim criminal law was far the greater part of litigation was never brought before Mughal courts. For a specific instance of the legal homogenization brought about by the British, see J.D.M. Derrett, *Religion, Law, and the State in India* (London, 1968), p. 10. For a specific instance of the legal homogenization brought about by the British, see J.D.M. Derrett, *Religion, Law, and the State in India* (London, 1968), p. 10.

was a fairly remarkable and precocious interest in social and cultural history: very different, really, from the supposed British colonial prototype, for it developed precisely around the time when the turn towards professionalized accuracy on the Ranke model was making such themes disreputable in Western academic scholarship. The two main areas of original research were ancient Indian culture and religion and, in Bengal particularly in the wake of the Swadeshi upsurge, regional and local histories as well as extremely important surveys of the development of Bengali language and literature. Here, pioneering use was made of vernacular literary texts, oral folk traditions, artistic works, and a very wide range of cultural artefacts. To take one remarkable instance: Dineshchandra Sen's *Brihat Banga*, published in 1935 as the fruit of two decades of labour, began with a declaration that 'the social, artistic and religious evolution of a civilization does have some relationship with political history, but the connection is not necessarily always close or vital.' A later chapter argued that wanderings among the common people, and studying their patterns of life, crafts and traditions, could often reveal more about true history than poring over inscriptions or written texts. It went on to illustrate this proposition through inferences teased out from peasant ways of learning measurements and predicting the weather, folksongs, and the material culture of boatmaking, house-construction, the weaving of quilts, and the preparation of sweets. For Sen, it appears at times, the true repositories of Bengal's culture have been plebeian, low-caste people bound up with everyday material production, not the Brahman bearers of high Sanskrit learning. The weakening of that high-culture-bearing strata under Pathan rule is presented, most uncharacteristically, as a boon which opened the way for the development of the Bengali language.⁵⁰

If Sen's populism, probably inspired by one kind of reading of Vaishnava traditions, represented an effort at a kind of peoples' history, there was also the slightly later and much more carefully crafted initiative of Niharranjan Ray (*Bangalir Itihas*, Calcutta, 1949). This attempted a veritable total history of pre-thirteenth-century Bengal, with sections on ecology, economic conditions, land relations, caste and class structures, statecraft, religion, culture, and everyday life. Ray, too, had spent years wandering through Bengal's countryside, but as a Left-nationalist activist, and his work reveals signs of Marxian influence.

⁵⁰ Dineshchandra Sen, *Brihat Banga*, 2v (Calcutta, 1935; repr., 1993), pp. v, 895-946.

It must be added immediately, however, that Niharranjan Ray and even Dineshchandra Sen were hardly typical of the bulk of writings built around the *rashtra* / *samaj* dichotomy. A local history like Jogendranath Gupta's *Bikrampur Itihas* (Calcutta, 1909) would be a much more representative example. Gupta enumerated in great and loving detail the past and present achievements of the Bengali Hindu *bhadralok* in what was one of its classic heartlands. No one would guess from reading his book that more than half the population of the region he was writing about were Muslims, or that, among the Hindus, Namashudras considerably outnumbered the Brahmans, Baidyas and Kayasthas combined. The *bhadralok* history of Bikrampur was emphatically not about people like them.⁵¹ As Niharranjan Ray pointed out in the Introduction to his *Bangalir Itihas*, '*samaj*' had generally been understood 'in a very narrow manner', excluding the plebeian strata, even by those who had grasped what Ray reiterated as the key feature of pre-colonial Indian life: its centring around '*samaj*', not '*rashtra*'.⁵²

Partha Chatterji's detailed account of writings about history in colonial Bengal does make fleeting reference to a trend in early nationalist historiography which 'denied the centrality of the state in the life of the nation'. The general framework he has adopted leads him to locate 'the principal difficulty with this view, which has many affinities with the later politics of Gandhism', in 'its inherent vulnerability to the overwhelming sway of the modern state'.⁵³ Other kinds of vulnerabilities, of the sort implicit in the silences of Gupta's history of Bikrampur, appear more obvious and vital to me, at least so far as Bengal historiography is concerned. The clearest evidence for them comes from more general or programmatic statements about history conceived in terms of the state/society disjunction, made during the Swadeshi years by Rabindranath Tagore and Satish Mukherji.

Rabindranath wrote often about history between 1901 and 1912,

⁵¹ For some details of Gupta's book, as well as census data about the religious and caste composition of the Bikrampur region, see my 'Kalki-avatar of Bikrampur: A Village Scandal in Early Twentieth Century Bengal', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies VI* (Delhi, 1989).

⁵² Niharranjan Ray, *Bangalir Itihas: Adiparba*, vol. 1 (Calcutta, 1949, 1980), pp. 2, 5.

⁵³ The reference extends over two paragraphs in a forty-page analysis of 'The Nation and Its Pasts', and 'Histories and Nations', in *The Nation and Its Fragments*, pp. 76-115.

and these essays provide rich indications of a mind grappling with a *rashtra/samaj* framework, and then in important ways going beyond it through an auto-critique of some of his own earlier assumptions: a complicated and contradictory process that attained abiding literary form through *Gora* (serialized between 1907 and 1909). *Bharatvarsher Itihas* (1902), probably the best known of Rabindranath's historical essays, used an interesting language that pressed the politics/culture divide towards a Muslim/Hindu dichotomy which is never explicitly avowed in the text. Thus the narrative of wars and invasions, proclaimed by Tagore at the beginning of this article to be no more than a bad dream – not genuine, valuable, history – is immediately defined by him to have extended 'from Mahmud's invasions to the imperial boasts of Lord Curzon'. 'In the darkness caused by the storm and thunder of Mughal and Pathan, our ancient temples had to cover their heads, while the marbled, ornate tombs of the mistresses of Sultans soared to kiss the stars.' The general denigration of statecraft, it seems, does not extend to the wars and conquests of a Samudragupta, while the exaltation of culture quickly slips into a firmly Hindu mould.⁵⁴

In *Nababarsha* and *Brahman*, two other 1902 essays published a few months before *Bharatvarsher Itihas*, Rabindranath spelled out what was then his notion of ideal Hindu samaj, in terms explicitly, even aggressively Brahmanical and patriarchal. (A combination that seems almost inseparable: we may recall the conflation of over-mighty Shudras and disorderly wives in the dystopia of Kaliyuga.) Inequality is inevitable in all human societies, he argued, but India has given appropriate respect to 'low and high, women and men'.⁵⁵ He counterposed the entire society of gentlefolk (*bhadrāsampradāy*) who should be given *dwija* (twice-born) status, to those considered 'Shudras', in ancient India as well as today – 'Santals, Bhils, Kols, bands of sweepers' – for in a proper samaj 'neck and shoulders must not be lowered to the level of the ground.' 'We want to become *dwijas*, not *feringhees*', whereas today there was the danger of all Brahmans degenerating into 'a vast society of tired clerks worn out by excessive work'.⁵⁶ And, still on the theme of the necessary inequality of

⁵⁴ *Bharatvarsher Itihas* (Bhadra 1309/1902), *Rabindra Rachanāvali*, vol. iv (Calcutta, 1940, 1975), pp. 377, 379.

⁵⁵ *Nababarsha* (Baisakh 1309/1902), *ibid.*, p. 373.

⁵⁶ *Brahman* (Asar 1309/1902), *ibid.*, pp. 395, 401–2. I find this counter-positioning of proper hierarchy to the miseries of contemporary clerical life, where 'the Brahman has to work with lowered head in the office of the *sahib*'

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humankind, Rabindranath in his *Nababarsba* essay attacked the 'modern wife' who, in imitation of the West, feels ashamed of 'serving' her husband and children. In the Indian tradition, however, 'sweeping the floor, bringing water, preparing food, eating after everyone else — considering even husbands without any exceptional qualities akin to gods' have been rightly taken to be the hallmarks of the 'grihalakshmi', the embodiment of true feminine grace and beauty.⁵⁷

Rabindranath, as is well known, soon moved away from most of these positions. The Hindu-Muslim riots in East Bengal in 1906-7, and the failure of the Swadeshi movement to enthuse the bulk of the peasantry, set him thinking about the problematic features of the samaj he had briefly idealized. Tagore, after about 1907, developed a powerful and consistent anti-communal critique, and by 1909 was condemning the samaj based on hierarchized caste difference as a 'gigantic system of cold-blooded repression'.⁵⁸ The repudiation of gender inequality was, perhaps less sharp or consistent, but still a short story like *Streer Patra* (1914) stands in utter and total contrast to the passage I have just quoted.

For a more consistent elaboration of the implications of a Hindu communitarian ideology grounded in hierarchy we need to turn to Satish Mukherji and his *Dawn*. Mukherji's 'The Question of Caste' (*Dawn*, August 1903) proclaimed axiomatically 'that in all ages and by virtue of a law of nature, there shall be inequalities and distinctions between man and man.' He reminded those who objected to caste as being hereditary that property, too, descended 'from father to son'. Admittedly, an element of flexibility enabling some promotions or demotions on the basis of merit was advisable to allow 'proper placement and chance of transfer': but this necessarily presupposed 'a group who can make the needed choices'. The Brahmans, Mukherji concluded, have the best qualifications and traditional expertise for this job of guardianship. Thus a mildly reformist criticism of caste was neatly co-opted into a defence of

(p. 393) extremely significant, and will be discussing its significance in Chapters 6 and 7. Late-nineteenth-century modulations of the Kaliyuga myth, we shall see, are important primarily as an entry point into representations of this clerical world.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 374.

⁵⁸ Letter to Myron Phelps, 4 January 1909, reprinted in *Modern Review*, August 1910. For more details about the change in Rabindranath's views after 1907, see my *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, pp. 62, 82-91.

Brahmanical order. Only through caste hierarchy, *Dawn* editorials and articles repeatedly proclaimed, could 'progress' be reconciled with 'order' or 'stability'. The editorial for the November 1900 issue, for instance, urged the need to understand the specific 'laws' of India's 'social evolution'. It admitted the need to overcome 'the present inertia of Indian society in many matters in respect of which its hands are free, e.g., social, educational, religious and industrial', but emphasized that this should be done only through pursuing 'a course that is consistent with stability'.⁵⁹ The language reminds us that Satish Mukherji had some connections with a Positivist group in late-nineteenth-century Bengal which had inflected the doctrines of Comte in a highly conservative, Brahmanical direction. As so often, caste and gender hierarchy were seen as interdependent, and in March 1903 *Dawn* gave great prominence to the views of the 'eminent Hindu Positivist, the late Jogendrachandra Ghosh, Zemindar', that India's progress 'must be securely based on continuance of the traditional family system'.⁶⁰ The Bengal Positivists, I will argue in a subsequent chapter, provide an illuminating case study of the ways in which specific aspects of colonial structures and discourses (legal recognition of a sphere of community-based personal law, and fragments of Comtean theory) were used as resources to reaffirm Brahmanical hegemony.⁶¹

Dawn regularly counterposed Brahmanical and patriarchal order against the incessant competition and 'gospel of enjoyment' of the West. It related the craze for increasing 'consumption per head' to the 'undue importance attached to the doctrine of rights', as manifested, in its opinion, notably in the advance of democracy in Victorian England.⁶² Its very first issue emphasized the need for India 'to steer clear of the Labour Problem of Christendom'.⁶³ The anti-capitalistic note is quite striking, but so is the precise angle of attack as revealed

⁵⁹ Italics in original. 'Indian Social Evolution and Reform' (*Dawn*, November 1900). See also 'Principles of Social Order: The Statical Aspect' (Editorial, *Dawn*, March 1900) which reiterated that 'all progress is built on Order and — is delusive, and even mischievous, when it is not built on order . . . '.

⁶⁰ For a more detailed discussion of this Positivist-cum-Brahmanical inflection of the *rashtra/samaj*, see Chapter 9. The pioneering, and still the most detailed study of Comte's Bengali disciples is Geraldine Forbes, *Positivism in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1975).

⁶¹ Chapter 7.

⁶² 'Social Movements Round a Centre' (anon., *Dawn*, August 1897).

⁶³ 'The Situation in India: A Problem and an Illustration' (anon., *Dawn*, March 1897).

by the kind of (totally inegalitarian) *samaj* or community being posited against it. And here, it has to be added, the anticipations in *Dawn* of some very contemporary trends become really startling. An article entitled *Western Ideal of Nationalism* (unsigned, but probably by Satish Mukherji) in *Dawn*, June 1911, contrasted the 'Western' notion of 'political nationalism', focussed upon the 'development of men's activities as *members of a state*', with the Hindu ideal of community based on regulated, hierarchized difference. The unity sought by Hindu society was not something 'homogeneous', but based on *dharmashastras* that laid down differentiated 'standards of righteous conduct adapted to various and varying . . . classes and divisions of people'. Unity came also from 'allegiance to the framers of these Laws, who form a distinct spiritual order. . . .' Western 'political nationalism', in contrast, sought 'a homogeneous political existence' through 'a suppression of all diversity'. Mukherji traced its origins back to 'France during the Revolutionary epoch of the eighteenth century', and in particular to 'the French Encyclopaedists . . . who in the name of equality and fraternity had preached a *jehad* against all that men and nations held sacred.' Such ideas, the article implied, had been imposed on India by Bentham and Mill, with a minor modification that substituted utility for the 'goddess of Reason'. Large parts of this essay, one is tempted to comment, could walk into a contemporary anti-'Orientalist' collection with a minimum of editorial updating: they counterpose, in remarkably clear language, an ideal of cultural difference premised on internal hierarchy against notions of universal rights which are felt to be homogenizing.

But of course the argument was anything but purely indigenous or traditional: even a cursory glance through the issues of *Dawn* indicates a striking degree of derivation from that other, more insidious kind of Orientalism that patronizes and praises, instead of denouncing, an equally essentialized Orient. A Cambridge don, Oscar Browning, was quoted with great approval for his statement that his Indian visit had taught him 'to tolerate *purdah*, and to have an admiration for caste',⁶⁴ while many of the strongest assertions of patriarchal values come from the pens of Annie Besant and Sister Nivedita.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ *Dawn*, July 1903.

⁶⁵ Thus Annie Besant argued in an article entitled 'The Education of Hindu Youth' (*Dawn*, June 1897) that passing the matriculation examination was useless for Indian girls, who should be trained rather in 'devotion and piety'. Any imitation of the West with respect to the education of women could 'break up

Assertions of values that otherwise would have been considered socially retrogressive are quite often explained or even justified today as valid responses to the all-pervasive colonial authority and interference. It therefore becomes important to note that the *Dawn* variety of 'constructive swadeshi' was not conspicuously anti-colonial, so far as politics was concerned. Indeed, the politics/society disjunction in this case permitted at times a rather remarkable degree of loyalism. In February 1898 *Dawn* justified Satish Mukherji's Bhagavat Chatuspathi (a 'Hindu Boarding Religious Institution' to train students 'under a system of Hindu discipline') in part on the grounds that 'in this way alone could we live happily amongst our rulers, and setting an example of lofty character repay them tenfold the debt which we owe them for the era of uninterrupted peace and tranquillity which India had not enjoyed for many and many a day until she came by the dispensation of an All-wise Providence under British overlordship.' That was 1898: thirteen years later, after the storms of Swadeshi had come and gone, Satish Mukherji was hailing the 'transcendental importance' of the visit of the King-Emperor, and arranging to present George V with a full set of the copies of his *Dawn*.⁶⁶ The important point that seems to emerge is that the refurbishing, or invention, of ideologies of Brahmanical hegemony and patriarchy under colonial rule did not necessarily flow from anti-colonial impulses alone: more internal compulsions and power relations also deserve attention.

I have been emphasizing a precocious, if in many ways problem-ridden, thrust towards social history. A qualification that needs to be made at this point is that such tendencies had developed

the family system, drive the women out in the world to earn their living, make them competitors with men'. An earlier essay by Besant on Hindu women (1894), which *Dawn* reprinted in October 1901, had extolled the charms of chaste widowhood. It admitted that Hindu ideals of womanhood could have no place in the West, but pleaded, in a classic statement of one kind of Orientalism: 'Leave the Hindu woman untouched by Western thought, and do not destroy a type just because it is unique . . . We have women enough, who are brilliantly intellectual and competent: let us leave unmarried the one type which is the incarnation of spiritual beauty.' Nivedita, too, was full of admiration for the 'nun-like qualities' of the Hindu widow, and felt that 'there are few great relationships in human life like that between a Hindu man and his mother.' (*Dawn*, May 1903.)

⁶⁶ 'The Imperial Visit' (*Dawn*, December 1911). For the presentation of *Dawn* to George V, see Haridas and Uma Mukherji, *Origins of the National Education Movement* (Calcutta, 1957), p. 249.

primarily outside the world of the professional Indian historian, which in any case took quite some time to constitute itself. University departments began systematic research in history rather late, as they had been primarily examining-cum-teaching bodies till the early twentieth century, and an all-India organization of the historical profession (the Indian History Congress) was floated only in the 1930s. As had happened in the West a generation or two earlier, the turn to the Ranke model of academic precision and strictly archive-based history placed a heavy premium on political-military-administrative narratives. The tone was set by the major British Indian surveys: Vincent Smith's *Oxford History of India* (1919) and the Cambridge History series published during the inter-war years, while among Indian historians Jadunath Sarkar emerged as the most respected and influential scholar through his predominantly political works on the Mughal empire and the Maratha kingdoms.⁶⁷ A state-oriented Indian history had thus come to dominate academia now, largely displacing social-cultural interests⁶⁸ — without however fundamentally modifying many of the underlying premises of that other kind of work. Thus the more abundant and precise data that had now become available about the ancient (or 'Hindu') period led to dynastic histories marked often by an uncritical preference for alleged periods of 'imperial unity', particularly the Guptas, Asoka Maurya remaining a bit suspect because of his Buddhist affiliations. Imperial unity, however, ceased to be such a plus point if the rulers happened to be Muslims, for, as in nineteenth-century historical novels, the wars of sections of Rajputs, Marathas, and Sikhs with centralizing Muslim rulers were generally given the status of national struggles. Another revealing discrepancy consisted in a variation across time of the degree of attention professional historians were prepared to give to social-cultural matters. Ancient Indian civilization and culture still attracted a lot of attention in syllabi and research alike, quite often in highly apologetic, even revivalist forms. Similar themes were much less studied or taught for the 'Muslim' period, except by a few firmly

⁶⁷ Jadunath Sarkar, however, had the imagination, flexibility and grace to hail Niharranjan Ray's book as a landmark in what he declared would be increasingly recognized as the 'highest' kind of history: social history. See his preface to the first edition of *Banglar Itihas*, p. x.

⁶⁸ In Bengali-language works, too, the new political focus was exemplified in Ramaprasad Chanda's *Gaur Rajmala* (Rajshahi, 1912) and Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay's *Banglar Itihas* (Calcutta, 1914).

anti-communal nationalist historians who tried to highlight 'syncretic' Bhakti-Sufi movements and foregrounded Akbar against Aurangzeb.⁶⁹

One curious feature of history-writing about the 'modern' or colonial period prior to the 1950s needs some emphasis. Nationalist historiography developed on sites some distance from what, on logical grounds, should have been its proper location: the rich and growing traditions of contemporary anti-colonial movements. There was virtually no professional research on such themes (or on 1857) till some years after independence, and the history of colonial India consequently remained very much a narrative of viceroys, Afghan or Burmese wars, and administrative and 'constitutional' reforms. Home Department files or private papers for recent years were largely inaccessible, most academic historians worked in government-controlled or financed institutions, and with the rise of mass nationalism (as well as revolutionary terrorism and Left formations) the factor of censorship (and, more often, self-censorship) had probably become much more important than in the more placid late nineteenth century. Even the critique of British Indian economic policies worked out by Moderate Congress intellectuals like Naoroji or R.C. Dutt seldom entered standard history textbooks: certainly I cannot recall such themes in my college courses, a decade after 1947. The social-historical impulse also tended to wither away for the colonial period, with the major exception of the middle class studying its own cultural origins in an increasingly self-adulatory manner through the renaissance myth. Caste and religion in colonial times were probably felt to be divisive themes, from the perspectives of countrywide unity and anti-British struggle.

Through silences and stresses alike, the bulk of late-colonial Indian professional historiography came to have a tilt that was strongly Hindu, as well as North Indian. The alternatives that sometimes emerged within that same milieu were based on simple inversions of mainstream assumptions, and hence did not mark any qualitative break. Thus there were occasional writings which glorified Muslim rulers, eras of pan-Islamic grandeur, and powerful Southern or regional dynasties, in equally uncritical ways. What remained fairly ubiquitous were views from the top: whether Northern, Southern, or regional, Brahmanical/high caste or *ashraf*. By far

⁶⁹ An obvious example is Tarachand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* (1922; reprinted Allahabad, 1963).

the most influential model, of course, was that of a fundamentally harmonious 'Indian' civilization and culture, all too often implicitly identified with 'Hindu' traditions of alleged catholicity, with an underlying Brahmanical or high-caste slant. In a simultaneous move, the sting was sought to be removed from inconvenient questions of gender oppression by postulating a Vedic or ancient golden age of learned and respected women subsequently shattered by foreign, usually Muslim, intrusions.⁷⁰

There were some signs of an inversion of a more fundamental kind. In Maharashtra and Tamilnadu, in the wake of powerful lower-caste movements, alternative versions of history were constructed which stood the theory of the assimilative spread of 'Aryan' civilization on its head, and projected a counter-myth of Northern-Brahmanical foreign conquest and tyranny over the indigenous '*bahujan samaj*' of intermediate and low castes. The Shivaji projected in Jyotirao Phule's ballad about him in 1869 was primarily a Kunbi-Maratha folk hero distinguished by concern for peasants, while *Ghulamgiri* (1873) dismissed 'fictions' about his 'freeing the motherland from *Mlecchas* and protecting Brahmans and cows' as 'false religious patriotism'.⁷¹ In the 1920s, the Chamars of Punjab would use the recent discovery of Harappan civilization to develop a similar anti-Brahmanical Aryan rhetoric.⁷² Even in Bengal, much less known for its caste politics, the thrust towards *bhadralok*-dominated social and regional histories of the *Swadeshi* and post-*Swadeshi* years actually coincided with a quite independent stream

⁷⁰ Traces of this myth can be seen already in a paper on the conditions of Indian women presented to the Derozian Society for Acquisition of General Knowledge (Maheshchandra Deb, *A Sketch of the Condition of Hindu Women*, reprinted in Gautam Chattopadhyay). It attained the status of a historical commonplace through Altekar's *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation* (1938). Two excellent recent critiques are Uma Chakrabarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism, and a Script for the Past', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi, 1989), and Kumkum Roy, 'Where Women are Worshipped, there the Gods Rejoice': The Mirage of the Ancestress of the Hindu Woman', in Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (eds), *Women and the Hindu Right* (New Delhi, 1995).

⁷¹ Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology* (Cambridge, 1985), Chapter 10; *Collected Works of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, Volume I (Slavery)* (Bombay, 1991), p. 26.

⁷² Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement against Untouchability in Twentieth-Century Punjab* (California, 1982).

of tracts. These expressed lower-caste grievances and aspirations, and constituted for them, sometimes, imagined pasts built out of selective appropriations from elite myths and histories. Thus the Rajbansi claim to Kshatriya status could be buttressed through the Brahmanical myth of the destruction of Kshatriyas by Parashuram,⁷³ while the metrical biography of the founder of the Matua sect which had laid the foundations of the Namashudra movement in Faridpur laid claim to the anti-caste heritage of the Buddha (and Kabir) a generation before Ambedkar.⁷⁴ Alternative historiographies like these have been generally, and symptomatically, ignored by academic scholarship. Today they seem on the point of becoming a formidable force, as an opportunist BJP-BSP (Hindu upper-caste and trader with Dalit, lower caste) alliance in Uttar Pradesh breaks down partly through Dalit insistence on celebrating, precisely in the state where Ayodhya is located, an anti-Brahman leader of far-off Tamilnadu who had publicly burned pictures of Ram on Madras beach in 1956.⁷⁵ Implicit here is a very different way of imagining, not only the subcontinent's pasts, but perspectives of national unity or integration.

III

I have been emphasizing the differences within late-colonial Indian historical thinking, in particular a contrast between social-historical impulses mainly generated outside the formal historical profession, and statecraft-oriented narratives written from within its confines. Certain features common to both appear equally significant, however, when looked at from today's perspectives, and in terms of their conditions of production and dissemination. These demarcate the late-colonial situation quite sharply from the many historical worlds of today, and consequently offer a vantage point for a brief review of contemporary opportunities and predicaments.

There were two notable absences. The Asiatic Society and the

⁷³ The ancestors of the Rajbansis, it was claimed, were Kshatriyas who had taken refuge in the wilds of North Bengal to escape the wrath of Parashuram, and had subsequently forgotten their high-caste origin and customs. Harakishore Adhikari, *Rajbansi Kulapradip* (Calcutta, 1908).

⁷⁴ Tarakchandra Sarkar, *Sri Sri Harililamrita* (P.O. Olpur, Faridpur, 1916). For a more detailed discussion of such alternative constructions, see Chapter 9.

⁷⁵ For details about Periyar's burning of images of Ram, as well as his other violent attacks on the Ramayana, see Paula Richman, 'E.V. Ramaswami's Reading of the Ramayana', in Paula Richman (ed.), *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Delhi, 1994).

Anthropological Survey apart, official funding for pure research, detached from pedagogy, hardly existed, and there was very little of today's accelerating globalization which has made trips abroad for degrees, research or seminars an important part of the more prestigious kinds of academic life. Opportunities for any kind of higher education were more restricted and therefore even more class-cum-caste defined than today, given the far fewer universities and colleges. Within this smaller educated community, however, the hierarchical divisions between research/teaching, university departments/undergraduate colleges/schools, metropolitan/provincial universities seem to have been somewhat less sharp. Repositories of books, manuscripts, art objects and cultural artefacts were often built up by autodidacts, gentlemen with access to local resources and antiquarian interests but little formal academic training: a zamindar, lawyer or schoolteacher could sometimes contribute as much or more as a university professor. For Bengal, one thinks immediately of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, many local libraries, and the Varendra Research Society, the latter located in a small North Bengal district town (Rajshahi) yet enjoying at one time an academic prestige which it would be difficult for any non-metropolitan centre to emulate today. Another example of this relative absence of internal hierarchization within a smaller educated elite is provided by the career of Sir Jadunath Sarkar (1870–1958). A Rajshahi zamindar's son, Jadunath's formal degrees were in English, and till retirement he combined research with the teaching of History, together sometimes with English and Bengali, mainly to undergraduate students (at Ripon, Metropolitan and Presidency Colleges in Calcutta, followed by Patna and Cuttack, and then briefly at the Benaras Hindu University). Jadunath became internationally renowned but never went abroad.⁷⁶

Late-colonial histories, then, were generally written by teachers for students or general readers. Very many of the topmost professional scholars also produced textbooks, and most of them published original works both in English and in indigenous languages. There was therefore much less of a gap than is evident now between the best and the worst or even average histories. But it would be dangerous to romanticize: inadequate funding for full-time research, confinement within national or regional parameters in the absence of opportunities for wider contacts, the restrictive aspects of a

⁷⁶ Biographical data taken from S.P. Sen (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. IV (Calcutta, 1974).

nationalist paradigm shot through with unstated class and high-caste assumptions (quite often sliding into communalist attitudes), all exerted a price. The 'best' scholarship of those times, with rare exceptions, appears unacceptably limited, parochial and unselfquestioning today.

Post-independence historiographical developments, in contrast, have been marked by a dialectic which simultaneously enhanced standards vastly at elite levels, while paying far too little attention to histories being taught to the majority of college and school students as well as diffused through other means among the general public. Advanced historical research has come to have as its intended audience one's academic peer-group, research students of the best universities, and, increasingly, international conferences. Meanwhile the now very seriously dated historiography of a past generation has kept on getting reproduced and disseminated, in diluted and crude forms, at other, inferiorized and neglected levels. Thus has come to be constituted a 'common-sense' — using that term in the most negative of Gramsci's several different formulations⁷⁷ — open to appropriation and orchestration by organizations such as the Sangh Parivar.

There has certainly been a qualitative transformation in the work of the leading practitioners since the 1950s, bound up with very significant shifts in basic approaches and choice of research questions. In ancient and medieval Indian historiography, where the changes have been most obvious, work from the late 1950s has focussed on themes like 'social formations',⁷⁸ debates about the existence and nature of Indian feudalism, or the possibilities of

⁷⁷ Gramsci, who always made clear that for him there could never be 'just one common sense', quite often emphasized its 'fragmentary, incoherent, and inconsequential' aspects, as a kind of bricolage of residues from the high cultures and 'prejudices from all past phases of history . . .'. But it could also include elements evolving from below, as it were, from shared experiences in labour and in social relations, with an embryonic oppositional potential. Assertions of lower-caste identities through imagined histories have obviously no intrinsic superiority in sheer academic terms over dominant-caste constructions, but they do seem to include elements of common-sense of the latter kind. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey N. Smith (New York, 1971), pp. 323-7, 419-25. See also the helpful comments of E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London, 1991, 1993), pp. 10-11.

⁷⁸ The major breakthrough, of course, was D.D. Kosambi's *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay, 1956).

capitalistic developments in pre-colonial times. Inscriptions and land grants have been probed, no longer primarily for information about kings, dynasties or conquests, but for the inferences that could be teased out from them on broader socio-economic relationships and questions of state formation. Impressive detailed studies of medieval agrarian, artisanal or commercial structures have similarly taken the place of old-fashioned dynastic and military histories.

Ranke, then, has been displaced in considerable measure by Marx. The specific direction of this change owes much to the overall conjuncture of the 1950s and 1960s, marked by a strong and apparently growing Left presence in Indian political and intellectual life. Mere enhancement in research opportunities obviously cannot explain it, nor was it just a question of wider international contacts. It was not mainstream British or American historiography, not even writings on South Asian themes, but a journal like *Past and Present*, the 'transition debate', and the work of historians like Hill, Hobsbawm and Thompson — often sought to be marginalized by academic establishments in the West — that appeared most stimulating to Indian scholars exploring new ways of looking at history.

The new history had been iconoclastic in the 1960s; today, in leading universities as well as in the Indian History Congress (though hardly elsewhere), it has been functioning as a kind of establishment for almost a generation. This provokes, nowadays, a certain legitimate impatience about the occasionally simplified and restrictive nature of its applications of Marxism, and attempts at more wholesale repudiation are not unlikely, given the context of the collapse of socialist regimes and the sharp Right turn in recent world and Indian politics. It is important, therefore, to retain a sense of the sheer distance that separates the post-Kosambi or post-Irfan Habib historical world from what had preceded it, even while developing the qualities of self-criticism vital for any living tradition of radical historiography.

An aspect of this 'shift in the paradigm',⁷⁹ one which has not been much emphasized but is particularly relevant for my present argument, is the rupture with a conventional nationalist historiography which, when transposed into ancient or medieval times, all too often had become indistinguishable from communalism. To cite only a few obvious instances: the casualties of the transformation

⁷⁹ Romila Thapar has used this phrase to describe the impact of Kosambi: 'The Contribution of D.D. Kosambi to Indology', in Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India* (Delhi, 1992).

in ancient Indian history-writing include not only the 'Gupta Golden Age', but the basic premise of a distinctive and once-glorious Aryan 'race',⁸⁰ taken over from Orientalist scholarship and made into a central plank of much nationalist-communalist ideology. The work on the Shudras pioneered by R.S. Sharma helped to expose the seamy, exploitative undersides of ancient Indian civilization, while after the massive research of the 'Aligarh School' the counterposing of a 'good' against a 'bad' Muslim king, an Akbar against an Aurangzeb, is no longer felt to be a necessary task for secular-minded medieval historians. Themes like technological change, surplus-appropriation, and peasant resistance have come to be considered far more significant, and tolerance or intolerance are seen as determined not by the personal catholicity or bigotry of rulers but primarily by material, especially political, pressures and relationships. In parenthesis, it needs to be noted that there are the seeds of a problem here, in a kind of absolute valorization of the economic and political-administrative over the religious, cultural, or social. As in the sometimes reductionist interpretations of culture in the ancient period, there are obvious connections with simplified notions of Marxism in which consciousness figures as merely ephiphenomenal to the 'material base'. But interesting also are the ways in which certain earlier patterns are being reproduced. Social history of a kind had received considerable attention from nationalist intellectuals working on the 'Hindu' period, but very much less so for the 'Muslim' or 'British' centuries. That, more or less, seems to have remained its fate even after the 1960s. Caste, for instance, can hardly ever be avoided in studies of ancient Indian history, whereas it is only very recently that it has started to figure significantly in historical works on the colonial era.

Modern Indian history has actually had a somewhat different trajectory, for here nationalist historiography really came into its own and occupied its 'proper', anti-colonial domain only from the 1950s and 1960s. Political inhibition was increasingly replaced by state encouragement, access to late-colonial archives became easy with the introduction of a thirty-year rule, and the 'national movement' — all-India, regional, even district-level — became the favourite topic of research in the history departments of India's proliferating universities. The second major area of advance was in economic history, once again at first within a broad colonial/anti-colonial paradigm.

⁸⁰ Romila Thapar, 'Ideology and the Interpretation of Early Indian History', in *ibid.*

This enriched through more sophisticated tools and empirical detail the basic critique of colonial policies and structures that had been initiated by the first generation of nationalist economists and developed by Marxists like R.P. Dutt.

As the example of economic history indicates, there was considerable scope in modern Indian history for a kind of Left nationalist-Marxist consensus, a rough counterpart perhaps in historiography to the Nehruvian consensus which, at least in retrospect, seems to have characterized middle-class Indian intellectual life during those decades. A basic framework grounded in anti-colonial nationalism appeared all the more urgent in view of attacks from what, with some justice, were identified as neo-colonialist positions, instances, it was feared, of the empire striking back. One recalls the polemics against the efforts of what is popularly known as the Cambridge School to reduce anti-colonial nationalism to mere factional politicking; the debate around deindustrialization provoked by a revisionist essay by Morris David Morris; and the sharp reactions generated by the second volume of the *Cambridge Economic History of India*.

An unintended consequence of this continued and indeed enhanced domination of the nationalist paradigm in historiography pertaining to colonial India has been yet another subordination of the social by the political or economic. The nineteenth-century prehistory of the nationalist middle-class intelligentsia, construed in terms of a narrative of education and social reform leading up to patriotism, received considerable attention: yet Jyotiba Phule, symptomatically, had to wait for his first sophisticated historical study till Gail Omvedt's book in 1976.⁸¹ Lower-caste protest had often developed antagonistic relationships with mainstream anti-colonial nationalism, and the penalty extracted was its frequent characterization as 'collaborative', 'divisive', or 'sectional'. Straightforward anti-colonial narratives could be constructed fairly easily out of political and economic developments: the social, inevitably constituted in large part also by 'internal' tensions, presented more intractable material for a nationalist historiography committed to a saga of a basically united people. Openly communal histories could contribute even less, for the central assumption of homogenized, unchanging, and inevitably conflicting religious identities effectively blocked meaningful social-historical exploration. A critique of mainstream nationalism for its many 'betrayals' was mounted

⁸¹ Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India, 1873 to 1930* (Bombay, 1976).

at times, it is true, by Left studies of class struggles of workers and peasants. But once again socio-cultural dimensions tended to get marginalized, as simplified Leninist frameworks gave priority to a combination of economic pressures and 'external' organization, and tended often to get lost in debates on the correctness or otherwise of party strategies.

The would-be social historian of modern India had perforce often to turn for guidance to social anthropologists. But that too has been a domain full of problems, where conservative attitudes have often blended with structural-functionalist premises to produce an abundance of bland, tension-denuded categories. Thus all kinds of caste mobility, including radical protest, have been grouped together under one label, 'Sanskritization', indicative primarily of the most assimilative kind of change. A parallel instance would be the 'jajmani system', where elements of mutuality in relations between the Brahman ritual expert and the householder have been extended to the rather different transactions of peasants and artisans, even landholders and agricultural labourers.

That the standard anti-colonial nationalist model, at least in its more totalizing, unmediated versions, can be constrictive is indicated by the fact that much interesting and stimulating recent work has been taking place outside, or in a tangential relationship to, its boundaries. Take for example the notable growth areas of economic history, and studies, often over the long-term, of the grossly neglected South. The framework of abrupt and cataclysmic late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century economic decline that still works fairly well for some regions of early colonial penetration (most notably, Bengal) does appear somewhat less helpful, for other areas. (A work like Chris Bayly's *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*,⁸² however controversial at times, cannot be dismissed as simply neo-colonialist.) The rapidly growing genre of environmental or ecological history, to take a second example, often has to work with scales of time that need not coincide with conventional periodizations. Parts of the South, again, seem to have had patterns and rhythms of their own: looking outwards commercially towards and across the Indian Ocean rather than inland, and marked in the inter-War years more by lower-caste assertions (and in some regions by Left movements) than mainstream Gandhian nationalism or Congress and League politics.

⁸² C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Cambridge, 1983; rpt. Delhi, 1993).

There developed, in the 1970s and early 1980s, a conjuncture during which conventional nationalist and Left-nationalist premises seemed on the point of more direct challenge, even decisive overthrow. As in the 1950s, a changed overall context was crucial. Its constituent elements included the (slightly delayed) academic fall-out from worldwide moods of radical optimism characteristic of the 1960s and early 1970s, and the rise within India of a variety of extreme-Left tendencies which combined disillusionment with organized Marxist parties with hopes of an impending peasant revolution. As the prospects of radical change withered, there was a proliferation of volunteer groups engaged in constructive work at the grassroots, while women's movements with self-consciously feminist perspectives emerged as a novel and permanent element in the Indian scene. Meanwhile, lower-caste protests were gathering strength, forcing, after the Mandal flare-up in the mid-nineties, considerable rethinking among Left activists who had for long underestimated its autonomous appeal. History-writing was modified in this changed conjuncture in two more or less parallel but largely unconnected ways: the sudden popularity of 'histories from below' (early *Subaltern Studies*, of course, but also quite a lot of work outside and sometimes preceding it),⁸³ and a quantum leap, virtually from scratch, in women's studies, increasingly informed by feminist approaches.

The first wave of Indian feminist scholarship – original, powerful, but nowadays largely neglected or forgotten – questioned the triumphal narrative of unilinear advance in the 'status of women' through male-initiated nineteenth-century social reform, followed by women's participation in Gandhian, revolutionary-terrorist or Left-led movements. More nuanced and ambiguous patterns were suggested, emphasizing the contradictions of reform and the ways in which nationalism could have displaced the women's question and recuperated patriarchal ideologies and structures, even while opening up public spaces for women, and there were interesting efforts to relate shifting gender relations to detailed studies of socio-economic processes.⁸⁴

⁸³ I attempted a survey-cum-analysis of the early moves towards histories from below in *Popular Movements and Middle-Class Leadership in Late Colonial India* (Deuskar Lecture, given at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1982; published Calcutta, 1983); see particularly p. 74, fn. 3. Like my *Modern India 1885-1947* (Delhi, 1983), I had drafted this lecture before reading *Subaltern Studies I* (Delhi, 1982).

⁸⁴ I owe this assessment of early feminist historiography to Tanika Sarkar – 'Women's Histories and Feminist Writings in India: A Review and A Caution'

Meanwhile, there was a spate of research publications on tribal, peasant and labour movements, as well as a few pioneering, sympathetic studies of lower-caste initiatives in large part independent of, or even hostile to, mainstream nationalism. The generalizations that emerged from some of this work were not dissimilar at times to those being worked out independently by historians of women. An inverse relationship was suggested between moments of popular, specifically peasant, autonomy, and Gandhian nationalism in its more organized forms and phases. *Subaltern Studies*, in particular, began with a programmatic statement simultaneously critiquing the elitism of both colonialist and nationalist historiographies.⁸⁵ The habit of looking at history solely from the top downwards, in terms of leaders mobilizing the masses through ideals, charisma, or manipulation, it was cogently argued, has often coincided with economic assumptions: both had combined, even in Left historiography, to obstruct efforts at studying the consciousness and culture of subaltern groups.

I have argued later in this volume that the possibilities that had opened up a decade or so back, the chances of a social-historical breakthrough, have today become restricted once again, and that this, too, has happened in contexts both worldwide and specific to India.⁸⁶ For the moment I will merely suggest a connection between such closures and a paradoxical kind of nationalist recuperation associated with critiques of colonial discourse, particularly in the dominant strand within today's *Subaltern Studies*. Paradoxical, both in terms of the starting point of that project, and because the critique of official, state-centred nationalism has not been given up. But a two-fold displacement has occurred: from colonial domination to Western cultural conquest; and from subaltern, usually peasant, consciousness (often marked by the centrality of religion, but not detached from questions of class, exploitation, and power) to affirmations of community consciousness in effect defined by religion and abstracted from indigenous power relations (other than

(Plenary Session Address, Seventh Berkshire Conference, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, June 1996), forthcoming. A fine example of this earlier work is J. Krishnamurti (ed.), *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Survival, Work and the State* (Delhi, 1989), consisting of essays published several years earlier in the *Indian Social and Economic History Review*.

⁸⁵ Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', in Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I* (Delhi, 1982).

⁸⁶ See Chapter 3 below.

those embodied in that alleged quintessence of post-Enlightenment rationality, the bureaucratic nation-state). The adoption of the single criterion of subordination or otherwise to modern Western power-knowledge is not too distant, surely, from the familiar digits of cultural nationalism. And the related tendency to valorize all assertions of indigenous community values is likely to inhibit sympathetic explorations of a vast range of initiatives by or on behalf of subordinated groups: women, lower-castes, Left-led peasant and workers movements, all of which have selectively appropriated elements from Western ideologies. Later chapters will provide instances of how such inhibitory pressures are already at work, even in the writings of scholars with undeniably radical values.⁸⁷ Histories from below have ceased to be in vogue, being displaced by a focus on colonial or elite discourses, and feminist studies of the nineteenth century often dwell obsessively on the limitations of West-inspired reform initiatives.

A clarification may be needed at this point. I am far from suggesting any rupture with basically anti-colonial parameters in writing the history of colonial India. Colonial exploitation and domination of course constituted the central set of relationships during these centuries. In so far as its cultural manifestations have been highly productive of undifferentiated illusions of progress, modernity or reason, the critique of colonial discourse does have its uses — though more perhaps in the West, and in English Literature circles, than in the specifically historical world of South Asia, where many of its findings sound rather familiar. There remains a need to recognize nuances and mediations, variations in the extent of colonial cultural or other domination across times, regions, social spaces, and the possibility of earlier tensions (around caste and gender, notably) being reproduced in ways no doubt conditioned by the colonial presence, but not uniquely determined by it. The traditional, orthodox-Marxist way of looking at the colonial world in terms of a series of class-determined oppositions to an alliance between imperialism and a subordinated feudalism rightly appears problem-ridden, stilted, and reductionist today. But it did provide some space

⁸⁷ A major example would be certain significant silences in Partha Chatterji's comprehensive recent work, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories* (Delhi, 1994). Chatterji's subsequent article, 'Secularism and Toleration', *Economic and Political Weekly*, xxix, 28, 9 July 1994, is the clearest embodiment so far of the slide from subaltern through peasant to religious community. For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 3.

for distinguishing between varieties of nationalism in terms of their social perspectives and composition. A glance back at the pages of a journal like *Dawn* suggests that we are today in some danger of unwittingly reproducing the assumptions and values of a particularly narrow and elitist cultural nationalism. What is required, perhaps, is some equivalent of the 'doubled' (or better, multiple) vision socialist-feminist historians have been struggling to attain. Gender in capitalist societies cannot be understood in total separation from class: it has repeatedly proved disastrous to collapse the one into the other.⁸⁸

Much more is at stake here than merely academic historiography. I have argued elsewhere that the shift towards criteria of indigenous 'authenticity' and 'community' can constitute, however unwittingly, certain dangerous common discursive spaces, for already some of the more sophisticated ideologues of Hindutva have started using similar categories and arguments.⁸⁹ My glance back at non-statist, samaj-oriented patriotic histories should raise some doubts also about the strategy, often advocated nowadays in the spate of writings about communalism (provoked by recent developments), of postulating traditional catholicities against the homogenizations being projected by Hindutva or Muslim fundamentalist groups: 'authentic community-consciousness', so to say, against 'communalisms' ultimately attributable to colonial discourses.⁹⁰ A journal like *Dawn*, for instance, carefully kept away from the communal numbers game that had begun in Bengal soon after the decline of the Swadeshi movement,⁹¹ argued that homogenization was contrary to the true spirit of Hinduism and an offshoot of Western cultural domination, and yet quite aggressively asserted high-caste, patriarchal values.

⁸⁸ Joan Kelly, 'The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory', in Judith Newton, Mary Ryan and Judith Walkowitz (eds), *Sex and Class in Women's History* (London, History Workshop Series, 1983).

⁸⁹ Sumit Sarkar, 'The Anti-Secularist Critique of Hindutva: Problem of A Shared Discursive Space', in *Geminal: Journal of Department of Germanic and Romance Studies*, Delhi University, vol. 1, 1994. See also Chapter 3.

⁹⁰ That, roughly, seems to be Gyanendra Pandey's argument in *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi, 1990).

⁹¹ See the pioneering discussion of this theme in P.K. Datta, 'Dying Hindus': Production of Hindu Communal Common-Sense in Early 20th Century Bengal', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20 June 1993. *Dawn* seems to have carefully side-stepped the question of the alleged decline of Hindu numbers in Bengal as compared to Muslims, raised by U.N. Mukherji in 1909: see the unsigned essay 'Who are Hindus and Who are Not', in *Dawn*, January, February, June 1911.

Such assertions were actually more blatant at times in catholic, non-communal texts that were not primarily engaged in efforts to build Hindu unity against the Christian or Muslim Other. Projects for such unity, in partial contrast, on occasion seemed to demand assimilative caste reform: U.N. Mukherji, once again, provides an excellent Bengal example.⁹² The emergence, already around the Swadeshi years and on a vastly enhanced scale today, of alternative lower-caste histories and conceptions of solidarities makes the reiteration of indigenous, undifferentiated community-values highly problematic. Their concordance with contemporary feminist values would be as difficult.

Much of the appeal of late *Subaltern Studies*, as well as some of the criticisms it has evoked, flow from its apparent affinities with aspects of postmodernism — or more precisely perhaps with what has come to be called postcoloniality. These include the centrality of anti-Enlightenment rhetoric, the oscillation between 'community' and 'fragment', and an occasional toying with moods of epistemological uncertainty. Postmodernisms in recent years have swung sharply between what can amount to affirmations of identity-politics (as counterposed to the allegedly homogenizing politics of universal and equal rights going back to the Enlightenment), and celebrations of hybridization, of identities disintegrating as globalization intensifies.⁹³ I have argued in another chapter that I find the one pole as unacceptable as the other, particularly in post-Ramjanmabhumī India, but also that the parallels with postmodernism, whether drawn in admiration or as critique, I believe to be based in large part on misrecognitions.⁹⁴ Rhetoric against other people's metaphysical totalities apart, there has been very little, really, in late *Subaltern Studies* of reflexive, self-doubting moods and methodological disquiet raised by the problematizations of language in recent years. This to me is a matter of some regret, for such reflexivity can have considerable value. It has helped to make an increasing number of historians far more self-aware and questioning about the representations they use

⁹² See Chapter 9 for some elaboration of this argument.

⁹³ For two recent critiques of this 'tendency . . . to waver constantly between the opposing polarities of cultural differentialism and cultural hybridity', see Aijaz Ahmad, 'The Politics of Literary Post-Coloniality', from which I have taken the quoted passage (*Race and Class*, 36, iii, January-March 1995), and Terry Eagleton, 'Where do Post-Modernists Come From?', *Monthly Review*, 47, iii, July-August 1995.

⁹⁴ See Chapter 3.

as their 'sources', the categories they employ, and the rhetoric implicit in their writings, and much fine work is being done nowadays dancing, as it were, at the edges of relativism.

Yet it is difficult to deny that a complete surrender to relativistic positions tends to become self-contradictory, being far easier to apply to other people's positions than to one's own. Paradoxically, it can also become a kind of soft option: if all statements are really on the same level, what matters is presentation, display, command over up-to-date style, not the toil of hard research or genuine auto-critique. Charles Taylor has argued recently that extreme subjectivism ignores the fundamentally dialogic nature of human life, language and knowledge, its development, always, through interaction and exchange.⁹⁵ A dialogical imagination, further, need not necessarily abstract from power relations, though that has happened at times in some readings of Mikhail Bakhtin. What it necessarily emphasizes are the non-monologic, social, conditions of production of consciousness. The effort to develop a social history of historical awareness acquires, then, an added significance. It can point towards ways of recognition of the reflexive turn that do not have to succumb to complete subjectivism.

I have argued implicitly throughout this essay that an exploration of the social conditions of production of history cannot afford to remain a merely intellectual project. It needs to become part of wider and far more difficult efforts to change these conditions. The paradox of postcolonial front-ranking historiography has been that the affirmation of socially radical values and approaches (unimaginable for old masters like Jadunath Sarkar or R.C. Majumdar, for instance) has been accompanied by more, rather than less, elitism in structures of historical production and dissemination. Late *Subaltern Studies*, as the first Indian historiographical trend to achieve an international prestige largely prior to, and in excess of, its reputation within India, is peculiarly open to a critique in terms of its 'politics of location'. But of course elitism operates within academic structures inside the country too, and at many different levels. Residence, or even language — writing in Hindi or other indigenous languages rather than in English — will not automatically eliminate hierarchies.

The marginalization of the JNU historians' manifesto was a reminder that there has been relatively little sustained or effective attempt to spread the methods, findings, and values of even the

⁹⁵ Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition'.

more India-rooted, post-1950s Left-nationalist historiography beyond 'higher' academic circles. The spread-effects of History Congress sessions, the possibly more effective state-level conferences conducted through regional languages, sporadic translation efforts, and occasional refresher courses, remain fairly limited, and the possibilities of democratic dialogue often get further restricted, even within these limits, by the prevalence of hierarchized structures and attitudes. And it is surely symptomatic that the high degree of interest in Western Marxist and radical historiographies has never been extended to include efforts to learn from 'history workshop' experiments. In Britain, Germany and some other Western countries, these have sought to go beyond the academic guild through extra-mural adult and workers' education initiatives. They have encouraged workers and other ordinary folk to write or speak about their experiences and memories, and tried to form groups of local 'barefoot historians'.⁹⁶ In India, however, with the important and honourable exception of gender studies, which has offered considerable opportunities at times for fruitful interaction between activists and academics, research and teaching tend to remain highly hierarchized even among Left intellectuals.

The contrasting experiences of two efforts at preparing school textbooks can serve in conclusion as indicators of problems – and possibilities. In the schools where they have been in use, the National Council of Education, Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks commissioned in the mid-1970s from front-ranking (and mostly Delhi-based) historians have certainly helped to eliminate the blatant communal bias at the level of prescribed texts (through not necessarily from actual teaching),⁹⁷ and outdated histories have been displaced to some extent by the findings and approaches of post-independence research. But their impact has been reduced by over-

⁹⁶ It is seldom remembered that E.P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* originated as lectures to adult education classes for Yorkshire workers. The *History Workshop Journal* contains abundant information about extra-guild initiatives, emerging from British New Left and socialist-feminist movements. For the less known but important West German developments in the 1980s, see Alf Ludtke's Introduction to Ludtke (ed.), *The History of Everyday Life* (Frankfurt, 1989; Eng. trans., Princeton, 1995), and Geoff Eley, 'Labour History, Social History, Alltagsgeschichte: Experience, Culture and the Politics of the Everyday – A New Direction for German Social History?', *Journal of Modern History*, 61, June 1989.

⁹⁷ RSS-run schools in Delhi often use NCERT textbooks, no doubt interpreting them in their own way.

burdened syllabi, bureaucratic management, and a concentration on providing 'correct' factual information and interpretation rather than imaginative pedagogical presentations. The texts were written by university scholars with little possibility of contact with secondary education: inputs through discussions with schoolteachers, difficult to organize for such a centralized, Delhi-based project, seem to have been minimal.

A decade or so later, the Eklavya volunteer group was able to work out much more interesting and innovative history texts and teaching methods through sustained grassroots work in the not particularly propitious atmosphere of Hoshangabad's small town and village schools in Madhya Pradesh. There were consultations with metropolitan historians (the initiators of the history textbooks project were themselves JNU graduates), but also repeated rounds of discussions with local schoolteachers. Eklavya history texts contain less factual detail than the NCERT books: combined with constant attention to teaching methods, they do seem geared towards much more classroom discussion and creative assimilation.⁹⁸ Eklavya recently organized a teaching-cum-research seminar of Madhya Pradesh college teachers, and has had plans for collecting historical material through its far-flung and socially diverse local contacts. Money of course remains a very major constraint, for Eklavya, unlike most NGOs today, has so far kept away from all international funding agencies.

Such experiences are a reminder that what is needed is not just more effective channels of communication through which high academic wisdom can be disseminated downwards, but efforts to democratize also the production of historical knowledge, to work towards a new kind of historical culture. There is a need to pioneer ways of developing interaction among researchers, teachers, and activists drawn from, or working among, diverse social strata. On

⁹⁸ The ancient Indian history textbook, to take a specific example, includes a number of stories, some taken from the Jatakas and other texts, others invented. A story set in a hunting-foodgathering community is followed by questions as to what its members would do if hunters fail to find game. Initial responses, I was told, often suggest going to the market, or, more commonly, borrowing from the mahajan. Further classroom discussions can then highlight what is and is not possible in a particular historical situation, thus introducing basic notions about the logic of a social formation far more imaginatively and effectively than any formal definition. Incidentally, I recall being amazed by the level of animated discussion in an Eklavya village class — admittedly in one of their best schools.

THE MANY WORLDS OF INDIAN HISTORY

a long-term scale, collaborative research works and textbooks could emerge, enriched by multiple social and pedagogical experiences, and based on a mutual reformulation of perspectives.

I know this will sound hopelessly utopian, and particularly so because any suggestion for moving beyond the professional guild tends to get equated with some form of 'going to the people', which is then dismissed as unrealistic for the vast majority of academics. What I am suggesting as beginnings are far more modest things. There seems no reason, for instance, why participants at the many seminars that are constantly being held in cities like Delhi should not include at least some schoolteachers. The hierarchical divisions between scholars at research institutes, university teachers, and those working in undergraduate colleges are visibly deepening: surely something should be done to reduce these barriers. One way could be informal discussion groups — inevitably middle class, perhaps, but still including people other than academics: for history, surely, is a subject in which intelligent interest does not demand great professional knowledge. I can recall some groups like these, one of them consisting of trade union activists, as well as dedicated efforts to bring out a historical journal in the vernacular, from the Calcutta of my youth, and no doubt there have been many such instances elsewhere. Small beginnings: but surely we can agree that the many worlds of Indian history must not be allowed to fly totally apart, as the social base of producers and intended audiences of front-ranking South Asian scholarship narrows, even while reaching out towards global horizons.

Introduction

Akio Tanabe

THE STATE IN THE POST-COLD WAR PREDICAMENT

Since the end of the Cold War, a tremendous change has taken place in the world order. Communism has lost its ideological appeal and neo-liberalism has come to dominate the political scenario. At the same time, however, religious nationalism, ethno-nationalism, and various kinds of so-called fundamentalism as well as other kinds of claims for political and social entitlements by ethnic, religious, regional, linguistic, gender-sexuality, and caste groups and communities have emerged vigorously and come to pose serious challenges in many parts of the world. This situation suggests that the modern state system, earlier sustained under the 'balance-of-power' structure of the Cold War, has now been shaken from its foundation. Hitherto latent political and social forces have begun to surface. India is no exception in this sense. Not only have new problems emerged in this region, but various old problems also seem to have reappeared with a new vigour. Such moves are forcing us to reconsider presuppositions regarding what the state is and ought to be.

There is now a plethora of groups and communities—religious, ethnic, linguistic, caste, etc.—which demand legitimate rights of participation, autonomy, and resource distribution from the state in India.¹ The basic question seems to be, 'Who has what entitlement and agency in which sphere?' Like in many other areas of the contemporary world, Indian state and society now seem to be going through a process of redefinition of entitlements and agencies of different peoples, in which many groups and communities are attempting to maximize their legitimate presence in the socio-political sphere. In the democratic set-up of a nation-state, the question of entitlement and agency is directly related to

the question of representation: 'Who are to represent and be represented in the Indian nation-state?' There are now increasing demands and violence that surround questions of who legitimately represent the nation and who have legitimate claims on the state.² This question of 'who?' is the essence of what is called identity politics in India today. In this cultural-political process of redefinition of public entitlements, agency, and representation of groups and communities, the nature and function of the Indian state are under serious intellectual and political contestation.³

Incidents of violence in modern India after the Cold War—especially the caste upheaval regarding application of the Mandal report in 1990, the communal clashes in the Ayodhya case in 1992, and most recently the massacre in Gujarat in 2001—seem to have cast doubts among observant global citizens about not only the maturity of democracy in India but also its very possibility. Are divisions along caste and religious lines so deeply rooted in Indian culture that it is not possible to overcome them unless Indianness is negated altogether? Our answer should be a definite 'No' to such a facile essentialist and colonialist understanding. If we contextualized these incidents in the global process of redefinition of entitlements, agency, and representation under the post-Cold War predicament, they would be seen as violent eruptions of the pain and difficulties which such a redefinition process unfortunately and inevitably incurs. It should be clear that the outbreaks of violence are not due to any Indianness. Nevertheless, if we are to understand the particular nature of cultural-political processes in India in which these brutal incidents took place, it is also necessary to understand the specific characteristics of Indian state and society. The kind of identity politics that is emerging in the current situation can only be understood if we take into account the nature of the relationships between the state and society in the history and culture of India.

In this volume, we focus on the state because it is a space where contemporary problems can be found in a condensed form. The focus will be on the nature of the state in India in the past and present. By considering the state, we hope to recognize the roots of contemporary problems in India and the surrounding world.⁴

THE QUESTION OF SOVEREIGNTY AND LEGITIMACY: ON 'CRISIS' OF THE INDIAN STATE

One of the questions in the emerging global order lies in defining the function of the state, that is to say, the extent to which the state would

maintain its sovereignty. The modern international state system, allegedly established by the Westphalia Treaty (1648) in Europe, presupposed that the state was the main source of security for the people and the only legitimate player in international politics. Thus the state was given a privileged position as the sovereign agent in international as well as domestic politics. However, it is precisely the state's sovereignty that is now under question. Is the state supposed to command monopoly over the total and monolithic sovereignty? Are independent sovereign states the only legitimate players in international politics? Or should limitations be placed on their sovereignty and cessions made to supra-national and sub-national communities and groups? These are fundamental questions the answers to which will largely decide the nature and form of future democracy and global order.

The problem of the state, at the level of the regime, can be captured as a crisis of 'legitimacy'.⁵ The legitimacy of a democratic regime rests in effective representation. There now appears to be growing discontent over the lack of proper representation among various groups and communities in India.

The growing discontent and demands are related to the ironic fact that post-colonial India succeeded in establishing the 'state at the core of India's society'.⁶ The state 'infiltrate(d) the everyday lives of Indians, claiming itself responsible for everything they could desire'.⁷ Thus although the state has succeeded in establishing itself as responsible for people's welfare, it has not, in reality, been able to provide many people with basic needs for survival and dignity. Under this failure of governance, it is natural that there are active political demands and discontent towards the state through which people aspire to fulfil their desires and basic needs.⁸

In other words, it is because the state has monopolized the function of legitimate redistribution of resources that the question of representation and entitlements in state politics has become a crucial issue in modern post-colonial India.⁹ Distribution of resources in pre-colonial India, however, as we will touch upon later, was mainly managed by the social system of rights rather than by the state. Thus monopoly of the function of distribution of resources by the state, people's discontent over the present set-up, and active demands over representation and entitlements in state politics stem from the modern transformations in the form and function of the state. So, in order to reconsider what is required of the state and society today, we must locate the present form and function of the Indian state in the context of a longer history.

Although the people's expectations towards the state have increased, the working of the Indian state does not seem to match the responsibility it has increasingly taken on itself. This has led to the situation where there is a 'growing crisis of governability'¹⁰ and 'crisis of political institutions'¹¹ in India. With the growing concentration of responsibility and power of the state, instead of the development of governability, unfortunately there has been a rise of everyday malfunctions and corruptions that have become a part of the built-in system of the post-colonial Indian state.¹² As Bishnu Mohapatra points out, 'It is not inappropriate to say that the "crisis" of institutions and the erosion of norms and values in India have indeed become "routine" and "everyday"'.¹³ In this situation, there is now serious reconsideration of the role and function of the state in India.

THE PLACE OF THE STATE IN INDIAN HISTORY

One of the crucial questions related to the predicament of the contemporary Indian state is how to understand the position of the state in Indian history. This question is important since a historical understanding of the Indian state would greatly influence the evaluation of the contemporary situation. The issue here is whether we should see the present kind of state exercising influence on society as a continual development from the pre-colonial Indian state or as a new introduction by British colonial rule.

It is commonly perceived that the state in pre-colonial traditional India occupied a marginal place. Most influentially professed by Dumont,¹⁴ this view of India holds that the domain of power is encompassed by, and therefore hierarchically inferior to, the religious domain which defines status in caste society. Thus, according to this view, 'a crucial feature of traditional Indian society was its ability to marginalise the political order'.¹⁵ Here, instead of the state controlling society, the regulative norm of society is seen to check the state's power.¹⁶ As a consequence, the Indian state is considered to lack the 'developmental potential of pre-modern European states'.¹⁷ Thus, Khilnani says, 'Unlike the history of Europe, that of pre-colonial India shows no upward curve in the responsibilities and capacities of the state'.¹⁸

If we hold this kind of view on the traditional Indian state, we will have to assume an unbridgeable gap in the history of India between the weak and marginalized traditional state on the one hand, and the modern state with its coercive power and systemized administration on the

other. As a corollary, Khilnani says that 'the state as a sovereign agency...did not exist' in the pre-colonial period and that 'foreign rulers brought with them to India a concept of the state'.¹⁹ Kaviraj goes as far as stating that under colonialism, there was 'a process of state-formation in the entirely literal sense of the term: i.e. the complex of institutional mechanisms that we call the "state" was in fact "formed", literally brought into existence'.²⁰

There is no doubt that a radical change took place in the concept and structure of power under colonialism. However, we are of the opinion that the kind of historical understanding which assumes a complete break between the pre-colonial and the modern Indian state cannot be maintained. There have been vigorous ethnohistorical and anthropological criticisms on Dumont's understanding of the traditional Indian state by 'neo-Hocartians' such as Dirks, Raheja, and Quigley who stress the importance of the workings of the state for the social order, especially caste.²¹ The problem is not only about revising the understanding of 'traditional' India. The question of continuity and change of the Indian state over history is important for the evaluation of the contemporary Indian state as it is related to how we comprehend the derivation of the contemporary Indian state. If we suppose that the state was formed only under colonialism, we will have to admit that the legitimacy and idea of the present Indian state came from the West. The problem is that this kind of view would necessarily place the Western state, or at least its ideas, as the model to be imitated by non-Western colonized countries. Under such assumptions, the 'crisis' of the Indian state will only be assessed in terms of how India failed to imitate the model correctly. This will strip Indians of their agency in creating their own nation-state.²² However, if we view the present 'crisis' of the Indian state as part of the historical process of redefinition of its structure in relation to the particular nature of Indian society, our understanding of the Indian state will be contextualized in its own history of structural development over a longer span of time. What we aim to do in this volume is precisely such contextualization of understanding of the Indian state in the past and present.

THE BIRTH OF THE STATE IN INDIA AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION TO SOCIETY

It is a recognized fact that the term 'state' is very difficult to define or conceptualize.²³ When we attempt to dissect the state from society, it

becomes impossible to find a clear boundary separating the two. However, if it is impossible to answer the essentialist question of what the state is at a theoretical level, it is all the more important to see what the state has been in its relation to society in history.

The first section in this volume, 'Formation and Concept of the State', attempts to discover the characteristics of state formation and concept of the state in India. Special attention will be paid to questions on the nature of the state in relation to society as regards the organization and legitimacy of power.

The first essay in Section I by Gen'ichi Yamazaki deals with the process of state formation in ancient north India in the period of the Sixteen *Mahājanapadas* (sixth-fifth centuries BC). This is an interesting intermediate period between the period of preceding tribal kingdoms (*janapada*) and the eventual hegemony of the Magadha.²⁴ There were different types of states competing in this period. Yamazaki presents an interesting comparison of the different types of states in this period showing the patterns of relationships between the state and society.

Yamazaki tells us that the Gana-Saṅga system of the 'tribal republic' represents the state before kingship. The state was collectively ruled by the heads of households. In this kind of polity, there is no clear division between the state and society. The structure of the state overlapped with that of social power in the community. Regarding early 'tribal kingship', Yamazaki explains that it was born in the upper Ganga valley where Brahmanical culture had developed with Vedic literature, rituals, and varṇa social system since the later Vedic period (c. 1000-600 BC). However, there was hardly any development of kingship in the later period.

These states of tribal republic and tribal kingship lost their independence one after another with the development of the Magadha kingdom of the lower Ganga valley. Yamazaki describes the successful development of 'autocratic kingship' of Magadha by not only referring to the availability of rich natural resources in the region but by also pointing out that this region was relatively free from the varṇa social system and Brahmanical tradition as it was located in the eastern frontier of the Aryan world. The king was able to make efforts to increase the strength and efficiency of the state without the constraints of tribal bonds and varṇa system. Yamazaki's clear explanation enables us to see that it was from the Magadha kingdom onwards that the state began to have its own agency beyond the social system. As Romila Thapar points out,

it is when the sovereignty of the state becomes independent of the power structure and cultural norms in society that we can see the true development of the state.²⁵

However, this does not mean that a simplistic distinction can be drawn between the state and society. Through Yamazaki's analysis, we can deduce that the state had to be free from social constraints in order to develop its strength, but also depended on society for provision of resources. Also, the state had to present itself as the protector of social norms in order to legitimize its sovereign power over society. Such nuanced relationships between the state and society remain an important topic of discussion throughout this volume.

THE MULTIPLE LAYERS AND AGENTS OF THE INDIAN STATE: INTEGRATION THROUGH COMPETITION

The second article by Kulke presents a lucid and comprehensive account of state formation in early medieval India with an analysis of their genesis and historiographical contexts. Kulke re-examines his concept of 'integrative model' mainly vis-à-vis theories of feudalism represented by R.S. Sharma and the segmentary state proposed by B. Stein.²⁶ He critically evaluates the contributions and future possibilities of his integrative model. The importance of the integrative model is that it sheds light on the aspect of integration in the process of state formation rather than on the aspects of fragmentation and segmentation which theories of Indian feudalism and the segmentary state tended to stress.²⁷

Kulke reintroduces his processual model of state formation where there was integral development from 'tribal/Hindu chieftaincy' which consisted of a small nuclear area, to the 'early kingdom' which extended its political authority to the hinterland and had a 'circle of tributary neighbours', to the 'imperial regional kingdom' which possessed plural major nuclear areas and respective tributary neighbours. An important point is that although local dynasties ceased to exist in the core areas, 'local autonomous corporate institutions...continued to exist within and autonomous tributary kingdoms outside these enlarged imperial core areas'. Many of these institutions—temples, pilgrimage centres, monasteries, etc.—and lesser kingdoms retained their own identity and even enhanced their importance after integration. Thus Kulke's model has attempted to place processes of integration as 'a counterpoint to the processes of fragmentation and segmentation', and not to deny them.

Kulke, however, concedes that the integrative model so far 'has primarily focused on modes of integration from the centre'. He calls for the need to pay more attention to the processes of competition and contestation from the periphery involved in the integration process.²⁸ He also contends that we should look at how state ideologies and legitimisation are constantly redefined in continuous processes of competition and negotiation. Kulke in the end proposes the phrase 'integration through competition' through which he hopes to concede 'a stronger participation and a more active role to the many local and subregional institutions, without, however, deconstructing the royal centre'. His newly paraphrased 'integration through competition' is definitely a step forward in the model of state formation allowing more space to the various agents in the periphery and from below in the overall process of integration.

Kulke's contribution to the understanding of state formation in India is particularly important as it contains the potential of explaining the mechanism of state integration with the simultaneous existence of autonomous spheres and agents within. One of the important characteristics of the traditional Indian state is that the sovereignty of the state was never monolithic but rather 'layered and shared'.²⁹ Multiple layers of polities are known to have existed within the state.³⁰ Moreover, there were other important autonomous spheres and agents within the Indian state, such as temples, religious sects, caste communities, markets, and banking networks.

It may be said that characteristics of the pre-colonial Indian state are based on the fact that it reflected and coordinated the balance of interests and values of different groups, communities, and polities. At the same time, the state could render itself as representing the universal and higher values that transcended the differences and thus appear as the central point of unity and integration of these multiplicities. With the legitimacy of the universal value it represented, the state could command authority over social groups and lesser polities. But since the machinery of governance was so dependent on the social groups and lesser polities, the state's strength could not derive from being a monolithic sovereign entity. Its power came about instead by offering an integral sphere of coordination, competition, and contestation between different groups, communities, and polities. In turn, these groups and communities in society could live together as their contestations and clashes were arbitrated by the state as the unifying centre around which they were connected and coordinated. In Bayly's words which Kulke

quotes, 'Further model (on Indian state formation) might stress that the state was neither centralised nor decentralised, but something which depended on its ability to arbitrate between contending local groups, tribes, classes, etc., i.e. its strength was not so much an essential feature but a reflection of the nature of society it was trying to govern'.³¹ Kulke's model of 'integration through competition' points towards creating such a model of state formation.

THE STATE AND SOCIETY IN INDIA

If the feature of the Indian state lay in its 'reflection of the nature of society it was trying to govern', the questions we must ask as a corollary are what was the nature of Indian society and how was it reflected in the state's structure? The third article by Kimura attempts to answer these questions.

Kimura suggests that it is the socio-political powers at the village level which condition the structures of larger level politics and the state. He compares the Indian case to the Japanese, pointing out the differences in their internal structures. He points out that the pre-war Japanese political system of the 'family-state' was rooted in similar power relations in the Japanese village community, where the relationships of 'patriarchal governance-cum-protection' and 'filial obedience' between landlords and tenants were given importance. Kimura goes on to argue that, unlike the case of Japan, the Indian village structure is characterized by a system of division of labour called the '*jajmani* system' in the previous literature which did not rest on personal relationships but on exchange of protection, payment, and services fixed by custom. By *jajmani* system, Kimura does not mean dyadic patron-client relationships but the impersonal relationships based on land or rights inherent in the land. He suggests that this kind of 'impersonal' arrangement of rights enabled the Indian village community to retain its integrity despite caste divisions. The importance of such 'rights-based' structure of the Indian local community is also pointed out by Kotani (*vatan* system), Mizushima (*mirasi* system), and Tanabe (system of entitlements) in this volume. In our understanding, it was one of the most important aspects of Indian medieval society that had a large influence also on the structure of the Indian state.

Kimura points out that it was precisely this kind of impersonal system of rights in the Indian social structure that led to the segmented character of the Indian state.³² The lack of contractual relationships and

the waning of personal allegiance of the inferior towards the superior is an extension of the impersonal relationships in the Indian village community. In such social context, land granted to the inferior is easily transformed into independent rights and share.³³ The segmented structure of the Indian state where semi-independent political powers overlap is thus a result of the political culture of impersonal arrangement of rights in India.

He further points out that in comparison to Japan, contemporary India faces difficulties in maintenance of governability, just as the segmented character of the Indian state allowed subordinate groups a large degree of independence without binding ties to the superior body. The segmentary character of the state and society meant that a Nehruvian, socialist, state-run policy of economic development was doomed to fail. However, on the other hand, Kimura suggests, there are possibilities of dynamic socio-economic development if India rebuilds her political authority, since in today's age of globalization, the autonomy of subordinate groups is an asset for cultivating close relationships with transnational or international organizations.

Kimura's article explains the nature of the Indian state in reference to the features of Indian society characterized by impersonal arrangements of rights and segmentary structure. This kind of sociological explanation, however, must be contextualized in a specific time and place to test its validity. In Section II of this volume, we go on to look at the forms of the state in particular regional and historical contexts and see how they transformed over history especially during early modern and colonial periods.

SOCIAL SYSTEM, IDEOLOGY, AND THE STATE IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

Section II of this volume, 'Forms and Process of the State', deals with the forms and process of transformation of the Indian state from medieval to early modern and colonial periods. Changing characteristics of the Indian state through history in relation to society and economics are taken up.

First, let us again consider the point raised by Kimura regarding the 'rights-based' Indian social system and its influence on the form of the state. There have been attempts to describe and give a name to 'yet some unspecified "medieval Indian social formation"' ³⁴ or the 'medieval Indian system'. ³⁵ Pioneered by Fukazawa's seminal work on

reconsideration of the system of division of labour in pre-colonial Indian society,³⁶ Kotani, Mizushima, and Tanabe point to the existence of similar social systems prevalent in pre-colonial India. There was a set of patrimonial rights—variously called *vatan*, *miras*, etc.—that involved claims upon shares of local products, certain socio-political roles, and ritual privileges and duties.³⁷ Now the question is what position and role the state had in relation to such rights-based society.

The first article of Section II by Kotani looks at the relationship between society and the state in medieval Deccan. He pays attention to the predominant ideology of *doṣa* (sin)—*prāyaścitta* (penance), and considers what kind of role the state played in relation to such ideology. It should not be misunderstood that Kotani is suggesting another set of oppositional values to explain Indian society in a structuralist manner. Rather, the point of his argument is that there was a clear public code of proper behaviour and its violation resulted in the 'sin' of the individual and related parties that had to be rectified through 'penance'. The public code of proper behaviour was defined according to one's position in the social order, at the core of which was the caste and the *vatan* system. The sin-penance ideology played an important part in sustaining the state order and social stability. The material basis of this ideology, Kotani argues, was the '*doṣa* (crime)—*daṇḍa* (punishment) relationship' as physical power of compulsion was implemented by the state (*sarkārdaṇḍa*) and communal control was applied by the local society through caste penalty (*jātidāṇḍa*).

Thus, according to Kotani's argument, the ideology of sin-penance functioned to legitimize the power structure which, in turn, worked to maintain the social order through crime-punishment relationships. In this way, both the state and the local society drew on the same 'sin-penance ideology' for the maintenance of stability and order; and they did so fairly independently of each other through their respective and mutually complementary functionalities. It is interesting that not only social power but also the state commanded control over the social order. Although the state seems rather dependent on the social order for its overall stability, it also had distinct authority beyond social power to maintain order through coercive power.

Mizushima's article on south India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also argues that the system based on patrimonial rights, which he calls the 'mirasi system', was at the core of the socio-political structure. In this system, all levels of participants from the village functionaries to the state performed their respective duties in lieu of

shares in the production. The state was an important and essential part of this system in the late pre-colonial period. Mizushima suggests that the mirasi system was the grammar in the social architecture, built upon the main central pillar of the local society supported by other main pillars of the state, large *poligars* (military groups), and influential temples.

There are some nuanced differences between Kotani and Mizushima in the way the state is placed in relation to the vatan and mirasi systems respectively. In Kotani's formulation, the vatan system is seen basically as a social system in which the state interferes as another authority. In Mizushima's framework, however, the state is seen not as being outside but as constituting an essential part of the mirasi system. The question we must ask here is whether the system of patrimonial rights was the overall system in which both the state and society were embedded or the state had a distinct authority and existence independent of the social system. The reality seems to be that there is truth in both aspects. The state certainly had its duty and share in the system of patrimonial rights. In the arena of the system of rights, the state and other players competed against each other to enhance their own shares, as Mizushima argues.³⁸ At the same time, it is also true the state had its distinct existence, role, and authority beyond society as Kotani suggests. Although the state had a role to play in the system of rights, what made the state 'the state' was not its role in this social system. As the article by Yamazaki clearly shows, the state exists as the state when it transcends the bonds of social relations. It is necessary to further investigate what position and role the state had in relation to the social system of patrimonial rights in medieval India.³⁹

THE EARLY MODERN STATE, COMMERCE, AND VALUES

Tanabe's article in this volume takes up the question of the relationship between the social system of rights—which he calls "the system of entitlements"—and the state of Khurda in eighteenth-century Orissa. He introduces the concept of the 'sacrificer state and sacrificial community' to describe the relationship between the Khurda kingdom and the local community. He argues that the system of entitlements in the local community took shape as the sacrificial organization as the duties prescribed by the system were performed as sacrifice. However, the sacrificial organization in the local community was ideologically made incomplete without the symbolic presence of the king who had

established his authority as the sacrificer. It was the king then who legitimized each entitlement and functioned as the symbolic centre of the system of rights though he stood outside and beyond the local community. Tanabe suggests that the formation of 'sacrificer state and sacrificial community' may be related to the early modern development of the state when 'administrative technologies of surveillance, numeration, calculation and recording' penetrated into the system of entitlements. Each entitlement was calculated and recorded in cowry numbers and tax was taken by the state from there. Numeration of resources in the locality led to linking local communities to a larger sphere of market and trade. At the same time, there was 'ritualization and divinization of the king' in Khurda kingdom as the king represented Lord Jagannath, the 'real ruler of Orissa', on earth. It was the divine king as the central sacrificer who enabled each individual entitlement holder to 'transform the performance of duty according to his place under the system of entitlements as service to the divine'.

Tanabe's article indicates the prospect of widening the scope of research on the state and locating it in relation to administrative, social, commercial, and religious aspects. In future research, it is necessary to further historically contextualize the process of state formation and transformation of the relationship between the state and society in a wider perspective. In particular, we have to pay attention to the early modern development of administrative technology, social transformations, trans-local and transcontinental commercial activities, and *bhakti* religious movements in order to understand the eighteenth-century Indian state.

The vibrant development of marketing and financial systems in India from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries has been recognized by scholars since the 1980s, mainly due to the initiative of Chris Bayly's influential work, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*.⁴⁰ This insight has undermined the imperialist understanding of the eighteenth century as an age of decline. There have been ample researches—by Perlin, Stein, and Washbrook to name but a few—of revision of eighteenth-century India from this point of view.⁴¹ However, the early modern transformation of India in the eighteenth century was not restricted to the economic sphere and we must develop a more holistic understanding of the period.⁴²

Mizushima in this volume deals with social transformation in south India in the late pre-colonial period and considers its effects on the form of the state. In this period, the mirasi system began to collapse as

mirasidars emerged as village lords and attempted to control the distribution of shares previously managed by the system of patrimonial rights. This led to the balance of power between the *mirasidars* and the state shifting to the favour of the former. Mizushima argues that this deconstructive change in the *mirasi* system can be seen as the most important factor leading to political instability in eighteenth-century India. Mizushima's perspective on late pre-colonial transformation in relation to market economy, social system, and the state gives an important insight into the dynamics of eighteenth century.

Regarding the relationship between the state and market economy, previous explanations tended to be formulated in a simple cause and effect manner. As Subrahmanyam's article in this volume neatly summarizes, previous accounts took two routes. In the 'forced commercialization' hypothesis, expounded by Eric Wolf for example, the state tax forced commercialization in society.⁴³ In the 'commercialization of state power' hypothesis, most famously espoused by Chris Bayly, the development of market economy made the king 'the biggest accountant and grocer of the realm'.⁴⁴ Although these two routes are to be highly regarded, Subrahmanyam proposes a third way in which he attempts to reconsider the process of 'state-formation' by taking into account the relationship between the market and its rationality, as well as other principles in the society 'such as honour, warrior status, and the capacity to gamble' which played significant roles in political and ethical organizing of society. Subrahmanyam's attention on values and ethics of the early modern state shares perspectives with Tanabe⁴⁵ and Bayly.⁴⁶ This viewpoint is of particular interest since eighteenth-century Indian statecraft has often been seen as a world of *realpolitik* and calculations.⁴⁷

Subrahmanyam's article approaches the issue by focusing on historical materials regarding a mid-eighteenth century conflict in coastal northern Andhra called the 'Bobbili War'. He points out the significant presence of a commercialized and monetary economy. But this did not mean, he argues, there was a straightforward parallel development in the political field. The economy is not determined by politics and politics is not just a product of developments in the economic sphere. He illustrates the complexities in the 'language of politics' where prices and values coexisted in a twisted manner in late pre-colonial India, pointing out how the historical materials presented offer various hermeneutics according to the 'epistemological framework within which they are located'. Subrahmanyam successfully describes, through his vivid illustrations, the complexity of the situation where the moral

economy of values of loyalty and honour and the political economy of power and money intersected.

Understanding eighteenth-century India is of particular importance since it is the period when we witness early modern transformations of the country prior to the advent of modernity under colonialism. It is necessary to trace the routes of early modern developments carefully in order to assess the effects of colonialism on state formation in India.

COLONIALISM, SOCIETY, AND NATION

Tanabe in this volume points out that one of the most important aspects of the transformations of the Indian state and society under colonialism was the separation between the rational and the religious. In pre-colonial Orissa, there was an inseparable development of the religious and the rational which the divine king mediated. This coexistence of the religious and the rational finds a parallel in south India described by Subrahmanyam where there was a twisted connection between values and prices. During colonial rule, however, there was a 'significant disjunction between the rational and the religious, the former being represented by the colonial state and the latter by the colonized society' according to Tanabe. The complex relationship between the rational and the religious under colonialism will be taken up again later in relation to van der Veer's argument.

Tanabe points out the twin aspects of continuity and change in the transformative process under colonialism. From the viewpoint of continuity, the development of colonial administration was an extension of the pre-existing growth in the administrative technologies of the state as well as the banking and trade networks. From the viewpoint of disjunction, there was a separation of the 'rational state' and 'religious-ritual society', where 'village, caste and kingship' came under the latter, while a centralized colonial government, army, and court were introduced to lead India 'towards rationalization and civilization according to the universal principle of modernity'. This led to a particular 'reorganized continuation' of the decontextualized and reified elements of certain aspects of religion, caste, and kingship that took on new meanings and functions in the field of cultural politics of identity formation.

If we follow Tanabe's argument, there was certainly a development in the capacities of the state in pre-colonial India *pace* Khilnani. In fact, it seems that the colonial government was able to extend its vast network of administration down to the local level precisely because

of this pre-colonial development of government. It appears that there was more continuity of development in governmental administrative technology and expansion than generally recognized. On the other hand, it is also important to note that there came to be an unprecedented harsh-wedged separation between the state and society under colonialism. In this sense, Khilnani and Kaviraj have a point regarding the birth of the state in 1857 that had coercive control and surveillance over society.

Thus, under colonialism, there was an emergence of a strong state which distinguished itself sharply from society. The separation of the state from society did not mean, however, that society was left as it was. The introduction of a new system of law and administration as well as penetration of colonial economy into the locality meant that there was a major transformation of Indian society especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁸

At the level of local society, there was complete destruction of the system of patrimonial rights under colonialism. People of wealth and power—such as mirasidars in south India—who had accumulated patrimonial rights through purchase in the eighteenth century, declined in their influence as the legal claim on the land product was now transferred to landownership. Mizushima's article in this volume argues that the position of mirasidars waned in the late nineteenth century as they lost their economic power, though their status as village lords was acknowledged and institutionalized by the colonial administration. *Pattadars*, whose ownership of land was recognized through registration, took over the central role in villages as landholders and a wider section of the society was able to join this category. There had been a process of transferring the basic sphere of social entity from the local society to the village in the late pre-colonial period. Further, the basic sphere was passed over from the village to the land lot by the colonial administration before this shift was completed. *Pattadars*, the products of colonial rule, were just holders of land lots and were unrelated to the local society and the village. Thus in colonial society, Mizushima says, the Indian villager had neither local society nor village to depend on to stand against the state.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, people could no longer rely on a concrete system of site in the local society or village as a basis for their identity and existence. The system of patrimonial rights was fragmented into individual proprietary rights. In this situation, Indian people attempted to reformulate their identity on various other bases

such as religion, caste, language, and civilization. These different routes of identity formation led to the formation of various trends in Indian nationalism. Meanwhile, the colonial state started to extend its surveillance onto Indian 'culture' largely by categorizing, objectifying, and essentializing caste and religious communities in Indian society. This project of colonial power of knowledge gave a powerful twist to the way Indians imagined their nation as we see in Dirks' article in this volume.

Colonial state in the latter half of the nineteenth century set up a vast project of surveying and recording customs, beliefs, and characteristics of the peoples and communities of Indian society in the form of census and ethnographic investigation. As Kaviraj says, this was 'an attempt to grasp cognitively this alien society and bring it under intellectual control'.⁴⁹ Dirks in this volume highlights this kind of characteristics of knowledge and power of the colonial state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By introducing the term 'ethnographic state', he points out that anthropology rather than history became the 'principal colonial modality of knowledge and rule' for the colonial state. He argues that the colonial state had to find different kinds of strategies for imperial rule after the 1857 rebellions. Land tax and mercantile trade—which characterized the colonial state in first half of the nineteenth century as an 'extractive' state—had disturbed the 'circuits of political and economic vitality' of the eighteenth century. Although they remained as important sources of revenue even in the latter half of the nineteenth century, from this period onwards, the state adopted new kinds of 'policies of indirect rule' and 'non-interference' in which colonial anthropology played a crucial role. Dirks says that the 1857 rebellions led the British to distinguish communities in India as either loyal or disloyal to the colonial state. Under such a regime, colonial knowledge of Indian peoples and cultures came to be employed in order to evaluate matters of loyalty and not revenue. Paradoxically, 'the policy of non-interference thus necessitated a new commitment to colonial knowledge about the subjects of its rule'.

Further, Dirks points out that the 'ethnographic state' was a cause of long-lasting communal and national problems since it categorized Indian people into different communities according to caste and religion and then enumerated and characterized them as distinct categories. Dirks argues that this kind of colonial epistemology of the ethnographic state went on to dominate post-colonial India 'long after its contradictions unleashed the historical inevitability of partition'. It functioned to legitimize the nationalism of figures such as V.S. Savarkar and also

gave scope for 'extreme nationalist ethnographic imaginaries' which continue to have tragic consequences in South Asia even today.

THE SECULAR STATE AND RELIGIOUS SOCIETY: DISJUNCTION AND INTERSECTION

In Section III, 'Ideas and Problematics of the State', we have four articles which discuss the position and role of the Indian state relating to contemporary issues.

Van der Veer's article focuses on the issue of secularity of the state. He takes up what he calls the 'central feature of the idea of secular modernity', namely the 'separation of church and state' in the context of the colonial encounter between India and Britain. By giving examples from this historical relationship, he points out the mutual interdependence between the secular and the religious, and its importance in the emergence of a public sphere. According to van der Veer, 'the separation of Church and State... indicated a shift in the location of religion in society from being part of the state to being part of a newly emerging public sphere'. The secularity of the state is required not to create a secular society but to ensure diverse religious activities in the public sphere. He argues that 'it is not so much that religion cannot be allowed to enter the public sphere in order to let the modern nation-state exist, but that religion creates the public sphere and in doing so is transformed and moulded in a national form'. Vigorous activities of Christian missionaries in India led to detaching the state from patronizing native religious institutions, thus secularizing the state. This also resulted in the creation of a public sphere where religious movements produced modern forms of Hinduism which defined themselves in opposition to the colonizing state. Van der Veer thus convincingly tells us how religion is crucial for the creation of a public sphere in opposition to secularist understanding of the public sphere most famously espoused by Habermas.⁵⁰

He also points out the common misunderstanding regarding 'opposition between religious intolerance and secular liberty', since 'rise of the nation-state and the related emergence of a public sphere makes new, modern forms of freedom and unfreedom, tolerance and intolerance possible'. Van der Veer explains the complexity by pointing out that it was the missionary societies which demanded secularity of the state and freedom of religious opinion, but it was also they who embraced the notion of evolutionary progress which legitimated the colonial project. He further points out that Hindu movements resisted

the colonial project for freedom, but also created a Hinduism containing communal tendencies.

The characteristics of secular state and religious society—each attempting to extend its own sphere of influence—continue to be found in today's post-colonial period. We can see a concrete example of the intricacy of the relationship between secular state and religious public sphere from the account of south Indian temples given by Tanaka in this volume.

Tanaka's article on the politics surrounding south Indian Hindu temples analyses and draws out implications of the controversies involved in lawsuits between temples and the local government. He deals in detail with the case of the Nataraja temple of Chidambaram and says that there apparently exists a realm of 'pure religion' which is 'realized outside the influence of politics'. This is in spite of the fact that the state government often tries to interfere in temple affairs by arguing for the necessity of state intervention in the form of 'law and order' due to chaos and corruption in the temple's financial situation brought about by power politics among the local leaders. In this scheme, the state government sees itself as the king, the maintainer of righteous law (dharma).

However, Tanaka goes on to say that this kind of intervention fails to gain support from the general public as 'politicians and the bureaucrats are not accepted as the keepers of dharma or as faithful devotees (*bhakta*)'. Moreover, if we consider what is happening carefully, there is a 'nationalization of temples or the centralization of temple management' in actuality. That is to say, outwardly there is the principle of separating politics and religion, but in reality, the process of politicization meant that religious spheres came under political control, as the government sought to gain popularity and votes by resorting to all sorts of tactics. The judiciary tends to support the temple's opinions and does not allow state interventions. However, as Tanaka notes, this judgement by the court comes from an interpretation of modern law and not the principle of dharma or devotion. Significantly, the temple's response to government intervention by instigating lawsuits has in fact led to a situation where it is 'caught up in the web of the judiciary system', which is after all a part of the state system, and this leads to the temple's increasing secularization.

Thus Tanaka's article clearly illustrates the complexity of the inter-relationship between the secularity of the state and the religiosity of an institution in the public sphere (the temple), as expressed by van der

Veer. As the temple attempts to maintain its sphere of 'pure religion', it takes up the principle of secularism to keep the state away from interfering in the religious sphere. Tanaka takes the argument further to say that the temple is bound to use the law court for realizing its demand on secularity of the state. By doing so, the temple is led to define its positionality not in terms of a religious framework but in a modern, legal discourse and paves the way for its own self-fashioned secularization.

Here we can see how the relationship between 'the rational state and religious society' under colonialism was not a simple dichotomous separation but an intricate, interdependent, and negotiated process of mutual definition in complex historical dynamism.⁵¹ Dirks demonstrates the process from the state's point of view and how the epistemological framework of the ethnographic state contributed to the production of religious identities in Indian society and further to the rise of communalism. Van der Veer's account shows us how the development of a public sphere in India involved religious movements which tried to identify themselves against the colonial state. In the process of construction of 'self' in opposition to 'others', some of the modern forms of Hinduism that were created by this politics of identity formation took an increasingly communal turn. We also discover in Tanaka's article how a religious institution attempts to defend its 'pure religiosity' by referring to the supposed secularity of the state, and ends up becoming more secularized in terms of its organization by depending on modern legal processes for protecting its religiosity.

In more general terms, it can be said that in this process of mutual definition of the secular state and religious society in colonial and post-colonial India, the state has come to position itself as representing the general will beyond social divisions. Furthermore, the state has attempted to hold power of knowledge and more actual coercion over society based upon this legitimacy.⁵² Meanwhile, many societies (including para-communities)⁵³ and institutions in the public sphere have tried to make religion the basis of their identity, which the modern state cannot take over due to the principle of secularity, and secure their autonomous sphere outside the state. In this process, however, the religious societies and para-communities are becoming increasingly like modern organizations or political groups demanding more representation and entitlements in the name of their particular religious identities. This brings us back again to the question of democracy and representation in Indian politics.

DEMOCRACY AND REPRESENTATION IN POST-COLONIAL INDIA

The paradox of Indian democracy is pointed out succinctly by Kaviraj as follows: 'The paradox... is that if Indian politics becomes genuinely democratic in the sense of coming into line with what the majority of ordinary Indian would consider reasonable, it will become less democratic in the sense of conforming to the principles of a secular, democratic state acceptable to the early nationalist elite'.⁵⁴ Kaviraj is probably right about the difficulty of reconciliation between the Nehruvian ideal of state politics and what the majority of ordinary Indians would find reasonable. The religious character of Indian society is apparently at odds with the 'secular' idea of the state.

However, first, we should not mistake the non-secular characteristic of Indian society as something that belongs to its pre-modern 'traditional' character. As we have seen, a complicated disjunction between the secular state and religious society developed in the modern, especially colonial, history of India. In other words, it is not so much that the traditional characteristics of Indian society do not allow the realization of a modern secular state. Rather, it is the plight of modern Indian society that it was formed in opposition to the rationalist state in colonial and post-colonial history amongst the complexity of power relationships between state hegemony and pursuit for liberty. For the state to remain secular and non-interfering, society had to prove its religiosity. It was only after the 'majority' religious group felt that they could use the state to their advantage that some people started to question the secular character of the state and demand that the state accepted religious principles.

If this is so, second, we may go on to argue that it is necessary to question and deconstruct the presupposed antagonistic dichotomy between secular state and religious society. It seems to me that the ongoing discussion over the issue of 'secularism' in India is still caught in the colonial division of 'the secular state' and 'religious society'. There is said to be a 'great divide' among Indian intellectuals over whether they would like to promote secular rationality of the modern state or religious communitarian values of the indigenous society.⁵⁵ Such a divide persists partly because there is a tendency to dichotomize secularity and religion and look for an answer in either of the two that would direct both the state and society in a monolithic manner. However, in fact, there will be no contradiction if we set our aim on upholding

a democracy that promotes a space for socio-political negotiation where multiple sections of people with diverse values can interact openly and freely. The state should be supportive of such public spheres, including religious ones, without trying to take over the social function of negotiation and interaction. In this line of thought, the principle of secularism in the sense of non-interference and neutrality of the state in religious spheres—and not in the sense of 'hyper-rationality'⁵⁶ of negating religious values—seems beneficial and necessary not only for protecting public interests from certain religious ideology but also for protecting religious values in society from the arbitrary interference from the state. Surely, an unmediated reflection of a majoritarian socio-religious value on the state would be detrimental to healthy development of an open society where religious values can prosper in free interaction.

Then, there seems no reason why there cannot develop a balance between secularism of the state and religious values of the society. What complicates the matter, however, is that there is no agreement but rather a huge gap in the understanding among Indian intellectuals about the desired balance between the state and society and which of the two should take the leading role in socio-political changes. Nandy's article in this volume describes the situation as follows echoing the 'great divide' mentioned above: 'This is a country where the intellectual culture and traditions of political analysis can be divided into two parts. One comprises those who think that the state is a major instrument of social and political change and must be given primacy in social life; the other comprises those who think that, for civil society to thrive, the state must be contained and redefined'. Nandy himself definitely belongs to the latter group, while Zuberi's article in this volume seems closer to views held by the former.

Nandy in this volume argues that the modern nation-state has been a difficult instrument of democracy in non-Western countries including India and discusses the Indian ambivalence towards the state in the last thirty years. In order to analyse and clarify where the distortion of the present Indian state lies, he takes up three images of the Indian state that have dominated the last 150 years of Indian politics. They are 'the state as a protector' of society from oppressors and outsiders, 'the state as a modernizer or liberator' of society from tradition to the modern world, and 'the state as an arbiter' where social relationships can be renegotiated. He says that currently the first two images have cornered the image of the state as an arbiter and, as a result, its pure political aspect is overruling the possibility of the state as a space for cultural

self-renewal through open renegotiation of social relationships. The state as protector and liberator takes the prerogative in the 'pursuit of social justice, human rights and cultural survival' which would in fact be better facilitated by open politics of social participation. The actual realization of such values has become more difficult for the state in the present condition. Moreover, the breakdown of the image of 'state-as-an-arbiter' has led to a situation in which the state neither protects nor liberates. Access for the citizen to the state and its major institutions decreases as new hierarchies are established that are designated by modern institutions, including the bureaucracy, technocracy, security establishment, and community development. Despite all this, Nandy maintains, or rather hopes, that certain aspects of the image of 'state-as-an-arbiter' have retained the ability to underwrite an open polity as well as a new relationship between Indian traditions and open politics. He also points out that although the Indian state may have grown stronger, it has become less legitimate as an arbiter, protector, and liberator. As a result, legitimacy of the political order is often sought in a field outside the political system such as science, technology, sports, culture, and art. Nandy in the end calls us to seriously reconsider a more attenuated role of the state in order for civil society to thrive and create new forms of political imagination.

The gulf between those who place primacy on the state as an agent for socio-political development and those who would rather have the state's role limited in order for society to develop *sui generis*, seems to be wider than can be filled in a short discussion here. However, it may be pointed out that the form and role of the state can only be decided in a democratic process of interaction between the state and society. If this is so, the question is not whether it is the state or society which should have primacy, but what is the proper way of democratic representation so that both state and society can build up a mutually supportive relationship rather than that of competition for wider sphere of agency. Ways must be insured for public opinion to be freely formed in society and represented democratically in state politics. In contemporary India, the process of democratization in terms of increasing popular participation in politics seems to be an ongoing process. In this process, the political system is bound to go through further transformation and it would not be without reactions and frictions. Polemics aside, we cannot but pray with Nandy that this process of democratization may bring about an open polity that would establish new links between Indian social values and system of political democracy, formulating a space of

renegotiation of socio-political relations towards a better state and society acceptable for Indian people.

NATION-STATE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The last article in this volume by Zuberi looks at the history of independent India and assesses its achievements. In Zuberi's evaluation, contrary to what Khilnani and Kaviraj say, the colonial Indian state lacked the capacity to reorganize or develop Indian society and is fundamentally pre-modern.⁵⁷ In his reckoning, the 'formation of a modern democratic state... represents a major, perhaps *the* major, Indian achievement' in the post-colonial period. As we have discussed, if healthy development of a nation can only be achieved when there is a link between society and the state through a proper route of democratic representation, Zuberi is definitely right about the colonial state being incapable of developing society and the creation of a democratic regime in independent India marking a major breakthrough.⁵⁸

Zuberi's concern lies in how the Indian state can maintain its autonomous agency in international politics. He says that the present international order 'seeks to build a durable structure of inequality and peace enforced by the powerful'. So the established powers resist the entry of new aspirants to equality. The nuclear club is the most exclusive in the contemporary world, and its members have created an 'imposed order' of the 'Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime' made up of domination of five nuclear powers. According to Zuberi, discriminatory political moves that forcibly attempted to exclude new members from the club pushed India into exercising the nuclear option. This was necessary as 'the Indian State's ability to provide security and to conduct an independent foreign policy is dependent on the degree of self-reliance in defence'.

Zuberi predicts that 'international order of the first decades of the twenty-first century is likely to be marked by American attempts to maintain a preponderance of power at the global level while establishing balances of power in various regions of the world'. In this context, he suggests that it is the 'aspirations of autonomy' of India as a state that will continue to govern its future moves. He credits India for managing to 'cope with diverse international and domestic pressures in a democratic framework'. He cites India's success in the fields of science and technology and also in the recent resilient economy. Nevertheless, he anticipates that the present 'reconstitution of society'

will be a long-drawn process with tensions and occasional turbulences. He suggests that the primary instrument for managing this process will be the state and the state resources will be 'heavily stretched'. In the end, however, he is hopeful that 'economic prosperity and diplomatic leverage is propelling India towards the role of an "actor" rather than that of a "subject" in the evolving international order'.

Zuberi thus sees the nation-state as continuing to be a primary player in the world order and national politics of the twenty-first century. In the emergent new global order, the nation-state will probably find it more necessary to concede parts of its sovereignty to the supra-national and sub-national levels, giving up the monolithic unity of state sovereignty. In this process, however, there is no doubt that the nation-state will continue to be the most important apparatus of democracy through which people will represent and exercise their will, even in the decision of limiting and conceding state sovereignty. Moreover, the necessary 'reconstitution of society' pointed out by Zuberi—that is, the same agenda as 'renegotiation of social relations' mentioned by Nandy—can only be achieved if there is a democratic society supported by a democratic state. To what extent the state will participate in this reconstitution process and what role it will play will have to be decided in the very process of democratic representation of people's will. There is little consensus regarding the ideal image of the state among concerned scholars; nevertheless both Nandy and Zuberi seem to agree on the point that we have to expect further socio-political transformations with the development of democratization and that it is necessary to seriously consider what role the state can play thereof.

CONCLUSION

The contemporary volatile process of redefinition of entitlements and representations of diverse groups and communities, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, is taking place as a necessary reconstitution of socio-political relationships since the process of democratization involves increasingly more agents in the arena of political participation. The form of the state, which the widening democracy of India will decide, would probably be different from what western political philosophers have prescribed. The forms of modernity and democracy which India will decide for its own future remain to be seen.⁵⁹

In order for this reconstituting process to take place with minimum tension and violence, it is the state's duty to facilitate the renegotiation

and restructuring of socio-political relationships of diverse groups and communities by providing democratic routes for enunciation and dialogue of voices. In this sense, the state continues to play an important role in ensuring healthy socio-political development. The state and society, rather than opposing and competing for spheres of power and hegemony, should find ways to be mutually supportive. But this is much more easily said than done considering the colonial and post-colonial history of India. Coordination of the relationship between 'powers as they are legally constituted in the domain of the state' and 'powers as they are actually exercised and negotiated in the local societies' is still a 'central problem of Indian politics'.⁶⁰

As we have seen, the viability of the state in India throughout history—arguably including the colonial period—rested in its ability to arbitrate and coordinate the powers and entitlements of diverse groups and communities.⁶¹ The state has been instrumental in providing a common arena of negotiation between various values and interests. Socio-political integration was achieved not by imposing an order but through competition and negotiation in which the state itself took part.

The redistribution of resources and allotment of entitlements were managed in a system of patrimonial rights at the social level in medieval India and the state functioned to assist in maintaining its order. The contemporary Indian state, on the contrary, has largely monopolized the function of redistribution of resources. This is one of the reasons why the state is the target of political demands by so many groups and para-communities. The concentration of power of redistribution in the hands of the state has also brought about corruption. Social demands for access to state resources have led to over-politicization of socio-religious relations. It seems mandatory then that the state recovers its ability to arbitrate socio-political relationships so that production and distribution of resources can be managed in a manner acceptable to the emerging Indian democratic values.

For the state to play this role, it should not identify itself with a particular value or interest in society. The secularity of the state is necessary so that it will not be partial to any religious or non-religious creed. However, this does not mean that the kind of dichotomous division between the secular state and religious society developed through the colonial period must continue. Rather, it remains one of the most important agendas in post-colonial India to overcome such a dichotomy. A key to a viable relationship between the state and society seems to lie in mutual respect for socio-religious values and secularity

of the state. We hope this volume helps us to see the relationships between the state and society and those between secularity and religiosity in India in a better historical and cultural perspective, rather than presupposing their antagonistic contradiction.

Needless to say, India will occupy one of the most crucial and critical positions in the world order in the twenty-first century. An understanding of the past and present of the Indian state is important for discerning present problems as well as looking into future possibilities. Moreover, the Indian state's experience in dealing with its multicultural and heterogeneous condition might provide us with some hints for achieving a better future in a globalized world.

NOTES

1. Freitag talks of the process of 'the redefinition of Indian civil social space and who will be allowed to participate publicly inside that discursive space' (Sandria B. Freitag, 'Contesting in Public: Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Communalism', in David Ludden [ed.], 1996, *Making India Hindu: Religions, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 232). There is indeed such a process of redefinition of public entitlements going on. However, it is also necessary to consider larger conditions for viable civil society. Alongside the issue of participatory rights in civil society, the actual issue in contemporary India seems to be to ensure proper governance from the state through the working of the 'political society' and to form viable political and social ethics through the working of 'moral society'. See Partha Chatterjee, 1998, 'Community in the East', *Economic and Political Weekly*, No. 33, pp. 277-82, and *idem*, 2000, 'Two Poets and Death: On Civil and Political Society in the Non-Christian World', in Timothy Mitchell (ed.), *Questions of Modernity*, Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 35-48, on the concept of 'political society'. See Akio Tanabe, 2002, 'Moral Society, Political Society and Civil Society in Post-colonial India: A View from Orissan Locality', *Journal of the Japanese Association for South Asian Studies*, No. 14, pp. 40-67, on the discussion of 'civil society', 'political society', and 'moral society'.

2. There has been an increase of tension and conflicts as there has been the promulgation of democratic ideas and institutions into the non-elite, subaltern population who place increasing and multiplying demands on the government and do not conform to the behavioural patterns of supposed 'secular' and 'rational' civil society. Cf. A. Kohli, 1990, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This leads us to reconsider the nature of the relationship between subaltern-empowering 'democracy' and urban-elite centred 'civil

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THEMES AND APPROACHES

This book is an attempt to account for and interpret the phenomenon of caste in the Indian subcontinent. It deals primarily with the period from the mid-eighteenth century to the present day, though the first two chapters explore the spread of castelike norms and values in the age of the great sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Indian dynasts.

Of all the topics that have fascinated and divided scholars of south Asia, caste is probably the most contentious. Defined by many specialists as a system of elaborately stratified social hierarchy that distinguishes India from all other societies, caste has achieved much the same significance in social, political and academic debate as race in the United States, class in Britain and faction in Italy. It has thus been widely thought of as the paramount fact of life in the subcontinent, and for some, as the very core or essence of south Asian civilisation.

There is of course an enormous body of academic writing on caste. Studies by anthropologists and other social scientists provide a wealth of closely observed ethnographic detail; many propose sophisticated theoretical interpretations. So, given the notorious sensitivity of this terrain, what is the case for an attempt to explore it from an historical perspective?

In recent years historians have broken much new ground in the study of political and economic change in the subcontinent, both before and during the colonial period. But caste, which is best seen as a meeting ground between everyday Indian life and thought and the strategies of rulers and other arbiters of moral and social order, tends to provoke more heated debate than almost anything else in the specialist literature.

It has been common since the days of British rule for both historians and anthropologists to refer to India as a 'caste society', and to treat the values of so-called caste Hindus as an all-pervading presence in Indian life. Since the 1970s, however, there have been commentators, both within India and abroad, who have accused these

earlier specialists of massively overstating the importance of caste. Some have gone so far as to question the very existence of an ancient pan-Indian caste system, dismissing the idea of caste society as a fabrication of colonial data-collectors and their office-holding Indian informants. This often perplexes newcomers to the field when they read about the many important Indians, including Mahatma Gandhi and other past and present politicians and social reformers, for whom caste was and is a real force in Indian life, and certainly much more than an orientalist's 'imaginings'.¹

The subject of caste throws up other difficulties as well. Those unfamiliar with the field often complain that even the best modern historical studies make little effort to explain what they mean by caste, despite the fact that these works so often refer in passing to such mysterious phenomena as *jati* and *varna*, Backward and Forward Castes, Brahmanism and non-Brahmanism, purity and pollution, untouchability and outcasting, caste movements, casteism, 'caste wars', and much more.

Furthermore, in dealing with such major historical events as the 1857 Mutiny-Rebellion and the anti-colonial 'freedom struggle', the literature often identifies groups of Indians by specific regional caste titles, often without making clear whether this kind of group affinity truly overrides individual decision-making in times of crisis. Not surprisingly, many readers wish to understand more fully what is meant when they read that, in 1857, there were areas where 'the Jats' remained loyal, while 'the Rajputs' and 'the Gujars' rebelled; or that in the 1920s, 'the Patidars' of the Gujarat region joined Gandhi in acts of resistance to British rule. They read too of how Gandhi and his powerful opponent B. R. Ambedkar clashed in the 1930s over the issue of how best to 'uplift' India's millions of so-called untouchables.

Those to whom these terms and concepts are unfamiliar will rightly want to know what an endowment of Jat, Patidar, Brahman or 'untouchable' caste identity actually entailed at these times. Further-

¹ See Inden 1990. Such works as Dirks 1992a, 1992b, Cohn's 'The census, and objectification' in Cohn 1987, Appadurai 1992 and Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993 improve greatly on studies which treat Western orientalist ideas in isolation, especially in suggesting that colonial rule had the effect of turning such 'constructions' into lived reality. (See also Washbrook 1975.) The present volume shares these historical perspectives but argues that while colonialism deserves much emphasis, so too do the many changes which were underway well before the British conquest. Furthermore, much weight will also be given to factors promoting the assertion of caste values in the years since Indian Independence in 1947.

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more, did such affinities change, or did they remain constant and immutable when so much else was changing in India's culture and material environment? Readers of both historical and anthropological works have good reason to ask whether caste is to be seen in any sense as an ancient or primordial essence of Indian life. Should such be the case, how is this to be reconciled with what many historians now say about the fluidity and dynamism of the pre-colonial state systems and economies?

By the same token, non-specialists sometimes find even the most stimulating anthropological discussions of caste hard to reconcile with accounts of nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalist politics. Those reading these historical treatments of the early nationalist era find once again an emphasis on subtly overlapping affiliations of religious community, class and regional or linguistic affinity. They are therefore taken aback when they then turn to works by those anthropological theorists for whom Indian life and thought are represented in an apparently very different way, featuring fixed and arbitrary schemes or structures of caste identity.

ISSUES AND PREMISES

This study will argue that caste has been for many centuries a real and active part of Indian life, and not just a self-serving orientalist fiction. Yet it will also seek to show that until well into the colonial period, much of the subcontinent was still populated by people for whom the formal distinctions of caste were of only limited importance as a source of corporate and individual lifestyles. This would include much of Bengal, the Punjab and southern India, as well as the far northwest and the central Deccan plain.

Of course long before the age of European expansion, these and other regional societies knew norms and conventions which named, grouped and sometimes ranked people by order and function. There is much debate about the nature of these social forms as they emerged in India's medieval kingdoms, and this study will not attempt a detailed reconstruction of these usages in the distant past.² It is clear though that some at least of these diverse and fluid ideas and practices

² For one such reconstruction see Inden 1990: 213-62 on castes as political assemblages or 'subject-citisenries' within medieval Indian kingdoms.

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prefigured what we now know as caste; indeed the names of many individual castes as well as other elements of the terminology used in contemporary caste life derive from these earlier regional schemes and groupings. But this certainly does not mean that a single static system of caste has dominated Indian life since ancient times, despite the fact that a reverence for certain generalised caste ideals is extolled in important scriptural writings. Nor did the emergence of the varying castelike observances of the medieval realms translate directly into the very different forms of so-called caste society which anthropologists observe today.

These current manifestations of caste are now far more generalised across the subcontinent than was the case in former times. The book's aim is therefore to show that caste as we now recognise it has been engendered, shaped and perpetuated by comparatively recent political and social developments. The initial premise is that even in parts of the so-called Hindu heartland of Gangetic upper India, the institutions and beliefs which are now often described as the elements of 'traditional' caste were only just taking shape as recently as the early eighteenth century – that is, the period of rapid regional state-building which accompanied the collapse of Mughal rule and the expansion of Western power in the subcontinent.

Furthermore, from the early nineteenth century onwards, British rule significantly expanded and sharpened these norms and conventions, building many manifestations of caste language and ideology into its structures of authoritative government. It was Indians as much as Britons who took the initiative in this process, even though the impact of these moves was all the more compelling because it was supported by the apparatus of an increasingly powerful colonial state, and also by the effects of India's involvement in a Western-dominated global market economy.

Ironically, the practices of representative government, which became more deeply rooted in British-ruled India than in any other part of the non-white colonial world, served further to enhance the importance of caste affinities in the political arena. Both for early participants in electoral politics and to a significant extent in the period since Independence, caste has been an effective tool and resource for the creation of common interests across the boundaries of region, language, faith and economic status.

The argument here is not that Indians have somehow lacked the

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capacity to develop 'modern' political allegiances. On the contrary, it has often been avowedly 'modern' men and women who have taken the lead here, discovering that by embracing caste principles, or by imposing them on others, one may gain an extraordinarily flexible resource in uncertain times. On the one hand, the assertions of caste have made it possible to build broad allegiances which breach India's many boundaries of region, faith, language and economic status. Yet, at the same time, caste principles have often provided the means of excluding, disempowering or subjugating others. This has proven to be of great advantage in situations where other differentiations – those of class, for example – may be far less effective than an assertion that a group or individual is of alien or inferior caste. This may go far to explain why consciousness of caste differentials has not altogether given way in contemporary India to other markers of social difference – for example, those of class, colour, language or occupation – even though in many situations considerations of caste may overlap or be partially supplanted by any or all of these.

These manifestations of a more consciously castelike social order became increasingly apparent in the turbulent environments of the later Mughal realm, as well as those of the eighteenth-century post-Mughal kingdoms. This explains the book's somewhat arbitrary starting point of 1700. Of course the making or remaking of caste in the forms that we see both in the colonial period and today was a long-term process which cannot be pinned down to specific dates. Even so, the book will attempt to show that the later eighteenth century in particular was a period when India's regional societies underwent profound and complex changes which tended to give more Indians than hitherto a stake in this 'traditional' caste order.

The reasons for this are extremely diverse, and no single book can encompass all the ways in which caste and castelike identities were shaped, debated, attacked and contested even in the relatively recent past. There will, however, be an attempt to identify the most decisive of these changes, and to write about them comprehensibly, avoiding the use of abstruse technical jargon wherever possible. At the same time, the book will seek to build on the best of the existing empirical and theoretical literature. But, like the other New Cambridge Histories, this volume was commissioned as an interpretive synthesis rather than a survey. So what can it achieve that has not already been done by other specialists?

First, it will seek to draw on interdisciplinary perspectives in an attempt to bridge the gaps that often divide historians from social scientists in the treatment of caste. Particular emphasis will be given to the work of anthropologists: this discipline's special skills, and its insights into the values of the small-scale community, can and should be drawn on in the attempt to explore both changes and continuities in the experience of caste. Secondly, the book will attempt to frame its questions along rather different lines from those pursued in other studies. In particular, using both historical and anthropological perspectives, it will ask why caste has so evidently mattered to so many Indians, why it has aroused so much debate both within and outside the subcontinent, and why its norms have been so widely acted on in so many areas of economic, political and religious life, both in recent times and in the more distant past.

The aim here is certainly not to *defend* caste. Nor is it the intention to offer an all-embracing *theory* of caste, or at least not the kind of theory proposed by those social scientists whose goal is to identify a single principle such as purity, power or orientalism with which to explain caste experience, regardless of regional or historical context.

This does not mean that the book will disregard the rich but confusingly diverse theoretical literature, though it will give priority to those approaches which treat caste as a dynamic and multidimensional reality of Indian life, rather than an orientalist fiction or monolithic cultural code. The underlying premise then is that caste is a topic that can and should be explored by those seeking to grasp the complexities of both past and present life in the subcontinent. Indeed, given the vast array of empirical and theoretical studies that have contributed so much in recent years to the disciplines of Indian anthropology, sociology and history, the time is certainly ripe for an attempt at synthesis and interpretation.

What then of value judgements? Generations of well-meaning observers have denounced caste as a source of dehumanising inequalities and enfeebling social divisions. And it is true that in recent times especially, caste has been for many Indians a system of oppression comparable with the racist doctrines of *apartheid*, or the worst abuses of European serfdom. But it is impossible to understand its full effect on Indian life if we see caste only as a scheme of social and material 'disabilities'. On the other hand, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critiques of caste did have a powerful impact on colonial

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policy, and on the ways in which Indians themselves have come both to understand and to experience the phenomenon. Many modern south Asians are fiercely disparaging about caste, dismissing it as a legacy of a backward and inequalitarian past. Yet this kind of internal scrutiny was itself a major factor in the shaping of present-day caste society. Its effects are most visible today in a number of far-reaching provisions of India's post-Independence Constitution. Though now widely contested, these empower the state to advance or 'uplift' those of its citizens who are defined as 'backward' or collectively deprived on the grounds of low-caste birth. Ironically, as will be seen in the book's final chapters, the implementation of these provisions has played an important role in perpetuating rather than eliminating the claims of caste for many Indians.

More broadly, this study seeks to show that both before and after the end of British colonial rule, the perceptions and writings of both Indian and foreign observers contributed directly to the shaping of caste as a 'system', both in the distant past and in more recent times. In other words, caste was and is, to a very considerable extent, what people think of it, and how they act on these perceptions. Far from being a static reflection of received codes and values, caste has been a dynamic force in Indian life and thought: it has been embodied in what people do and say at any given moment about the conventions and values which they define as those of 'caste society'.

This does not mean that the book will seek to reduce caste to the realm of imagination or 'discourse'.³ For centuries, south Asians have found ways to make caste or castelike identities serve them in changing and often threatening circumstances. As a means of coping with a diverse and unpredictable social and physical environment, the titles, symbols and lifestyles of caste have proved to be remarkably durable and adaptable. So if caste is neither an orientalist fiction nor a shameful crime to be disguised or ignored in discussing India's history, it must be a fit subject for historical exploration. It is this which the volume will attempt to provide.

³ The term 'discourse' is being employed here in the crude though widely used sense of purely cognitive or unconscious operations, without connections to an active social or political domain.

DEFINITIONS AND PRINCIPLES

The English word caste has come to be widely used in south Asia, even by speakers of vernacular languages, though many equivalent terms for human orders or 'communities' exist in the subcontinent's regional languages. (On the origins of the term in English usage, see Chapter 3.) Today, as in past centuries, most Indians who would classify themselves as Hindus (and also many non-Hindus) are likely to be at least broadly familiar with two distinct concepts of corporate affiliation: the *jati* (birth group) and the *varna* (order, class or kind).⁴

The term caste is commonly used to refer to both of these. Both may be used of non-Hindus; they sometimes designate distinctions of species or kind amongst gods, animals and even inanimate objects and substances.⁵ Nevertheless, both now and in past centuries, the term *jati* has most often been used for the units of thousands or sometimes millions of people with whom one may identify for such purposes as marriage. There are thousands of titles associated with specific *jatis* in different parts of the country. A few such titles – most notably Rajput, Chamar and Jat – have come to be quite widely recognised; most will be unfamiliar to people outside a limited geographical area.

In contrast to this profusion of *jatis* or birth groups, the concept of *varna* involves a scheme with only four divisions. Thus what would now be called Hindu society is conceived of as being divisible into four very large units which transcend specific regional associations. This scheme is propounded in a variety of widely revered Hindu sacred scriptures (see below, pp. 13–14). It has been most commonly understood as a ranked order of precedence, with the four *varnas* or idealised human callings appearing in the following order:

- the *varna* of Brahmans, commonly identified with those fulfilling the callings of priests and spiritual preceptors;
- the *varna* of Kshatriyas, usually associated with rulers and warriors, but also including seigneurial landed groups;

⁴ These usages include such regional vernacular terms as *qaum*, *sampraday*, *samudi* and *jati*. Like other English terms made familiar through colonial administrative practice, 'community' is still widely employed in both English and the vernaculars. It is often a reference to ethno-religious origin, as when newspapers refer euphemistically to Hindu-Muslim riots as 'clashes of two particular communities'. It is also a term for caste origin, often with an implication that such a 'community' shares an inherited moral mandate to promote common interests by coercive means. (See Chapters 8 and 9 below.)

⁵ Sharma 1975; Marriott and Inden 1977.

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- the varna of Vaishyas, often identified with commercial livelihoods, though associated with other producers and wealth-creators as well;
- the varna of Shudras or servile toilers.

So-called untouchables (and also the hill and forest populations who are now commonly called 'tribals') occupy an ambivalent place below, outside or parallel to this varna scheme. The titles of these four archetypes or orders, and the hierarchy of ranked callings and moral endowments which characterise them, are defined in ancient religious scriptures which became increasingly well known both before and after the British conquest. It is important to note too, however, that there are many widely revered sacred texts and doctrines which devalue or condemn caste principles. (See Chapter 1, below.)

In the words of the anthropologist R. S. Khare, the concept of jati refers to the experience of caste in the 'concrete and factual' domain of everyday social life, as opposed to the 'ideal and symbolic ... archetypes' which are embodied in the concept of varna.⁶ Once caste or castelike norms have come to be widely shared in a given region, a reference to jati can therefore identify people in a very minute and precise way; the designations of varna evoke vast and sweeping generalities. While one would expect to find at least a rough match between the two, there has often been much dispute about the precise order of merit among the various jati populations of a given region. Furthermore, people of different doctrinal traditions and social circumstances have attached differing degrees of importance to these schemes of caste. Indeed all these conceptual principles, and the ways in which people have acted on them, have been far more diverse and flexible than has often been thought, both by academics and by would-be reformers of caste.

For all this fluidity, it is still the case that certain basic ideas subsuming both jati and varna were shared by at least some people in the subcontinent well before the colonial period. The underlying premise here, which is still widely known today, is that those who would nowadays call themselves Hindus are born into fixed social units with specific names or titles. Such a unit is one's caste or 'community'.⁷ And, insofar as individuals and kin groups recognise the claims of caste, these embody something broader than the notion

⁶ Khare 1983: 85.

⁷ This is the sense in which the term jati is generally used, though without necessarily overriding its meaning as a reference to broader species-like groupings. (See note 4 above.)

of a common kin or blood tie. Indeed caste is widely described by anthropologists as a notion of attachment which bundles together a given set of kin groups or descent units. Both in the past and for many though not all Indians in more modern times, those born into a given caste would normally expect to find marriage partners within these limits, and to regard those outside as of unlike kind, rank or substance.

Furthermore, both in the past and today, those sharing a common caste identity may subscribe to at least a notional tradition of common descent, as well as a claim of common geographical origin, and a particular occupational ideal. Neither now nor in past centuries would an individual claiming Brahman parentage have been obliged to follow a priestly or preceptorial livelihood. Nor would a man professing princely Rajput descent automatically expect to wield a sword. Yet such claims have often conveyed recognisable messages to other Indians. In particular, those claiming Brahman or Rajput descent would definitely not expect it to be thought that their ancestors were humble labourers or providers of menial service, as would be the case for an individual identified by a low-caste jati designation such as Paraiyan or Chamar. (On the important topic of women's caste status, see below, especially Chapters 1 and 3.) Above all, the concept of caste has come to imply both boundaries and collective or corporate rank. In theory at least, civilised 'caste Hindus' should regard it as wrong and unnatural to share food or other intimate social contacts with those who are radically unlike them in caste terms. In theory too, the central characteristic of 'caste society' has been for many centuries the hierarchical ranking of castes or birth groups. The implication here is that to be of high or low caste is a matter of innate quality or essence. This is what is said in many scriptural codifications of caste ideals; in real life, these principles have often been widely contested and modified. Nevertheless, even people who came to reject caste principles either recently or in the more distant past are at least likely to have been familiar with these notions of corporate moral essences or qualities, meaning that in 'caste society', gradations of rank and precedence are innate, universal and collective. The implication of this would be that all who are born into so-called clean castes will rank as high, pure or auspicious in relation to those of unclean or 'untouchable' birth, regardless of wealth, achievement or other individual circumstances.

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THEORIES AND DEBATES

The key problem for Indian social science has been to decide whether caste should actually be seen in these terms, that is, as a coherent system of thought and practice rather than an orientalist fiction or a miscellany of essentialising 'discourses'.⁸ This in turn leads to the question of what exactly comes into people's minds when they differentiate between one another in caste terms. How distinctive are these markers of difference? Are they truly unlike those of other stratified social systems, where differences of status would seem to be so much more readily reducible to straightforward material matters, that is, to differentials of economic class, colour, education or religious affinity?

One might not think that caste differentials are so very distinctive, requiring special explanations which treat the difference between high and low castes as being fundamentally unlike the forms of stratification that distinguish the rich from the poor, or the dominant from the weak and subordinated 'subaltern'. After all, people of low-caste origin are often significantly poorer, less well educated, more inclined towards unprestigious forms of 'folk' religion, and even physically darker-skinned than those claiming superior caste rank. None of these, however, is invariably a feature of caste difference. Some other basis of differentiation does seem to come into play, above all in cases where there would appear to be no evident material basis for a claim of caste superiority.

Both in the past and to a significant extent today, the deprived 'untouchable' and the very poor individual of 'clean' caste may appear to be indistinguishable in economic and other material terms. Yet there is still something real and important that divides them, not just in the abstract, but in the bitter realities of everyday experience. Similarly, Brahmans and other 'clean' or high-caste groups and individuals may often be found in deprived material circumstances. Yet such people will not lose the intangible but widely recognised quality that defines them as higher in caste terms than those who may be richer, better educated and even more politically influential than they are, but who will still be seen as their inferiors by the standards of 'traditional' caste ideology. This, however, raises the question of

⁸ For an influential treatment of this issue see Inden 1990.

whether such perceptions have differed at the top and bottom of the scale, either in the distant past or in more recent times. There is much debate on these two related issues, that is, whether 'modernity' has modified or undermined caste values, and whether those deemed to be low-born in caste terms have accepted or contested the jati and varna principles which define them as unclean or otherwise inferior.⁹

Among social scientists, the most compelling modern interpretations of caste are those which have sought to resolve these problems by combining ethnographic fieldwork observations with an analysis of sacred scriptures and other normative texts. The anthropologist Veena Das has been a particularly eloquent and innovative champion of this technique. She has thus rejected the approach of the empirical anthropologists who studied caste in the 1950s and 1960s, notably F. G. Bailey, for whom the learned abstractions of Hindu scripture were an irrelevance to the life and thought of the ordinary 'caste Hindu'.¹⁰

For Bailey and many of his contemporaries, 'traditional' caste was to be found in India's villages, and the villager's mental universe was one of practical material realities. 'Caste Hindus' worshipped Hindu gods, but the logic of their social relations did not stem from the values of those codes and scriptures which proclaimed the superiority of 'pure' Brahmans over worldly men of wealth and power. These were merely a disguise or *ex post facto* rationalisation for the realities of material advantage and disadvantage. Caste in Bailey's view was therefore not a unique moral or religious system. It was merely a more elaborate form of the social stratifications to be found in many other societies: the true basis of the distinction between those of low and high caste was differential access to political and economic resources.

For Veena Das, as for other important commentators of the past twenty years, texts do connect with this wider world of everyday town and village life, and have done so for many centuries. It is notable too that anthropologists who study 'caste' norms no longer confine themselves to non-literate village environments. T. N. Madan,

⁹ Moffatt 1979 argues for 'cultural consensus' between those of low and high caste; see Weber 1958. For opposing views, see Berreman 1967, 1971; Gough 1973; Mencher 1974; Omvedt 1980; Juergensmeyer 1982; and works by historians of the Subaltern Studies school, e.g. Chatterjee 1989. Other important contributions include Freeman 1986; Lorenzen 1987; Randeria 1989; and Delège 1988, 1989, 1992. And see O'Hanlon 1985. (The distinction between those of low and high caste is now widely seen as being conceived in terms other than or in addition to those of ritual purity and impurity: see note 18 below.)

¹⁰ See Das 1982, also Tambiah 1985; compare Bailey 1957, 1960.

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R. S. Khare, André Beteille and Jonathan Parry are among the most highly regarded of those who have taken the study of both 'caste Hindu' and apparently caste-free life and thought to environments of complex urban modernity. This blend of textual and ethnographic approaches has thus opened up a domain of norms and values which would otherwise have remained hidden from view, but which are now widely seen in anthropology as determinants of thought and action both within and beyond the world of caste relations.¹¹

India's earliest expressions of caste ideals can be found in the vast body of sacred writings known as the *Vedas*. These texts are thought to have been compiled between 1500 and 1000 BC, though it was in relatively modern times that the *Vedas*, especially the great invocatory sequence known as the *Rg Veda*, were extolled by influential sage-reformers as the defining core of Hindu faith and worship. One of the most famous sections of the *Rg Veda* describes the primordial act of blood sacrifice from which the gods created the four human varnas. The victim in this cosmic creation story is the thousand-eyed Purusa, the first created man. From the dismembered fragments of the sacrificed Purusa came each of the four varnas:

When they divided the Purusa, into how many parts did they arrange him? What was his mouth? What his two arms? What are his thighs [loins] and feet called? The *brahmin* was his mouth, his two arms were made the *rajanya* [*kshatriya*, king and warrior], his two thighs [loins] the *vaisya*, from his feet the *sudra* [servile class] was born.¹²

The sanctity of caste is extolled too in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the great exposition of spiritual teaching which is contained within the ancient *Mahabharata* epic. Without caste, says the *Gita*, there would be corruption of humanity's most precious standards of domestic honour and sexual propriety:

... when lawlessness prevails, ... the women of the family become corrupted, and when women are corrupted confusion of castes arises. And to hell does this

¹¹ See e.g. Madan 1991, 1992, 1993; Khare 1984; Beteille 1991a, 1991b, 1996; Parry 1980, 1981, 1985, 1994. These are certainly not simplistic portrayals of caste as an all-pervading essence of Indian culture; see also Kolenda 1983, 1986; Fuller 1992. M. N. Srinivas (1965, 1969, 1989) gave the field the important though now much modified concept of *Sanskritisation*, an historical process of upward group social mobility through the embrace of high or 'Sanskritic' (as opposed to local or popular) forms of Hindu social and religious practice, thus allowing caste society to be seen as mobile and fluid rather than static and inflexible.

¹² *Rg Veda* 2.2.1.1, quoted in Radhakrishnan and Moore 1957: 19; see O'Flaherty 1988: 27-8.

confusion bring the family itself as well as those who have destroyed it ... By the misdeeds of those who destroy a family and create confusion of *varnas* [castes] the immemorial laws of the race and the family are destroyed.¹³

The principles of caste as a universal law of life are further elaborated in the *Manavadharmasastra* or *Manusmṛiti*, an encyclopaedic treatise in verse on human conduct, morality and sacred obligations. The work is most commonly known as the *Laws* or *Institutes* of the mythical sage or lawgiver Manu; it was probably composed in about the first century AD. Here, as in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the focus is on the concept of *dharma*. This key principle of 'caste Hindu' thought is usually understood as the code of duty, religious law and right human conduct which defines the path to virtue and spiritual fulfilment for all humankind. In the *Institutes* of Manu, the source of this *dharma* is the will of the divine creator who gave each of the four human archetypes or *varnas* a distinct moral quality, and a calling to follow. God, 'the lustrous one', 'made separate innate activities' for the different orders of humanity.¹⁴ All wellbeing and merit, indeed the preservation of the entire created universe, depend upon this stratified ordering of castes. The term 'dharmic' is often applied to those ways of life which conform to these principles of *varna*.

How then have modern social scientists sought to relate these ancient scriptural ideals to the everyday life of the 'caste Hindu'? The best-known though most hotly contested attempt to construct a textually informed interpretation of caste has been that of the French sociologist Louis Dumont. Dumont proposed his formulation as nothing less than a synopsis of Hindu civilisation itself, which he saw as being animated by a unique and coherent structure of 'core values'. These he saw as conforming to the structuralist cognitive principles elaborated most influentially in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss. The view here is that social systems are underpinned by identifiable systems of values and concepts, and that these in turn are organised around universal cognitive and symbolic processes. In both Lévi-Strauss's and Dumont's versions of structuralist analysis, these regu-

¹³ 'The distress of Arjuna', *Mahabharata* 40-3, quoted in Radhakrishnan and Moore 1957: 105.

¹⁴ O'Flaherty 1991: 12. On the growth of social complexity in ancient India, which is thought to have provided the context for this text's differentiation of ranked human classes, see Thapar 1984 and 1992. On the idea of *dharma* as universalising 'laws of life', see O'Flaherty 1991: lxxvi-lxxvii, also pp. xxxv-xxxvi on *dharma* in the cultural synthesis embodied in the Hindu epics (the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) and the *Laws* of Manu.

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larly recurring core patterns or operations of thought take the form of paired binary oppositions.

Famously – and controversially – Dumont specified the opposing conceptual categories of purity and pollution as the first in the sequence of all-important complementary principles which, in his theory, pervade the conscious or unconscious thought processes of all Hindus. These are the archetypal or core principles which Dumont held to be unique to caste, and which he claimed to have observed both in scriptural formulations and in everyday life and worship.¹⁵ Thus for Dumont, the facts of life for the Hindu villager are not the straightforward matter of material differences on which Bailey insisted. The difference between those of high and low caste is far from being a disguised reflection of the ability to command material resources. It is instead, says Dumont, the reference points of purity and pollution which provide the important measurements of rank and status for the 'caste Hindu'. 'Preoccupation with the pure and the impure is constant in Hindu life', Dumont declares.¹⁶

Many anthropologists have found corroborating ethnographic evidence for this. Referring to the Pandit Brahmans whom he studied in their home region of Kashmir, T. N. Madan declares, '[Their] whole way of life is pervaded by a sense of the pure, and consequently, by the fear of impurity.'¹⁷ Other ethnographers too stress the importance attached in everyday speech and action to these complementary concepts of purity and defilement, though many specialists would now insist that the picture is misleadingly simplistic without the addition of further conceptual polarities, most notably those of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness.¹⁸

¹⁵ Both Dumont and his critics draw on such earlier theorists as Emile Senart (1894), Célestin Bouglé (1927), Georges Dumézil (1957) and especially A. M. Hocart (1938) who emphasised the ritualised or sacrificial dimension of the caste system's occupational specialisations. For interpretive overviews, see Delieu 1993 and Kolenda 1983; on Dumont's intellectual pedigree, see Galey 1981 and Appadurai 1992; on Hocart's view of caste as a ritualised redistribution system with principles comparable to that of the royal kingdom, see Dirks 1987.

¹⁶ Dumont 1970: 44. For debate on Dumont's view of caste as a unique feature of Hinduism which has nevertheless influenced or 'contaminated' many non-Hindus (1970: 202–12), see Ahmad 1973; Fuller 1975 and 1996.

¹⁷ Madan 1992: 109.

¹⁸ Such terms as the Hindi *shuddha/ashuddha* for purity/impurity, *sutak* for ritual pollution caused by birth and death, and *shubh/ashubh* for auspiciousness/inauspiciousness are widely used. On the debate about whether 'caste society' embodies power-centred relations of auspiciousness/inauspiciousness which exist independently of those of hierarchy

Thus, many commentators, particularly Veena Das, Richard Burghart and the 'ethnologists' inspired by McKim Marriott, have discerned a much wider array of cultural coordinates in 'Hindu thought' than those emphasised by Dumont.¹⁹ Indeed, even Dumont contrasts the Hindu social being, that is, the purity-loving dharmic 'caste Hindu', with another ideal type whom he sees as a second crucial pillar of the Hindu moral order. This is the ascetic renouncer – the so-called holy man or god-person – who for Dumont provides a complementary counterpart to the values of caste society. The ascetic steps outside social norms to follow a path of transcendent spirituality; this may lead to the achievement of ultimate release (*moksha*, liberation) from the bonds of material existence.²⁰

Other theorists, most notably J. C. Heesterman, also make much of this seeming tension between the two domains of caste life and other-worldly asceticism. As will be seen in Chapter 4, this is an important consideration for both historians and anthropologists, because both in the past and in more recent times, influential doctrines of anti-Brahmanical and even anti-caste 'uplift' and 'reform' have been constructed around claims that Hinduism's highest spiritual principles exalt 'casteless' renunciation over and above the values of caste.²¹

Furthermore, much like Heesterman, both Veena Das and Burghart are dissatisfied with Dumont's simple binary oppositions, and insist instead on the importance of additional patterns and conceptual categories as reference points, both in scripture and in everyday ethnographic reality. In particular, all three depart from Dumont in emphasising the ideal of kingship and power as an independent variable in Hindu life and thought. Burghart finds three rather than two spiritual

or ritual purity/pollution in Dumont's sense, see Carman and Marglin 1985; Raheja 1989; Madan 1991; Parry 1991 and 1994: 135–8.

¹⁹ See Das 1982; Burghart 1978b, 1983a, 1983b. Ethnologists, whose techniques derive from American cognitive anthropology, seek to interpret non-Western cultures using indigenous sociological concepts, rather than those of Western social theorists. See Marriott 1968, 1989; Marriott and Inden 1977; *CIS* Special Issue 23, 1: 1989; Moffatt 1990; Khare 1990; compare Madan 1982.

²⁰ On the associated doctrine of *karma*, the effects of past actions determining a being's successive rebirths, with *moksha* as the goal of ultimate liberation from incarnate existence, see Keyes and Daniel 1983; Fuller 1992: 245–52. On ascetic renunciation: Weber 1958; van der Veer 1987; Burghart 1983a; Babb 1987.

²¹ Heesterman sees no true opposition between the Brahman-centred values of caste society and those of the ascetic who seems to reject the norms of caste life. In classical Hindu scripture Heesterman sees a basis for reconciliation of this 'inner conflict': the Brahman absorbs the ascetic's renunciatory principle and is therefore able to claim to be 'in the world yet not of it' (1985: 43).

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ideals extolled as principles of supreme human and cosmic virtue and harmony. These three elements, each of which is a path of virtue and a source of cosmic harmony and righteousness in its own right, are represented as follows: first, the standards of dharmic caste life, as embodied in the priestly functions of Brahmins; second, ascetic renunciation; and third, the exercise of power by righteous kings, and by those who share kingly qualities of initiative, assertion and command.

Yet for Burghart, this apparent diversity still has coherence as a single system of thought and faith, with each of the three ideals interpenetrating and referring back to the others. Kings glory in their capacity to order the world through the exercise of power, yet still shore up their claims to be founts of righteousness by borrowing from the characteristics of the other two ideals. In the same way, the exemplars of the priestly and ascetic ideals absorb the key qualities that define the other two paths of righteousness.²²

For Veena Das, Hindu thought involves an even more complex array of patterned mental structures. She identifies a whole series of interconnected conceptual pairings: kings and their 'unkingly' subjects (commoners or Shudras); Brahmins and renunciators; renunciators and unkingly subjects; Brahmins and kings. For each pairing, she then identifies a 'latent' third ideal, arguing for example that the relationship between the Brahmin and the king has no meaning without the implied presence of this pairing's shadowy silent or latent principle, that of the renouncer. These webs of interconnecting core concepts, which she describes as a scheme of 'tripartite classifications with one term latent', are for her the basis on which the diversities of Hindu thought can be seen to achieve ultimate coherence.²³

Marriott's 'ethnosociology' offers yet another highly complex formulation, treating the bonds of caste as a product of mutable, ever-changing 'coded substances', and offering a model of caste society in which status rankings are expressed and experienced as a multidimensional web of ordered ceremonial exchanges and transactions.²⁴

²² Burghart's (1978b) sources include seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts from the Hindu-ruled Himalayan kingdom of Nepal. Compare Malamoud 1981.

²³ Das's (1982) sources include Gujarati caste *puranas* (mythological 'community' histories) dating from about the fifteenth century AD.

²⁴ For Marriott's view of Hindu culture as 'transactional and transformational', and of the Hindu person as a fluid, unbounded, continually transacting 'dividual' or divisible entity composed of coded substances or essences transferred to others through marriage and other interpersonal contacts, see Marriott 1976 and 1989.

For all the richness and sophistication of these approaches with their insistence on this greater diversity of conceptual reference points and core principles, they have all remained bounded by a surprisingly circumscribed notion of Hinduism. As a result, these formulations do not seem to recognise the extent to which the 'Hindu's life and thought have been intertwined with the subcontinent's other powerful religious traditions, including those of devotional Islam, as well as Christianity and Sikhism.²⁵

Some social scientists have argued that caste norms are based on ideals which are unique to Hinduism, and that 'true' caste is to be found only among those who profess the Hindu faith. Yet this presupposes much firmer boundaries between ethno-religious 'communities' than was often the case in past centuries. Certainly, castelike forms of rank and corporate allegiance have been very prominent in the lives of most people who would nowadays be thought of as non-Hindus. The difficulty here is that so many studies of the supposedly casteless minority faiths have played down those elements of religious and social life which adherents of these faiths have shared with the wider society. Yet if one looks at the millions who subscribe to India's minority faiths – Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, Jainism, and the ostensibly anti-caste neo-Buddhism to be discussed in Chapter 7 – one finds both in the past and today a high level of sensitivity to the nuances of caste, especially in matters of marriage and ritual pollution.

For adherents of the Sikh faith, the distinction between 'peasant' tillers and urban moneyed groups has long been reflected in an awareness of which Sikhs are of 'peasant' Jat caste origin, and which are to be identified by other jati names denoting a background in the literate service occupations. In south India it is common to encounter Christians who take pride in Brahman ancestry, and until recently many north Indian Muslims identified with the caste ideals of the lordly Rajput. Furthermore, as James Laidlaw has shown, most of the powerful north Indian traders who follow the austere anti-Brahmanical Jain faith are as insistent as their Hindu neighbours on the importance of marrying within named Vaishya merchant jatis, while simultaneously claiming descent from converts of princely Rajput caste.²⁶ Above all, for the members of virtually all the so-called

²⁵ See S. Bayly 1989 on south Asian religious 'syncretism'; on the historic construction of Hinduism see Thapar 1989 and van der Veer 1988.

²⁶ Laidlaw (1995: 88–119) shows that while Jains and Hindus regard their faiths as

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conversion faiths, the fluid but highly potent phenomenon of the pollution barrier is still a living force in everyday life, with those deemed to be descendants of untouchable caste groups often being denied social ties with others of their ostensibly casteless faiths.²⁷

AEQUALIS OR HIERARCHICUS?

With this one important *caveat* then, the view of caste offered in this volume is closest to the multidimensional models of those anthropologists who have emphasised the persistent appeal of renunciatory and kingly ideals, and their interconnections with those of Brahmanical purity. Veena Das and Richard Burghart are among the key influences here. At the same time, there are certain debates which are pursued in the work of other theorists, notably Dumont and his critics, which will be important to the approach being taken here. For Dumont, the presence of the renunciatory element in Hinduism does not alter his central premise, which is that it is fundamental to Hindu thought to rank all beings, all substances and all aspects of worldly social existence by this one overarching criterion of purity and pollution. This for him is an inherently 'religious' principle. It is on this basis, and no other, that the hierarchical rankings of caste derive their meaning. Brahmans therefore stand at the apex of the moral hierarchy which we call caste because they are inherently purer than the people of every other caste.²⁸

The great problem which Dumont thereby claims to have solved is how to explain the role of the so-called untouchables whose presence in 'caste Hindu' communities is for him a paramount fact of Hindu life. Dumont saw the presence of these 'unclean' toilers as a fundamental manifestation of Hindu values. In Dumont's theory, the distinguishing characteristic of so-called untouchables is that they and only they must perform the tasks of ritual cleansing and pollution-removal which he sees as indispensable for the existence of Hindus as social beings. These are tasks which keep the 'untouchable' in a permanently unclean state, but which thereby allow those of 'clean'

separate and distinct, the same castes exist among both; Hindu-Jain intermarriage is permissible so long as the partners are of matching caste. On Muslims and Rajput lordliness, see Chapter 1, below.

²⁷ See Chapter 1, note 3.

²⁸ Important discussions of Dumont and the concept of hierarchy include Kolenda 1976; Appadurai 1986, 1992; Galey 1989.

caste to maintain a state of ritual purity in a world which continually surrounds them with both tangible and intangible sources of defilement and pollution. Thus for Dumont, the distinctiveness of the supreme, pure Brahman is the complementary counterpart to that of the inherently unclean 'untouchable'.

What then are the problems arising from these claims? Many of Dumont's most vehement critics have accused him of disguising or even legitimising the coercive side of caste relations, particularly the concrete realities of disadvantage as experienced by those of low and 'unclean' caste. Among those who have attempted to reassert a material or political economy dimension to caste have been those Marxist commentators who since the 1970s have written sympathetically about caste-based militancy involving so-called 'Dalits' (ex-untouchables). Gail Omvedt in particular has thus rejected older Marxist views of caste as mere 'superstructure' or 'false consciousness' in a world where the true realities of political economy were to be seen as those of class-based oppression. She argues instead that the material effects of colonialism and modern capitalism served to make caste an authentic force in Indian life, and that any truly 'revolutionary' movement in India must take note of the special oppression experienced by those who have been thus coerced and disadvantaged through the workings of this 'redefined caste system'.²⁹

Some of those who have argued in these terms have at least hinted at the idea that Dumont's picture of caste may therefore be an accurate if only partial reflection of Indian reality, not in the sense of being a timeless expression of age-old 'traditional' values, but as a product of economic and social change in comparatively modern times. Yet there are still those who have condemned Dumont's entire theory as an exercise in demeaning orientalism, charging him with purveying a false stereotype of Indians as the slaves of an all-powerful 'religious' code, hence dreaming, irrational, otherworldly and devoid of the capacity to take 'modern', secular or individual initiatives. A number of Dumont's critics, notably Mattison Mines, have found evidence of strongly individualist values in Hindu thought.³⁰ Above all, many see Dumont as recapitulating Western colonial views which supposedly exalted or even fabricated the Brahman-centred perspectives that are central to

²⁹ Mencher 1974, 1978; Berreman 1979; Omvedt 1978, 1982; Gough 1989. See also Meillassoux 1973; Godelier 1986; Shah 1985: 14-15.

³⁰ Mines 1992.

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his analysis, and which are also fundamental for such commentators as Madeleine Biardeau, for whom 'orthodox Brahmanism' is nothing less than the 'permanent heart' of Hinduism.³¹

It is true that Dumont's theory treats Indians (or Hindus) as heirs to a system of values which are radically unlike those of the West. For Dumont, the Hindu's hierarchical judgements of human worth are made on a basis of collectively inherited moral qualities, rather than personal endowments or attainments. He maintains that only in modern, secular, rational Western society has there evolved a genuine concept of the individual. For Dumont, no such principle is possible in 'traditional' Hindu thought. The Hindu is a caste being whose social identity derives from collective rather than individual bonds and claims; in Hinduism, he says, only the follower of the renouncer's path can lead a life approximating to that of the Western individual. Thus, in Dumont's famous phrase, Indians belong to a distinct human order or cultural category, that of *homo hierarchicus*. This is a broad category embracing other supposedly 'traditional' non-Western civilisations. Yet for Dumont the Indian variant of this hierarchical being is unique; in their deference to the overriding 'religious' values defined in his theory of caste, Indians (or Hindus) are so different from other peoples that they are almost a distinct species of humankind.³²

Even Dumont's defenders have generally accepted that there are serious flaws in this sweeping portrayal of the Euro-American as *homo aequalis*, in contrast to the Hindu Indian who is consigned to the category of *homo hierarchicus*. But the key complaint here, as far as the historian is concerned, is the charge that Dumont makes India a land of static 'oriental' spirituality rather than action and agency. More specifically, these critics say that by insisting on Brahman-centred caste values, Dumont and those who share his views make India appear to lack any indigenous values which might have inspired the construction of strong states and the achievement of effective political action, either in the distant past or in resistance to colonial conquest.³³

A number of commentators have therefore mounted strong objections to Dumont's hierarchical or purity-centred picture of caste values, since this suggests to them a claim that only with colonial rule

³¹ Biardeau 1992: 15; those criticising Dumont on these grounds include Inden 1990; and see Searle-Chatterjee and Sharma 1994.

³² Dumont 1970; see Madan *et al.* 1971.

³³ See e.g. Dirks 1987; Raheja 1988a, 1988b; Quigley 1993.

did the subcontinent finally acquire forceful but 'derivative' models of polity and statecraft.³⁴ It is indeed true that for Dumont, the logic of caste makes those who are collectively pure by birth and essence superior to those who are endowed with mere worldly power. Although kings and other embodiments of the Kshatriya's active, lordly qualities may stand supreme in the material order, Dumont maintains that the Brahman as priest-preceptor derives his status from a source which is beyond and superior to the concerns of the mere material plane.

Dumont's famous phrase for this is the assertion that in caste society power is invariably 'encompassed' by status.³⁵ Thus he proposes yet another key set of binary conceptual oppositions: following on from his complementary pairings of purity/impurity, Brahman/untouchable and renouncer/man-in-the-world is his insistence on a radical disjunction in Hindu values between priesthood and secular power. In other words, unlike other societies which possess the cognitive capacity to recognise and exalt individual prowess and achievement in the worldly sphere, Dumont argues that in the Hindu social order, the worldly achiever and doer of active this-worldly deeds performs a less exalted task than that of the 'pure' and therefore superior Brahman.

Nicholas Dirks and Gloria Goodwin Raheja in particular charge Dumont with having overlooked much strong ethnographic and textual evidence which would radically reduce the importance of Brahmans and Brahmanical values in Hindu thought and social life. These critics propose a view of caste relations emphasising action, initiative and concepts of power deriving from indigenous cultural concepts and categories, rather than the 'religious' values of purity and hierarchy proposed by Dumont. In this view it is rulers, and those who exercise king-like power through the command of men, land and other material resources, who stand at the apex of India's scheme of moral order and values.³⁶ Thus in the centuries before colonial rule, Brahmans are to be seen as little more than technicians, performing

³⁴ Chatterjee 1986.

³⁵ Dumont 1970: 76-9.

³⁶ Dirks's formulation (1987) which emphasises indigenous notions of royal gifting proposes a view of power which, unlike Bailey's, does not depend on simple economic or material differentiations; Raheja (1988b) insists too on the mechanism of the gift (*dan*) which transfers inauspiciousness and thereby asserts and confirms the power (or 'ritual centrality', rather than hierarchy) of dominant, king-like landed groups.

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their specialist rituals as subordinate servants of kings and other men of power.³⁷ Even in present-day village life, it is the Kshatriya-like qualities of landed elites, rather than Brahman-centred purity values, which are seen by Raheja as structuring the relations between Hindus of differing caste rank.³⁸

These attempts to downplay or even dismiss the significance of Brahmans and Brahmanical caste values go against the grain of much that is familiar both from the historical record and in contemporary Indian life. The social scientists who will probably have the most enduring impact on the field are therefore those who have taken Dumont's formulations seriously rather than dismissing them altogether.³⁹

At the same time, however, India's enormous complexity and historical dynamism must make any quest for a single model or formula of caste a deeply frustrating experience. Herein may lie the great advantage of exploring these issues historically. The central premise of this volume will be that through historical perspectives, it may be possible to reach a view of caste which captures much of the plurality and multiplicity of Indian life and thought. From an historical vantage point, it may indeed be possible to show that none of the divergent theoretical interpretations outlined above can be refuted absolutely. On the contrary, each of them may actually be correct for some if not all Indians, at least for limited periods, and in at least some areas of the subcontinent, either recently or in the more distant past.

Those arguments which de-emphasise the Brahman and identify the princely warrior as the lodestone of the social order work best for the pre-colonial military states which took shape in comparatively remote frontier regions, well away from the great centres of high Hindu culture and worship. Yet it cannot be convincingly inferred from this that the role of the Brahman was merely a fiction promulgated by ancient law-givers, and then seized upon by British officials and academic orientalisks. On the other hand, far from illuminating the life and thought of an unchanging or primordial 'traditional' India, Dumont's theory is probably best understood as a description

³⁷ Quigley 1993.

³⁸ Raheja 1988a.

³⁹ Among the many strengths of these works is that they treat Dumont's category of purity as an element of a dynamic world shaped by the force of the political and the 'religious', rather than an abstract or independent entity. Notably successful examples are Parry 1974 and 1994; and Fuller 1979 and 1988.

capturing some of the rapid and complex changes which were becoming increasingly active in Indian society just before and during the colonial period.

Chapters 1 and 2 therefore explore the changes in political, economic and religious life which helped to spread castelike ways of life in many areas of the subcontinent in the period immediately preceding the colonial conquest. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with thought and 'discourse': Chapter 3 assesses Western colonial perceptions of caste, and Chapter 4 considers the understandings of caste that animated debates among Indians themselves, concentrating particularly on influential social, religious and political commentators of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chapter 5 returns the discussion to the domain of everyday life. Its aim is to explore the changing experience of caste in the age of high colonialism. The emphasis here will be on the increasing rigidities of the so-called pollution barrier, by which is meant the formalisation of social barriers separating those of superior caste from the lowest or most unclean and inauspicious caste groups, in circumstances of growing conflict in both town and countryside, in the period before the First World War.

Turning next to the power and resources of the twentieth-century Indian state, Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the electoral arena and the impact of modern political institutions on the experience of caste, first in the late colonial era, and then in the period since Independence. In the two final chapters, an attempt is made to ask in what ways and to what extent contemporary Indians are still affected by the norms of caste. Chapter 8 considers the practical realities of caste in the late twentieth century, asking how far the experience of caste has truly changed or been supplanted by other forms of solidarity and moral obligation in everyday life. Chapter 9 explores the painful and controversial phenomenon of so-called 'caste wars' in present-day India.

It goes without saying that the interpretations offered here will not please all of the field's contending experts. Nevertheless, on the assumption that these are important and compelling matters to explore and comment on, it is to this array of thorny issues that we now turn.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF A 'CASTE SOCIETY'

INTRODUCTION: 'HISTORICISING' THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL MODELS

Caste is not and never has been a fixed fact of Indian life. Both caste as varna (the fourfold scheme of idealised moral archetypes) and caste as jati (smaller-scale birth-groups) are best seen as composites of ideals and practices that have been made and remade into varying codes of moral order over hundreds or even thousands of years. The context for this fluidity has been the subcontinent's remarkable diversity in culture and physical environment, and above all the diversity of its states and political systems. Those conventions of rank and corporate essence that are often seen as the defining features of caste have been shaped, critiqued and reconstituted in all sorts of ways, both century by century and region by region. As will be seen in the three final chapters, these processes of invention and reformulation are still taking place today at the local level, and also in the wider context of regional and pan-Indian political and social conflict.

Even in the distant past, recognisably castelike ideologies and practices were followed by some people in most or all of the subcontinent's regional cultures. Yet until relatively recent times, many Indians were still comparatively untouched by the norms of jati and varna as we now understand them. This was true not only of the forest and hill people who are now called 'tribals', but also of much larger groups of powerful plains-dwellers and martial pastoralists. Even under the Raj, caste as a 'system' was far less uniform and all-pervading than many colonial commentators believed. Nevertheless, in the centuries immediately preceding the British conquest, social life in almost all areas of the subcontinent became significantly more castelike than had been the case in earlier times.

But what exactly did it mean to become part of a castelike social order, and what was it that caused these far-reaching changes in thought and behaviour? In the Introduction, it was noted that the social scientists who appear to have the most persuasive models of

caste as a conceptual system are those like Veena Das and Richard Burghart who emphasise a multidimensional array of themes, ideals and principles. In these anthropological accounts, which have both challenged and built on Louis Dumont's structuralist formulations, three sets of values – those of priestly hierarchy, kingship and ascetic renunciation – have particular importance in caste society as both opposing and interconnecting reference points for the 'caste Hindu'.¹

Looked at historically, however, it is possible to see a sequence of relatively recent political and ideological changes which brought these ideals into focus for ever more people in the subcontinent. Between about 1650 and 1850, all three of these core concepts came increasingly to make their mark in Indian life. Yet these developments did not bring all three conceptual principles to bear with equal force at one and the same time. On the contrary, there seem to have been two distinct stages in the making of the elaborately ritualised schemes of social stratification which have come to be thought of as the basis of 'traditional' faith and culture in the subcontinent. (The term ritualisation is being used here to denote an emphasis on forms of differentiation between groups and individuals which appear to demand recognition through distinctive modes of action – rituals – and which derive from some quality of innate or hereditary status, rather than immediate economic or political power.)²

What happened in the initial phase of this two-stage sequence was the rise of the royal man of prowess. In this period, both kings and the priests and ascetics with whom men of power were able to associate their rule became a growing focus for the affirmation of a martial and regal form of caste ideal. Across much of India, those who embraced these values sought increasingly to establish firm social boundaries between themselves and the non-elite tillers and arms-bearers to whom their forebears had often been closely affiliated. The other key feature of this period was the reshaping of many apparently casteless

¹ Without adhering literally to Das's or Burghart's schemes, the book's attempt to portray caste as both historically shaped and multi-stranded draws on their insights and those of other anthropologists discussed earlier. (On the relationship between dharmic, kingly and ascetic ideals, see below, pp. 49–62, and Chapter 2.)

² This is not to overlook the importance of forms of caste which focus on ideals of political power and kingship; indeed king-centred manifestations of caste will be emphasised throughout. Also, in the light of important work on kingship and the royal gift (notably Dirks 1987), it is not being suggested here that politically conceived conceptions of caste were lacking in the element of 'ritualisation'. See Dumont 1970; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994.

forms of devotional faith (*bhakti*) in a direction which further affirmed these differentiations of rank and 'community'. (See below, pp. 46-9.)

The spread of these lordly or Kshatriya-centred manifestations of caste values is therefore the focus of this chapter. Three important elements of change in the new states and dominions of the post-Mughal period will be discussed here: first, the emerging courtly synthesis between Kshatriya-like kings and Brahmans; second, the diffusion of these values and practices into the world of the upper non-elite 'peasantry'; and third, the continuing power and importance of martial 'predators' and so-called tribal peoples. The significance of these trends, and particularly the importance of individual agency in the forging of more castelike forms of social order, are explored more concretely at the end of the chapter through an account of the rise of the great Maratha-dominated polity of Shivaji Bhonsle (1630-80).

Chapter 2 will then explore the second stage in this sequence, which had its origins before the British conquest but reached its culmination during the period of colonial rule. Here Brahmans, together with scribes, ascetics and merchants who espoused Brahmanical social and spiritual codes, became ever more widely deferred to, even achieving a quasi-independent status in such areas as legal codes and colonial administrative practice. It was in this period that the power of the pollution barrier became for many Indians the defining feature of everyday caste experience.³

What will be seen in subsequent chapters is that British rule had the effect of intensifying many of the trends towards ritualisation in social life which were already underway well before the colonial period. Towards the end of British rule, and also in independent India, a process of what one might call de-ritualisation has been apparent. This has meant that Dumont's purity-conscious 'caste Hindu' has come in many cases to look more like a believer in material and political power as the chief measure of value in a dangerous and uncertain world. Yet these trends have never been complete. At no time in the past did all Indians deal with one another on a purely 'ritualistic' basis. By the same token, even in 'modern' environments, contemporary Indians

³ On the important phenomenon of the pollution barrier, that is, the values and practices dividing those of ritually 'clean' and 'unclean' birth, see below, Chapters 2, 5 and 8. (Despite their increasing power, these differentiations retained considerable fluidity and flexibility: see Parry 1970: 84-104 and 1979: 113.)

have not entirely de-ritualised their understanding of social difference. The focus throughout this study will therefore be on the many ways in which the experience of caste has taken root, often being forcibly challenged, and yet still spreading and diversifying in ways which had far-reaching effects across the subcontinent.

CASTE AND THE ORDERING OF PLURALITY

Nothing quite like caste has evolved in other parts of the world. Of course there are schemes of idealised social and moral order outside the subcontinent, especially in east and southeast Asia where Indian gods and social norms are widely known, but these schemes took shape in very different contexts. Japan's *bushido* code defined a hierarchy of warriors (*samurai*), commoners, merchants and 'untouchables' which resembled the fourfold varna scheme but was not associated with a proliferation of smaller *jati*-like birth-groups. In Thailand, ostensibly casteless Buddhist norms have co-existed for centuries with an ideal of kingship derived from India: hereditary Brahman ritualists still serve the Thai royal house, and the deified hero Ram is still the model for Thai rulers (as for the former Khmer kings of Cambodia) in their capacity as protectors of faith and righteousness. Furthermore, both east and southeast Asia have sizable minority populations – pastoralists, swidden cultivators and hunter-gatherers – who have been looked upon by 'civilised' townspeople and sedentary 'peasant' villagers in much the same way that so-called caste Hindus have regarded India's 'tribals'.⁴

Yet in east and southeast Asia, where the expansion of the rice frontier was generally accompanied by the spread of Islam and Buddhism, castelike hierarchies did not emerge from these differentiations between wanderers or 'tribals' on the one hand and sedentary villagers and townsfolk on the other. This should not come as a surprise: in these other Asian lands, diversities of religion, culture and language have been considerably less dramatic than India's. These

⁴ For debate on the existence of caste outside India, especially in *apartheid* societies, see Dumont 1970: 243–8; Berreman 1979; Ursula Sharma 'Berreman revisited' in Searle-Chatterjee and Sharma 1994: 72–91; Beteille 1991b: 15–36. (Detailed consideration of the literature on caste in Sri Lanka and Nepal is beyond the scope of this volume.) Potter and Potter (1990) and Bloch (1989) have pointed to the existence of castelike social groupings in China and Madagascar; Bourdieu (1962: 132) refers to the racial divide between whites and Muslims in colonial Algeria as a 'caste system'.

regions' political landscapes were generally much less diverse as well, with ideals of pre-colonial kingship often focused on only one divinely mandated royal house rather than many competing dynasties. Furthermore, in both the distant and more recent past, India's specialist Brahman priesthoods and ascetic preceptorial corporations tended to retain a considerable degree of separation and independence, even from very powerful rulers and their courts. Elsewhere in Asia, most notably in pre-modern Japan and China, both the Buddhist clergy (the monkhood or *sangha*) and its Confucian equivalents were often significantly more closely tied to state power than was the case for their Indian counterparts.

This difference can be attributed in part to the rise of regional Muslim kingdoms in India from the eleventh century onwards. Even where Muslim rulers patronised and interacted with Hindu religious foundations, as they often did, the subcontinent still did not develop a single composite 'national' faith. One further factor in the making of caste was the inheritance of a large body of sacred scripture elevating the Brahman to a status co-equal with or even superior to that of a reigning king, though this is certainly not to say that the *Institutes* of Manu or any other ancient code or text in some way 'created' the phenomenon of caste.⁵

Indeed the emergence of caste cannot be reduced to these factors or any other single causal factor. Yet the fact remains that, in contrast to other areas of Asia, the paramount fact of Indian history has been the subcontinent's remarkable array of contrasting ecologies, languages, religions, modes of production and political systems, as well as its great political fluidity, with persistent oscillations between prosperity and dearth, commercialisation and subsistence, pastoralism and peasant agriculture. One especially striking element of Indian life has been the presence of very large subordinated populations who have been identified as culturally, morally and even biologically distinct from other Indians: these are the people to whom such labels as 'tribals' and 'untouchables' have been applied.

All of these cultural, ethnic and historical diversities are reflected in the profusion of different meanings that Indians have given to the castes or caste-like groupings with which they have come to identify themselves. This was a particularly notable trend of the period

⁵ On eclectic styles of religious patronage, see Chapter 2, below.

explored in this chapter, this being the time when the great Mughal polity was fragmenting into the fluid regional successor regimes of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶ These critical changes in India's pre-colonial political landscape had profound but very disparate social effects. In many respects the subcontinent had become more fully integrated by the later eighteenth century, both physically and culturally. This integration derived from an increase in inter-regional warfare, as well as increasing travel, pilgrimage and commercial exchange, and greater scope for the transfer of writings and social norms from one region to another. Yet the limited standardisation which had occurred under Mughal administration was counter-balanced by equally powerful decentralising trends. These were particularly widespread during the eighteenth century, with its proliferation of competing and decentralised kingdoms and petty chiefdoms.

In these new post-Mughal realms, *parvenu* ruling elites took bold initiatives in the attempt to assert their power and legitimacy, turning to the symbols and language of caste as a prop of their statecraft, and especially to versions of these which emphasised power and beneficence. Yet at the same time, most of these rulers had to tolerate the presence of smaller-scale social groupings possessing their own norms and social conventions. These people, who included networks of long-distance traders, armed ascetics and arms-bearing 'tribals', often had only tenuous connections to the ideologies of caste being promulgated in these fluid new dynastic realms.⁷

The great puzzle then is how to relate people's lives in these environments of plurality and dynamism to ideals of jati and varna which apparently reduce human experience to arbitrary stereotypes: high and low, clean and unclean, 'pure' Brahman and 'impure' untouchable. In fact, however, pre-colonial kings and their subjects did not treat caste norms as one-dimensional absolutes, but as reference points to be negotiated, challenged or reshaped to fit changing circumstances. In the period from the Mughal conquest to the early stages of colonial rule, the caste or castelike conventions

⁶ On the formation of these Muslim-, Sikh- and Hindu-ruled polities (including those of Bengal, Awadh, the Punjab and the Maratha domains), see e.g. Alam 1986; Cole 1988; Grewal 1990; Gordon 1993; C. Bayly 1988; Wink 1986; Peabody 1991; also S. Bayly 1989; Dirks 1992a; Perlin 1985; Kulke 1995; Brittlebank 1997.

⁷ These circumstances of volatile politics and rapid but uneven economic growth ultimately came together to create a foothold for British military and commercial expansion across the subcontinent. See note 6, above; also Marshall 1996; Subrahmanyam 1990a.

which had come into being in different regions equipped both the weak and the strong with a means to maximise assets and protect themselves from loss.

This often involved naked coercion: new rulers and other insecure elites frequently invoked jati and varna principles in attempts to assert authority over dependent cultivators and other subordinate groups. But even people whose 'community' was defined as low or inferior in caste terms could see advantage in being known by a recognised title and status which they could associate with sacred norms and mandates, especially when others around them were relating themselves to these same conventions. These strategies of collective classing and ranking proved particularly valuable in circumstances where state power was fluid or insecure, and where large numbers of people had to adjust to the unpredictable in their everyday environments. The experience of caste could even reflect individual achievement, although in theory there should have been no way to force the facts of jati and varna to take account of personal prowess, as for example when a man claimed to be of exalted or 'pure' substance even though his origins were clearly of quite a different order.

So how wide were the diversities, given that caste has often been portrayed as a single homogeneous 'system', rather than a grid of diverse and changeable ideals and practices? In the high period of Mughal power (c. 1580–1700), there certainly were areas where strictly defined orderings of rank and status had come to prevail quite widely, especially among ruling elites, settled cultivators, and specialist mercantile and service groups in zones where intensive cultivation had long been practised. Such norms were common in the densely populated eastern Ganges valley. Similar conventions emphasising conformity to Brahman-derived ideals of refinement and ritual purity had emerged even earlier under the great Hindu dynasties which in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were centred on the royal courts and temples of the rice-growing southern river deltas.⁸

Yet even in south India, where Brahman-centred jati and varna codes are often thought of as being especially strict and all-embracing, the great ruler Krishnadeva Raya (1509–29) communicated an ideal of kingship which extolled both Brahman-centred piety and the virtues of lordship and armed prowess:

⁸ Stein 1980 and 1989.

CASTE, SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN INDIA

The expenditure of money ... [on] buying elephants and horses, ... in maintaining soldiers, in the worship of gods and Brahmans and in one's own enjoyment can never be called an expenditure ... [A king] should protect one and all of his subjects, should put an end to the mixing up of the castes among them ... [and] should always try to increase the merit of the Brahmans ... A king should get the merit of severe fasting and subduing the body only by giving money and not by giving up the enjoyment derivable from the anointments, baths, feasts, smearings, clothes and flowers in the several seasons ... A crowned king should always rule with an eye towards Dharma.⁹

Indeed, much of south India had no uniform 'system' of caste even in the colonial period, and the regional societies which came under Nayaka warrior rule in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were far from being textbook illustrations of the fourfold varna scheme. On the contrary, among south India's trading people there was little emphasis on the Vaishya ideal. In addition, many of the superior Tamilnad landowners, who modelled their refined lifestyles on those of superior Brahman land-controllers (*mirasidars*), did not themselves wear the sacred thread of the twice-born, the *suta*. As far as the formal varna scheme was concerned, this meant that they could not claim to be anything but members of the lowest varna, that of the non-elite Shudras.¹⁰

SEIGNEURIAL RIGHTS AND STATUSES: AN ARCHETYPE OF THE 'HIGH-CASTE'

These former Nayaka-ruled regions then were among the many areas where caste or castelike forms of social organisation were either fluid and open-ended or were based on conventions that were special to one particular regional subculture.¹¹ Elsewhere, however, there were regions where more standardised understandings of varna had become widespread and where, in particular, armed men of power had come to exalt themselves as heirs to the scriptural Kshatriya ideal. The adoption and spread of the title Rajput among north Indian ruling clans was of critical importance here. In the arid hill country which is now known as Rajasthan, located to the southwest of the Mughals' original strongholds in the Gangetic plain, powerful lords and their arms-bearing retainers had been calling themselves Rajput, a title derived

⁹ Sarasvati 1926; see Stein 1989: 51-2.

¹⁰ See Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 1992.

¹¹ See Chapter 3 below.

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from the Sanskrit *rajaputra*, 'king's son', as far back as the thirteenth or fourteenth century AD, and possibly much earlier. These people's closest counterparts elsewhere were the users of the south Indian designations Nayar and Nayaka; such titles as Kanyakubja and Maithil had similar connotations in the eastern Gangetic plain. Nevertheless, through a process of assimilation and interaction with the statecraft of the Mughals and their eighteenth-century successors, it was the Rajput version of lordly caste values that became particularly influential across much of the subcontinent.¹²

The Rajasthan region's ideal of Kshatriya-centred caste ideology emerged in its initial form well before the Mughal conquest, through the struggles which transformed the area's most effectively militarised chiefdoms into expansive royal domains. In both the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, Mughal armies fought bloody battles in this strategic frontier region, and through a mixture of force and conciliation, its kingdoms were eventually absorbed into the loosely textured Mughal political order. At this time, these armed elites had strong memories of the earlier clan chiefs who had made their mark in turbulent times by adopting known marks of lordship and exalted descent. Whether they were grandees commanding the region's great royal fortresses, or the armed retainers of such lords, such people now had to adapt themselves to the new circumstances of Mughal hegemony. Some clan heads accepted revenue-taking rights and military rank as Mughal clients, while others became 'rebel' opponents of Mughal rule; in either case such lineages had good reasons to identify with the potent though still highly flexible ideal of the lordly royal Rajput.¹³

Thinkers dating back to ancient times have written as if all of India (or non-Muslim India) were a domain of caste, with Brahman-centred caste values being everywhere revered as the core of human order and propriety, *dharma*. But the scholars of the Indo-Islamic courts knew that not all Indians, not even all 'Hindu' Indians, lived their lives by the principles of jati and varna. So to be Rajput or its equivalents elsewhere was more a matter of mediating between the formal world of courts, towns and villages and the big and vigorous populations

¹² Tod [1829–32] 1920; Peabody 1991 and 1996; Kolff 1990; Ziegler 1973: 3; Fox 1971; Ziegler 'Some notes on Rajput loyalties during the Mughal period' in Richards 1978.

¹³ Richards 1993.

who lived a more open or 'wild' life near the margins of the settled caste Hindu world.

India in the high Mughal period was therefore not yet embraced and integrated by proliferating Brahman-centred pilgrimages and royal rituals, with state power being exercised by and through pan-Indian Brahman service networks. As Chapter 2 will show, these were features of the far more castelike society that was only just beginning to take shape in many regions during the mid- to late eighteenth century. These were uneven processes even in the eighteenth century, with pacific Brahmanical norms often being confined to the lives of major courts and devotional centres, while the ways of prowess still flourished on the turbulent margins. Indeed, even at the centre of many new realms, these nominally opposing ways of life still existed side by side, sometimes in tension, but often interacting and interpenetrating, and with one only gradually coming to predominate over the others.

Yet the varna archetype of the Kshatriya-like man of prowess did become a key reference point for rulers and their subjects under the Mughals and their immediate successors. The chiefs and warriors whom the Mughals came to honour as Rajput lords in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may not even have been descendants of Rajasthan's earlier pre-Mughal elites. What mattered instead was that for both the Mughals' client feudatories and those who fought against them, these titles, and the markers of refined faith and social life which accompanied them, spoke in recognisable terms of exalted blood and ancestry.

Surprising as it may seem, Mughal rulers and their deputies actively fostered these assertions of seigneurial caste values. While the empire's power was still expanding, there was obvious advantage to be gained from the establishment of overlordship over an exalted regional military nobility. Indeed for the many Rajasthan chieftains who served in the Mughal armies as leaders of clan levies from their home domains, being Rajput came increasingly to be defined in precisely these terms, that is, as an entitlement to be enrolled in privileged military service within the imperial system. Mughal statecraft therefore consistently acknowledged the distinctiveness claimed by those professing Rajput birth and blood. In 1638 the Mughal dynast Shah Jahan personally placed the red *tilak* mark of investiture on the brow of his Rajput client Jaswant Singh of Marwar, despite the fact that this

gesture had strong connotations of Hindu dharmic convention. Even the 'Islamising' emperor Aurangzeb (reg. 1658-1707) included a high proportion of Rajput officers in the upper ranks of the imperial service hierarchy, and exempted them all from payment of *jizya*, the special tax on non-Muslims.¹⁴

These bonds between Mughals and Rajputs were equally notable in the sphere of dynastic marriage. Despite their allegiance to the ostensibly casteless faith of Islam, the Mughals made much of their marriages to Hindu brides from the households of Rajput grandees. In so doing they created strategic alliances and enhanced their legitimacy as dynasts by conforming to the known moral traditions of south Asian kingship. By these conventions, a true ruler must have many seigniorial co-sharers in his sovereignty. Such a ruler thus proclaims his authority by means of bride-taking and other acts which establish a continual flow of shared honour and allegiance between the sovereign and the lordly lineages who take part in these transactions.¹⁵

Under Mughal rule, all these usages spread far beyond the royal domains of Rajasthan, particularly across the Gangetic plain and deep into central India. This occurred in part through the continuing out-migration of arms-bearing lineages who called themselves Rajput. It was also a reflection of the willingness of Mughal rulers and officials to recognise titles implying Rajput descent as a marker of such people's assumption of rights to lordship over land. Again there were equivalent usages in the south, most notably in the kingdoms of the Telugu-speaking Nayaka dynasts who claimed to be heirs to the lordships created by the Deccan's Hindu Vijayanagar dynasts of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries.¹⁶

Both within and beyond these domains, those who wished to claim ties of blood and privileged clientage with elite lineages became increasingly insistent on their superiority to the unrefined toiling 'peasant' groups. By the later seventeenth century, there were many areas of north and central India where the most fertile lands had become subject to lords based in mud-walled forts who used their bonds of marriage with fellow Rajput, Maithil, Bhumihar or Kanyakubja patricians to command a flow of resources and deference from

¹⁴ Richards 1993: 179-80.

¹⁵ See Galey 1989; Richards 1978; Dirks 1987; Fox 1971; Stern 1977; Cohn 'Political systems in eighteenth-century India' in Cohn 1987: 483-99.

¹⁶ Stein 1989.



1. The Mughal Prince Parviz in audience with his father, Jahangir. The emperor wears a Rajput-style turban; Mughal court styles were strongly influenced by the conventions and symbols of Rajput lordliness.

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non-elite tillers and dependent labourers. By the early nineteenth century, European travel writers regularly observed both fortress-dwelling chiefs and their more prosperous 'peasant' imitators who defined themselves as men of refinement whose forebears had never 'touched the plough'.¹⁷

In the north, these clusters of petty rural patricians looked to ideals of Kshatriya kingship which had originated within the grander Kshatriya-ruled realms and chiefdoms. Amongst such lineages, the wearing of the sacred thread came to be considered a distinguishing mark of the Rajput seigneur and his regional counterparts, and to be incompatible with the life of the non-elite 'peasant'. And ultimately, as Chapter 2 will show, a high proportion of these men of prowess turned to forms of high courtly culture which exalted the more purity-conscious versions of varna ideology, most notably those which proclaimed the indispensability of Brahmans to human and cosmic order.

Of course these areas still contained large numbers of non-elite tillers. In the Punjab and the western Gangetic plains, convention defined the Rajput's non-elite counterpart as a Jat. Like the many similar titles used elsewhere, this was not so much a caste name as a broad designation for the man of substance in rural terrain. Even well into the nineteenth century, a male Jat was understood to be a man of worth but not a follower of exacting lordly codes. If he tilled land, his holdings were generally organised into common units of ownership (*bhaiachara*, literally brotherhoods), with each co-sharer being a fellow member of the same descent unit (the clan or *gotra*). In theory at least, each of these kin groups was a tightly-knit unit exercising control over the lands and villages of its own self-regulating ancestral territory or *khap*: tradition holds that this control was maintained through the authority of bodies which were known as *sarv-khap* (clan-territory assemblies). To be called Jat has in some regions implied a background of pastoralism, though it has more commonly been a designation of non-servile cultivating people.¹⁸

¹⁷ Pinch 1996: 86.

¹⁸ Pradhan 1966: 94-111 notes Mughal references to these *sarv-khap* assemblies; see also Stokes 1986: 128-42. In the Deccan the most widely used designation for 'peasant' groups was Kanbi. Their closest counterparts were the people referred to as Kammas, Reddis and Lingayats in much of the south, and as Kurmis and Goalas in Hindustan.

During the later Mughal period, the seigneurial rights of the greater landed lineages had come to be widely understood in ritual terms, that is, as a claim of inherited superiority over people who were identified by lower-status caste names. However, the basis of such rights was in the assertion and sharing of lordliness: in the more formally ordered kingdoms and chiefdoms over which the Mughals established their suzerainty, these assertions of rank came to be rooted in the claim that some higher overlord, a king or other man of power, had recognised one's ability to collect and remit revenue, usually land tax, within a particular territory.¹⁹

As the scale of state power expanded during the later sixteenth century and into the seventeenth, such opportunities became more widely available. In addition to those who could plausibly call themselves Rajput or Nayaka, many of these newer revenue contractors (*zamindars*) came from families claiming Brahman origins. In such areas as Darbhanga (now in north Bihar), these powerful lineages found advantage in embracing the style and trappings of princely lords (*rajas*). Darbhanga's Brahman revenue-receivers signalled their seigneurial pretensions by adopting the jati title Maithil; this prestigious honorific had many equivalents elsewhere.²⁰ Such titles came to be associated with highly formalised jati and varna norms, and in particular with an insistence on the lordly man's duty to protect Brahmans and Brahmanical caste codes.

This kind of caste ideology became much more pervasive during the colonial period. Its most distinctive feature was its insistence on the power of the pollution barrier, that is, an emphasis on the impurity and degradation of so-called untouchables, and for those of 'clean' caste an ideal of strict exclusiveness in relation to marriage, dress and diet.²¹ (See below, Chapter 5.) These are the rigorous social codes that have been widely regarded as the core of a single all-pervasive Hindu caste 'system', equipping both the weak and the strong to say in effect: 'Those are my inferiors; they are unclean by birth; by divine mandate their womenfolk are available to me, and they themselves must defer and toil in ways which I do not.' But caste in these forms was not universal even in the Gangetic heartland of Mughal India or in the 'orthodox' Hindu south. Such highly developed manifestations of jati

¹⁹ See Tod [1829-32] 1920, I: 127; Westphal-Hellbusch 1974.

²⁰ Ludden 1985: 166; Brass 1974: 58-9.

²¹ For further discussion of this important phenomenon, see Chapter 5, below.

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and varna had only a very rough similarity to the looser forms of community which were still prominent long after the decline of central Mughal power.

THE OTHER INDIA: 'MARAUDERS', UPLANDERS AND ARMS-BEARING 'PEASANTS'

Despite the prestige achieved by such people as Rajputs and Nayakas in their home locales, the life of the so-called traditional caste Hindu was still strange to many Indians even in relatively recent times. Long after the rise of the post-Mughal successor states, a large proportion of the subcontinent was still populated by martial uplanders and pastoralists who knew little of Brahmans, purity norms or socially exclusive marriage practices. Yet here, too, the broad status categories employed by military recruiters and other key practitioners of Indo-Islamic statecraft had familiarised many Indians with the idea that, like Rajputs, such non-lordly arms-bearers were also to be identified by specific regional 'community' titles. Indeed the very assertiveness of the seigneurial groups who wished to be known as Rajput had its direct counterpart in the increasing use and recognition of such collective arms-bearers' designations as Gujar, Koli, Kallar, Marava and Rebari.

Yet the forebears of the Tamil-speaking Kallar 'caste' whom Dumont studied in the 1950s would have been hard to recognise as a caste in the modern sense even in the later eighteenth century. Looking at such populations historically, it becomes clear that the turbulent events of state-building and ideological change both before and during the colonial period subjected such arms-bearers as south India's poligars (warrior chiefs), together with their counterparts elsewhere, to a further 200 years of caste-forming influences.²² Not the least of these was the disappearance of the thick jungle which still covered much of this terrain until the late eighteenth century. Until relatively recent times there were few sedentary 'peasants' either in the poligar country or in such areas as the Koli-dominated territories of Gujarat. The contemporary evidence suggests that hierarchical varna

²² The chiefs known as poligars came to control much of the Tamil and Telugu country in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; most were from the southern arms-bearing populations known as Kallars, Maravas and Vadugas. See Price 1996.

and jati concepts were of little significance among these regions' arms-bearing people until this process of 'peasantisation' was well in train.

Certainly the names by which these martial groups have come to be known often originated as dismissive outsiders' coinages, rather than caste or 'tribal' designations in the modern sense. Yet by the mid-eighteenth century, as Mughal authority fragmented and the rulers of the new regional successor realms fought to consolidate their power, many of the upland, forest and 'tribal' people made dramatic gains. The expanding state systems with which they became involved in this period played a crucial role in pulling the Kallars and their counterparts elsewhere into the world of jati and varna. This happened gradually at first, and in ways that generally reinforced the arms-bearers' command of ritual and material resources, and then more fully and disadvantageously as the East India Company's forces began to subjugate and 'sedentarise' these groups.

The statecraft of the Mughals and post-Mughal successor regimes certainly did not 'invent' caste. Yet by building on the inheritance of the Rajput domains and other pre-Mughal royal centres, these rulers familiarised a high proportion of their subjects with distinctions between high and low or meritorious and unmeritorious birth. By the early eighteenth century, a whole range of standardised social classifications had become central to the language of officials, scholars and military men. In addition to the titles associated with Rajput status, such broad regional arms-bearers' designations as Kallar and Marava in the south, and Koli, Ahir and Maratha in the west and north, gained prominence both in Indo-Islamic record-keeping and in the usages of such rulers as the south Indian Nayakas.²³

None of these was a truly castelike usage, signalling corporate affinity within an all-embracing dharmic order. Many were simply the usages of the scribe and the lofty urban moraliser in referring to those whom they regarded as frontiersmen and turbulent rustics, of interest primarily for purposes of record-keeping and intelligence-gathering. So a Mughal chronicler, commenting in 1664 on an abortive uprising involving 'predatory Kolis' from the Ahmedabad region, records: 'The Kolis, who always have the wind of revolt and the passion of rebellion in their heads, made that base person [a 'Balooch' rebel leader] a handle of revolt, and created disorder.' In the Gangetic north, arms-

²³ These were successors to south India's medieval Vijayanagar dynasts.

bearing Jat and Rohilla 'plunderer' populations were stereotyped in much the same way in eighteenth-century Persian commentaries.²⁴

Crude as it was, this terminology did reflect a rough notion of shared geographical origin, and often a specific liability to revenue payment or military service. Not surprisingly then, these labels, and others which regional officials either coined or took over from their predecessors, were rapidly assimilated into local vernacular languages. This occurred particularly in areas where such terminology reflected moves made by new rulers to differentiate among those of their subjects whose skills could be used in expanding their armies and revenue networks.

Through the operation of these patronage and preferment systems, large numbers of Indians became accustomed to the use of the many corporate titles which the Mughals and their successors had applied to both martial and non-martial client groups. Again, it was the people to whom such titles as Koli and Kallar had been applied who were particularly important here. Although most of the subcontinent's mobile forest- and plains-dwellers were disarmed and coercively 'peasantised' under British rule, during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the waning of Mughal suzerainty brought rich opportunities for these groups. Aspiring dynasts competed for their skills and allegiances, and as they became more deeply involved with the people of towns and sedentary cash-cropping villages, it would have been hard to draw firm boundaries between the martial meat-eaters and the big groupings of rural people who were known to other Indians either by superior lordly designations – Bhumihar, Rajput, Nayaka – or by so-called peasant titles – Jat, Kanbi, Kurmi and Kamma. Until well into the nineteenth century, these groups were all part of the same social continuum as the lordly elites and toiling cultivators who are now thought of as conventional 'caste Hindus'.

Nevertheless, by the standards of those who lived among socially exclusive and varna-conscious 'caste Hindus', the sense of community displayed by Kolis, Kallars and other mobile arms-bearers was decidedly open and fluid. It is particularly notable then that in the new kingdoms and dynamic smaller lordships which came into being across most of India in the eighteenth century, many of the new men of power had precisely this kind of non-elite martial background. A

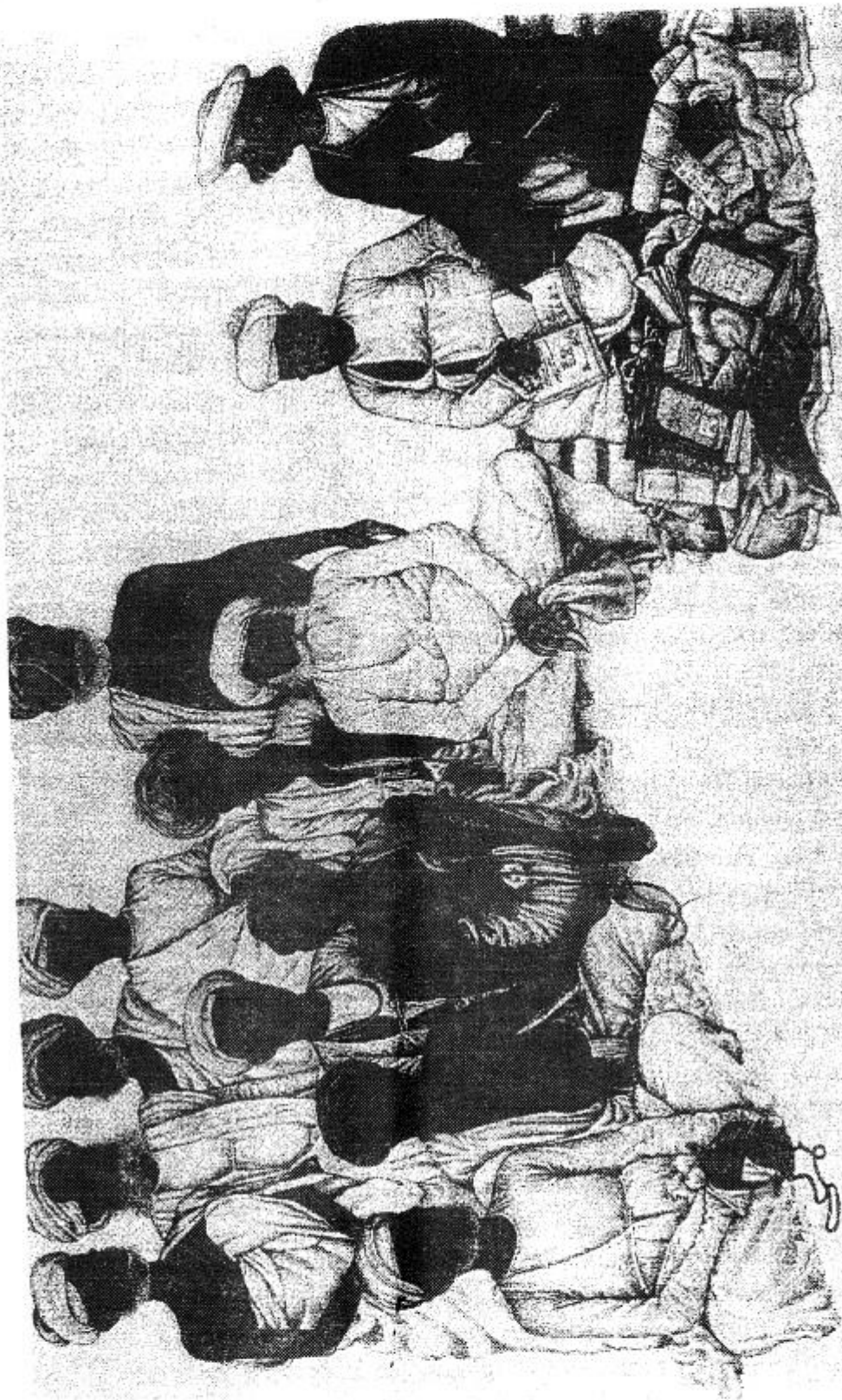
²⁴ Khan 1965: 227.

significant number of these chiefs and dynasts were either descendants of humble tillers from the thinly settled lowland plains, or hillmen and pastoralists with an established warrior tradition and a history of uneasy relations with sedentary village-dwellers.

Relatively few of the new lords and revenue magnates were superior 'caste Hindus' in the modern sense. Few wore the sacred thread (*suta*), and most were supported by socially diverse populations of warrior-cultivators who were relative strangers to Brahmanical convention. In the north, many of the individuals and armed lineages who forged these new dominions were identified as Marathas and Jats, and as Kallars and Maravas in the south. Many others called themselves Rajput. But as will be seen below, the armed lineages who expanded the margins of trade and commercial cultivation into remote areas in the Himalayan foothills and along the thinly populated fringes of the Gangetic plainland centres lived very different lives from those of the Mughals' grand patrician clients.

Initially at least, as they competed with their rivals for warrior recruits and other local allies, the rulers and their armed retainers in such dominions as the Jat-ruled Bharatpur kingdom southwest of Delhi, or in the other dry and thinly populated tracts of the poligar country and the western Gangetic plain, had good reasons to stay relaxed about matters of ritual purity. Many were from Muslim minority populations; these rulers particularly found advantage in building open and all-embracing networks of recruitment and affiliation. The non-Muslim soldiers, merchants and revenue contractors who took the new dynasts' patronage also needed to keep their options open: some Brahmanical exclusiveness in diet and marriage-making could signal to both Hindu and Muslim rulers that one's kin were honourable and thus suitable for service within the new realm. Too much, on the other hand, could foreclose options for tactical marriages and alliances with these rulers' other new-found clients.

In these areas where understandings of 'caste' were comparatively loose and flexible, the new rulers did recognise the more formal versions of jati and varna which characterised certain of their subjects and near neighbours. The self-made dynasts thus knew and used the relatively precise and socially exclusive jati and varna titles which were common to the specialist merchants, priests and artisans whose skills were of value to them in the forging of their new domains. At the same time, not even all of these people drew hard and fast boundaries



2. Tax collectors and village elders from the Delhi region. The latter are identified as Jats, Mewatis and Ahirs, and the pair holding tax records as a Kayastha and a Muslim. Painted for the scholar-official William Fraser (1784-1835), probably by the artist Ghulam Ali Khan.

between themselves and the populations of nomadic hill people, pastoralists and forest hunter-gatherers who made up a sizable proportion of the Indian population in this period.

Certainly the eighteenth-century dynasts and lordly groups found it advantageous to interact with unsettled 'marauders' as well as settled villagers and the habitués of the more refined court and shrine centres. This was no longer the case for people who used patrician titles in the later nineteenth century, when the memories of such connections were being widely disowned by 'pure' caste Hindus. Indeed, as Chapter 2 will show, for all the openness and ambiguity of the eighteenth-century warrior rulers in such matters, it was paradoxically the strategic and ideological needs of the dynasts which tilted the balance towards stricter order and rank, both in the making of marriages and in other important areas of caste experience. Even so, it was only in the later colonial period, when a high proportion of the unsettled arms-bearers had been reduced to the status of tied labourers in the service of dominant cultivators, that plains-dwellers came more generally to shun hill and forest people as unclean enemies of the 'caste Hindu'.

Yet in most cases these changes came slowly and unevenly. Even well into the era of the East India Company's political ascendancy, many people who were recognised as Rajputs, or as persons of equivalent honour and refinement in other regions, still had attachments to meat-eating 'tribal' chiefs, recruiting warriors from their kin groups, recognising the power of their gods and forest holy places, and often accepting their daughters in marriage.

It is true that by the mid-eighteenth century, many of the expansive new post-Mughal lordships were encroaching deep into the territories of the supposedly fierce and carnal people who were known by such titles as Bhil, Gond and Santal. Yet these heightened contacts could still be mutually advantageous. As the new dynasts became increasingly dependent on cash revenue and commerce, many hill and forest groups provided a market for commodities from the plains. In many cases too, rulers increased their recruitment of irregular military levies from these turbulent margins, whose populations often still mixed forms of shifting cultivation with armed tribute-taking from adjacent 'peasant' locales. So, far from seeking to disarm or annihilate such people, the Marathas and other post-Mughal dynasts found at least until the later eighteenth century that it made strategic sense to vest the most valuable of these groups with forms of qualified sovereignty

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(*girasi*), often with a tacit right to raid adjacent populations of sedentary revenue-paying 'peasants'.²⁵

In both north and central India, some new dynasts encouraged the itinerant quasi-Brahman bards known as Bhats or Charans to attach themselves to these armed hill lineages whom they called *girasias* (sometimes *girisi rajas*, later anglicised as Gracias or Grasia Rajas).²⁶ The idea of recruiting Bhats to sing the praises of these so-called *girasidars* was that these hill chiefs could thereby be exalted in the heraldic style associated with Rajputs, thus becoming more plausibly 'royal', and therefore fit to exercise the kind of parcelled-out lordship that had become the basis of suzerainty both in the Maratha-ruled territories and elsewhere. This seems to have been the means by which many self-made men of prowess equipped themselves with convincing Rajput 'caste' credentials. In the south too there were bardic groups who performed similar functions in the poligar country.

There was always a delicate balance between aggression and harmony in these relationships. Even so, until relatively recent times plains people tended to hold the bearers of 'tribal' titles in mingled fear and reverence. Their hills and forests commanded respect as the domains of blood-taking deities whose powers of *sakti* or activated divine energy empower both kings and gods to contend with the unclean or 'demonic' forces which continually menace the ordered dharmic world. Even well into the nineteenth century many powerful people still understood 'caste' codes to be saying to men of prowess that conformity to Brahmanical norms was not enough, that dynasts and their fellow Kshatriyas had a mandate to associate themselves, however ambivalently, with the gods, peoples and warlike energies of the hills and forest margins.

This idea even entered the great sixteenth-century Mughal text on statecraft, the *Ain-i-akbari*, which records a legend about the founder of one of the great Rajput dynasties being brought up in the wilds by a spear-wielding Bhil. When the young prince succeeds to his throne he is given his *tilak*, his emblem of royal consecration, by being marked on the brow with human blood provided by his Bhil protector. This stands in marked contrast to later versions of this story in which the

²⁵ Skaria 1992; also Tod [1829–32] 1920, I: 190–1; Singh 1988; Unnithan 1994.

²⁶ Forbes 1813, II: 88–106. On these Bhat 'self-immolators', see Chapter 2, below.

Bhil guardian becomes a mere savage to be subdued and triumphed over, thus proclaiming that the lordly man conforms to models of varna-derived Kshatriya refinement. The blood in the ritual is now that of the Bhil himself, slain by the prince who has won his throne by shedding the blood of the un-dharmic forest 'other'.²⁷

DEVOTION AND 'CASTELESSNESS'

Caste terms and principles were certainly not in universal use in the post-Mughal period, but those seeking appropriate terminology could certainly glean much from the available sacred sources – from the Sanskrit *Vedas* and epics, from Manu and the other *dharmasastras*, from the *purana* texts, from Brahmanical rituals, and even from the denunciations of anti-Brahmanical 'reformers'. Furthermore, by the early eighteenth century, more and more Indians could see these schemes of rank and classification being used to advantage all around them.

Yet at this time both the subordinated and the newly advantaged could and did turn to other forms of religion which have been widely described as 'casteless' and anti-Brahmanical. These spiritual traditions derive from the religion of *bhakti* or devotion as expressed by the great *sampradayas* or organised sectarian orders. Initiates of these monk-led orders still bind themselves in loving communion to one of the incarnate forms of the all-India high gods, the most popular of these being Ram the warrior-king, and Krishna the pastoral lover and nurturer. In the centuries preceding the British conquest, these devotional networks spoke to both new and established 'peasants', and also to rulers, traders and artisanal populations, in the anti-Brahmanical language of Caitanya, Kabir and the other historic teachers and mystics.²⁸

²⁷ On the Marathas' bloody subjugation of Bhils in Indore, where worship was offered to the eighteenth-century rulers' royal executioner's axe, see Luard 1908, II: 222. Also Unnithan 1994: 109; M. Carstairs 'Bhils of Kotra Bhomat' in Mathur and Agarwal 1974; Delège 1985; Guha 1996; and the anthropologist Adrian Mayer's account (1985: 215) of a Rajput prince's accession rite in 1918 when a Bhil reportedly performed the hereditary task of applying the installation brow mark with blood from his own gashed thumb.

²⁸ Among other medieval preceptors in this tradition are Ramanuja, and also the originator of Sikh teaching, Guru Nanak; earlier versions of anti-Brahmanical teaching were disseminated through both Buddhism and Jainism. For historically informed anthropological treatments of the *sampradaya* faiths see Burghart 1978a; van der Veer 1987, 1988; Pinch 1996.

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Islam too, which first took root in coastal areas of the west and south through contact with eighth- and ninth-century Arab traders, had a complex history of interaction with the anti-Brahman *sampradaya* faiths. By the sixteenth century, the rise of Muslim-ruled kingdoms in the Deccan and north spread the teachings of Islam to both humble and elite groups in much of the subcontinent, with Muslims comprising as much as one-fifth of the population in some areas. Even after the decline of Mughal power in the early eighteenth century, Muslim *pirs* (adepts of the mystical and devotional traditions known as Sufism) continued to be revered by both Muslims and non-Muslims. These *pirs* or cult saints attracted constituencies which were similar to the followings of Hindu *bhakti* teachers and Sikh gurus, and which shared many of their ideals and spiritual practices. Thus, from these sources too, Indians encountered messages of devotion to a deity who was to be seen as transcendent, but also as dissolving divisions of rank and hierarchy through practices of personalised mystical devotion.

Paradoxically, however, even though both Islam and the popular *bhakti* forms of Hinduism are often described as casteless and egalitarian, few if any adherents of these traditions should be seen as renouncers of caste. On the contrary, in the Punjab, Bengal and the southern poligar country particularly, the many non-elite 'peasants' and pastoralists who became devotees of Muslim *pirs* during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seem to have become distinctly more castelike than hitherto through these new-found bonds of discipleship. Of course these ties were not based on Brahmanical purity, but they did foster a sense of Kallar, Rangar or Meo *qaum* or *jati* affinity which was nourished by shared attachment to the *pir* and his power.

Such developments were particularly widespread in areas where the Muslim saint or spiritual preceptor had become a recipient of royal patronage, and an embodiment of lordly powers and virtues, in one of the fast-growing new regional realms and chiefdoms.²⁹ These trends closely resembled patterns of caste formation which were occurring at this time among hitherto amorphous and open-ended trading and service groups. Such people developed these enhanced *jati* affinities through attachment to *pir*-like local power divinities (*birs* and *virans*),

²⁹ S. Bayly 1989.

or to the temples, *maths* and gurus of regional *bhakti* cult deities. Here particularly we see a connection between the movement of merchants and traders into the *bhakti* cults and their growing association with the larger and more settled kingdoms and royal patronage networks of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.³⁰

This was also true of the initiated adherents of Sikh teaching in the north, and the followers of the Shiva-Lingayat tradition in the southern Deccan. These adherents of devotional faith had already become castelike 'communities' in their own right well before the era of the post-Mughal successor realms. More generally, however, *bhakti* teaching simply gave to the ordinary so-called caste Hindu an experience of mystical and apparently casteless union with the divine.

Yet even when the *sampradaya* sectarian orders devalued worldly jati and varna hierarchies, their lay adherents did not deny their validity in everyday life. Especially where marriage was concerned, lay initiates who worshipped through a personal guru (preceptor) rather than a Brahman ritualist would still accept that the 'untouchable' Chamar or Paraiyan was radically unlike the devotee of respectable caste origin. Many *bhakti* sects denied initiation to 'unclean' groups; some allowed only those of Brahman birth to become gurus. And at the very least these movements – like north India's Ram-worshipping Ramanandis, and the other *bhakti* networks which played a crucial role in the making of what we now call Hinduism – built on familiarity with jati and varna conventions, even though their devotees were urged to evade or transcend these boundaries in certain circumstances.³¹

Furthermore the activities of these 'conversion' faiths and *sampradaya* networks gave rise to assertive counter-movements like Bengal's early nineteenth-century Dharma Sabha organisations which rallied self-professed preservers of 'orthodox' faith to the defence of Brahmanical authority. Bengal was one of many ethnolinguistic regions where strong caste ideologies existed side by side with ostensibly un-Brahmanical forms of *bhakti* Hinduism, as well as with Sikh, Muslim and even Christian variants of devotional faith. In many cases too, both before and during the colonial period, battles between organised

³⁰ On such networks of affiliation among Hindus see Prakash 1990a: 41–58; Conlon 1977. On *pirs* see S. Bayly 1989; Eaton 1978.

³¹ See e.g. Pinch 1996: 27. A similar diversity of messages can be seen in the teachings of Sikhism, and in the many 'indigenised' manifestations of Islam and Christianity which took root in the subcontinent in the centuries before European conquest.

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groups of Hindu 'modernisers' and 'traditionalists' helped to heighten awareness of jati and varna concepts for people of varying social backgrounds, both before and during the colonial era.

THE INNER LOGIC OF CASTE

How then did perceptions of caste come to operate in these situations of rapid change over the last two to three centuries? How did the facts of an insecure environment shape the way in which Indians judged and classified both themselves and those of other 'communities'? And how is it that something in the nature of a caste 'system' came to be built out of such disparate principles as a reverence for the pure and the ascetic, and an exaltation of the warlike man of arms?

To return to the tripartite classifications identified at the beginning of this chapter, these questions may best be answered by exploring the uneasy synthesis that has emerged in relatively recent times between three distinct ways of life. These modes of conduct did not precisely match the three superior classifications of the varna scheme, though they came increasingly to serve as idealised reference points for people whose forebears had been comparatively untouched by caste values. These three modes of conduct were:

- (1) the way of life of the kingly warrior or man of prowess;
- (2) the way of life of the service-provider, meaning both the literate priestly man and the specialist record-keeper; and
- (3) the way of life of the settled man of worth, meaning both the productive and virtuous tiller and the man of commerce, both of whom might favour the spiritual model of the ascetic renouncer rather than the Brahman priest.

Taken together, these were the three main areas of opportunity which became available to those with appropriate skills at the time when the declining Mughal state and its south Indian counterparts were giving way to the new seventeenth- and eighteenth-century successor regimes, and thereafter to the growth of European colonial power. None of these pursuits and callings was new to the subcontinent; what was new in this period was the conceptual and practical importance they were acquiring in circumstances of growing social complexity.

As has been seen, many of the new eighteenth-century rulers and their key retainers were members of 'caste 'communities' only in the sense of having being roughly generalised about by others in these terms, assigned by Brahmanical convention or a ruler's scribes and

office-holders to an imprecise category with more or less pejorative overtones: Jat or Kurmi; Kallar or Marava; Rebari, Koli, Ahir or Gujar. From the vantage point of these people who had achieved new power and wealth through arms-bearing, India in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a world of individual opportunity and prowess, rather than one in which people of power were born into a known place on a ladder of strictly defined ritual precedence.

Yet everyday experience for many Indians was also coming into line with a picture of the civilised environment as one of more intricately delineated relationships between different social and occupational groups. What the rulers and their lordly clients were finding was that these insecurities could best be countered by projecting themselves as heirs to a known heroic tradition, this being the dharmic ideal of the Kshatriya king whose use of force is just, and who protects and orders the world according to strict norms of virtue and propriety.

Such rulers still needed flexibility in the relationships they were forging with other armed people and with the key specialist populations of the wider society. Brahman-centred formalities were therefore not immediately subscribed to by these new dominion-builders. Yet this was a period when lords and dynasts from comparatively humble backgrounds were adopting recognisably castelike ways of dealing with their subjects, drawing on the terms and archetypes of the Kshatriya ideal as a means of structuring their relationships with important retainers, allies and service-providers. So although they did not necessarily emphasise strict norms of purity, these rulers' claims of lordliness came increasingly to rest on a perception of their non-Muslim subjects as subordinated 'caste Hindus' leading a life of dharmic correctness under the supervision of a Kshatriya-like man of prowess. In making these claims, the new rulers already had a known repertoire of terms and concepts to tap into. Many occupationally specialised groups already used identifying titles which were much like modern caste names, and as we have seen, others were fast acquiring a more jati-like affinity through new patterns of migration and devotional attachment.

As will be seen in Chapter 2, a high proportion of these known 'caste Hindu' norms were associated either with named Brahman jati groupings (Nambudiris, Anavils, Chitrapur Saraswats, Kanyakubjas, Chitpavans) or with the specialist pollution-removers who served these varna-conscious groups (Bhangis, Doms, Chamars, Dheds,

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Kahars and many others). It was against this background that the ideal of the lordly and righteous Kshatriya acquired its appeal for an increasing number of lords and dynasts in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Anthropologists still find that when these titles and archetypes are invoked, Brahmans are widely thought of as people who should minimise their contacts with different classes of being. They should shun adornment and fleshly indulgence, placing an inherited calling to the spiritual above worldly ties and duties, even to the extent of rationing sensual impulses within marriage.³² This contrasts sharply with the qualities that have come to be associated with those of lordly patrician birth. A lineage claiming Rajput descent is understood to inherit a Kshatriya's mode of conduct, that is, the ideal of the heroic sovereign who sheds blood in a righteous cause and performs feats of prowess through which disharmony and unrighteousness may be dispelled or kept at bay. The king-like being therefore makes contact with dangerous powers and energies and consumes substances that would be incompatible with those prescribed for the Shudra, the Vaishya and the Brahman. Far from limiting his contacts with those of unlike kind, the environment of the man of prowess must be like the good king's realm, highly pluralistic, yet rendered harmonious and productive by his capacity to interact with and order the different classes of gods and humans. This was certainly the picture of the ideal realm conveyed in the dynastic chronicles which were commissioned by many rulers in the new realms and chiefdoms of the eighteenth century.³³

In theory at least, although one does not need to live a soldier's life in order to be known as Rajput, any more than one has to perform priestly functions to qualify as a Brahman, a male Rajput inherits a mandate to fulfil the Kshatriya ideal: to be an eater of rich foods, a lover of women and a doer of heroic deeds. And since Indians commonly read important messages into what is put on and into the body, there have evolved strong expectations that Rajputs and their regional counterparts should live, eat and dress in styles recalling the virility and worldliness of warriors.

This is certainly the way Rajput rulers had themselves depicted by

³² K. Gough 'Brahman kinship in a Tamil village' in Uberoi 1993: 146-75.

³³ See e.g. Burghart 1978b; Dirks 1982; S. Bayly 1989: 49-55.

the artists and praise-singers (Charans) whom they recruited to their courts. By the eighteenth century these styles were spreading rapidly throughout the subcontinent. Thus, the wearing of certain turbans and jewels, and the cultivation of luxuriant moustaches, came to be widely adopted as marks of lordly identity, both by the lords of Rajasthan and by those who were making similar claims in other regions. These reflect perceptions of sexuality and the body's physical attributes that are found in many other societies, most notably in Islamic west Asia. In the subcontinent, Muslims and Sikhs as well as Hindus commonly regard loosely flowing hair as being charged with sexual energy. A mustachioed man is virile and soldierly, and by the same token a mature woman's hair – indeed her whole body – should be subject to a demanding code of modesty and containment.³⁴

This is one of many areas in which the ideal of Rajput dress and conduct has come to overlap with those of the elite south Asian Muslim populations who have preserved a tradition of lordliness and arms-bearing. In both cases, men and women have contrasting obligations. It is expected that the Rajput man – or the man claiming equivalent warrior-like status – should parade his manliness and martial honour, while the sexuality of the Rajput woman should be rigorously controlled. By these standards, to be non-Rajput was to be one of two things: a pure, pacific person who had need of the lordly man's protection to safeguard his women's honour; or someone weak and lowly and therefore fair game, a provider of womenfolk for the patrician's gratification.³⁵

Those people in past centuries who wished to classify themselves by these lordly standards had a wide range of rituals, dietary codes and other markers which could be used to signal their distinctiveness in the eyes of others. Above all, however, there was the careful regulation of marriage alliances, so that it has become hard to conceive of caste without the central feature of endogamy – marriage within one's birth-group. Historically, and to a considerable extent today, people who subscribe to the more formalised versions of caste norms will tend to treat the mixing of seed from different human orders as bad, dangerous and uncivilised.³⁶

³⁴ Beck 1976; Das 1976; Das 'Paradigms of body symbolism' in Burghart and Cantlie 1985; Ward 1997; Bennett 1983 esp. p. 259 n. 31; O'Hanlon forthcoming a and b.

³⁵ Tambiah 1973.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

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Nevertheless, many of these same people have also tended to pay close attention to complex internal gradations of status within a given birth-group, meaning that kin groups will compete to make marriages that are not merely permissible but are also regarded as prestigious. So it is not just that Brahmans marry other Brahmans, or that those wishing to be known as Rajput or Vellala must find suitable matches amongst lineages of acknowledged Rajput and Vellala birth. Most of those whom we now call caste Hindus have come to see the jatis in which they claim membership as networks of hierarchically ranked descent groups. People who subscribe to these views will seek to make marriages not just with fellow Tamilnad Vellalas or Gujarat Patidars, but with the 'best' available sub-class of their own kind or order. In much of India, it has become common for people to try to elevate themselves in relation to others of the same overarching caste group through the policing of blood-lines, often by marrying daughters 'upwards' into higher-status clans or lineages. This practice, which anthropologists call hypergamy, has been widely understood as sustaining and perpetuating ideals of ritualised hierarchy at the core of the Indian moral order. Among the many groups in south India and elsewhere who have not followed this practice of hypergamy, other means have existed to regulate marriage on a similar basis.³⁷

On the other hand, until relatively recently many 'clean-caste' people did not insist on the distinction between so-called caste-fellows, who were suitable to ally with, and non-caste-fellows who were beyond the pale of formal marriage ties. In past centuries, many non-elite tillers gloried in a tradition of open-ended matchmaking. Well into the colonial period many of the rural north Indians who called themselves Jats were known for their practice of *karewa*, that is, the taking of wives or concubines from non-Jat 'peasant' or nomadic groups. Far from being seen as low or polluting, this was taken as a sign of manly prowess on the part of those who added to their kin group's stock of womenfolk in this way. It has been only in comparatively recent times that a much more exclusive ideal of marriage modelled on the practices ascribed to the 'purest' and grandest Rajputs and other lordly groups has come to be exalted by former followers of *karewa* or *karewa*-like practices.³⁸

³⁷ Important studies of south Asian marriage systems include: Dumont 1966; Pocock 1972; Nicholas 1975; Kolenda 1984. See also Kolenda 1980; Parkin 1990; Uberoi 1993.

³⁸ See Pradhan 1966: 4, 78; Datta 1997: 101-2.

This marital dimension of caste has been a key concern of twentieth-century anthropology. Under the influence of Dumont, many theorists have seen the marriage bond as the defining principle of the Indian social order, at least for professing Hindus. On this basis, caste becomes radically distinct from the descent-based social systems mapped by ethnographers in other parts of the world. Rather than making bloodlines carry the weight of people's social relationships, 'caste Hindus' have been thought to exalt the webs of alliance created through marriage over ties of blood, descent and affinity. In other words, it is not enough to ask who someone's father was; the key question in 'caste society' is held to be who will take one's kin as brides or grooms.

In times past, even the Indian state seems to have been shaped in these terms: marital alliances with the king and his kin become a critical source of power and status, and kingdoms grew and took shape around elaborate webs of royal marriage ties.³⁹ Even today, it is still widely reported that caste values define the kin of wife-receivers as conferring honour on the kin of the bride, the wife-givers. It is therefore a sign of true grandeur for a lineage if one's female kin are in demand as brides, and the most exalted matches are those made with the most exclusive descent groups.

If we ask how these trends evolved historically, in other words, who took the lead in embracing and spreading these conventions, we must stress again the role of the arms-bearers and self-made dynasts of the relatively recent past. Even men who achieved power through acts of individual prowess, and then went on to lead the sort of lordly and lavish life deemed appropriate to a Rajput, still felt a need to show the world that they were adherents of a known moral code. This prescribed order in all things, starting with the most fundamental matters of blood and procreation, and emphasising the nullification of those innumerable ritual pollutions which emanate from all forms of active human life.

There have been countless ethnographic studies treating the importance of marriage rules as a universal given of Indian – or Hindu – life, and thus as a defining feature of caste.⁴⁰ Both now and in the past, certain kinship structures have been regarded as characteristic of

³⁹ Stern 1977: 52–78; Dirks 1987; Parry 1979: 11.

⁴⁰ See note 36 above.

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specific jatis, with anthropologists making much of the different ways in which defenders of caste norms in particular ethnolinguistic regions have defined the classes of kin with whom a given jati or varna should either encourage or ban marriages. Anthropologists say that a 'caste Hindu' is heir to two distinct but related forms of birth group. The first of these is the jati, or status community, which is made up of many separate biological descent units, and is often identified with the defining moral code of one of the four varnas. The second is one's particular line of biological descent, with the added complication that women change these affiliations at the time of marriage.

Membership of these blood-based descent groups is reckoned at three or more different levels: the out-marrying clan, often termed *gotra*; the out-marrying *kul*, a unilineal descent group of more limited depth than the *gotra*; and the hearth unit or family household, with its single male head and joint access to property and food.⁴¹ Almost everywhere, people whose so-called caste lifestyles permit divorce and the remarriage of widows have been seen as distinct from the more refined populations who regard these practices as low and uncivilised. All this can be related to the ideal of marriage as the paramount social act, to be understood not as a private matter, but as a sanctified binding of kin units through the 'gift of a virgin' (*kanyadan*) from one descent group to another. So people from a wide range of different regions and status groups would say that the marriage union has meaning only if the bride is never-married and indisputably chaste. By this same logic, the severing of the all-important marriage bond is a cosmic and social rupture that makes the wife – never the husband – a person of radical and permanent inauspiciousness.⁴²

Even today, it is common for widows whose kin claim superior caste origin to lead a penitential life, breaking their bangles, shearing their hair, and abandoning the red cosmetic which a married woman applies to her hair parting to signify auspiciousness and fertility. Historically, the penances undergone by widows sometimes included *sati* (self-immolation by fire), much to the horror of British and Indian social reformers. As far as caste is concerned, this logic decrees that to allow divorce, or to accept widows as brides, must be the hallmark of people who are without the means to police their blood-lines scrupu-

⁴¹ For an introduction to debate on this topic see Davis 1976; Kolenda 1978: 14–22; Parry 1979.

⁴² Madan 1993: 291–2; Fruzzetti 1982.

lously, and who cannot afford to 'waste' the labour and child-bearing potential of available women kin in the interests of propriety and seemliness.

Looked at in these terms, caste as it has been lived and conceptualised becomes important in everyday life at the point when kin groups and individuals must look beyond their individual descent group for marriage partners, since the ideology of caste so consistently stigmatises marriages within the same direct blood-line, that is, one's clan or lineage (*gotra*, *kul*, etc). For people claiming exalted caste status, the making of marriage choices did become particularly complex at some point in the recent or distant past, with the greatest merit accruing to those who have been able to display the most elaborate and restrictive kinship rules.

THE PARADIGMATIC CASE: MARATHA KINGSHIP AND THE VALUES OF PROWESS

The career of the celebrated Maharashtrian dominion-builder Shivaji Bhonsle (1630–80) provides a telling case-study in keeping with the broad trends outlined above. The story of Shivaji's moves to consolidate his hard-won military and revenue-taking power may therefore be understood as exemplifying the first part of the two-stage process which was referred to at the beginning of this chapter. In other words, what we see in this dynast's life-long manipulation of the Kshatriya ideal supports this chapter's argument about the complex new developments in Indian social and political life which brought the royal man of prowess into prominence as a maker, shaper and reference point in the assertion of more formalised caste ideals.⁴³ This remarkable self-made dynast made the fluidities of caste work for him in two strikingly different ways. First, Shivaji was notably eclectic in his recruitment practices, offering high office to men of skill and loyalty with little regard to their faith or formal caste background. At the same time, this man of rustic non-*dwija* (i.e. non-twice-born) origin made caste truly matter to large numbers of people both within and beyond his new domain. He did this both by building classifications of jati and varna into his court rituals and statecraft, and most

⁴³ There are certainly ambiguities here; Shivaji has been widely treated as an illustration of the Brahmanisation of kingship rather than the assertion of active martial agency. On Shivaji's rule in the context of the kingly Kshatriya ideal, see Heesterman 1989.

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famously, by inventing the means to have himself literally reborn into the status of a lordly thread-wearing Kshatriya.

This celebrated *parvenu* state-builder thus made a conscious decision to use caste as a strategic asset, garbing himself in the trappings of Kshatriya kingship as a means of stabilising his fortunes and those of his client groups. Other 'new men' in both north and south India subsequently emulated his techniques, finding that they too had good reason to manipulate caste symbols as a means of self-advancement.

Clearly caste was not a matter of fixed or inherited essences for Shivaji and his imitators. The Bhonsles are thought to have originated among the large, amorphous populations of non-Muslim Deccan tiller-plainmen who had come to be known by the names Kanbi and Maratha. These people's religion was focused on *bhakti* devotional themes and gave little prominence to Brahmans. Even long after Shivaji's time, their social norms were loose and socially inclusive rather than formally castelike in the modern sense. Like the term Jat, which was its Gangetic equivalent, Kanbi has been for many centuries a broad designation for virtually all Gujarati- and Marathi-speakers who sustain themselves as ordinary cultivators. In the Maharashtra plateau country, a thinly populated land where agrarian livelihoods were difficult and insecure, the counterpart of Kanbi was Maratha. This term of modest distinction was used by rural people who had improved their lot through soldiering, mostly by taking up military service under the region's fourteenth- and fifteenth-century sultans. Initially, the term Maratha seems to have been no more specific or castelike than 'Dakhni', this being the designation for the Indian-born Muslim soldiery of these same rulers.⁴⁴

By the sixteenth century, the term Maratha was acquiring a more exalted significance, having become an honorific for people like Shivaji's own family of soldiers and petty office-holders who had been rewarded for service under the Deccan's Muslim sultans with special rights and land tenures (*inams* and *watans*).⁴⁵ In a relatively short space of time, the hereditary holders of these offices had come to differentiate themselves from the humbler tillers on whom they levied taxes in the name of their Muslim overlords. Few if any of these people wore the sacred thread (*sutra*). Neither Kanbi nor Maratha

⁴⁴ On the distinction in Gujarat between rustic Kanbis and refined superior 'peasants' (Paudars) see Chapter 5, below.

⁴⁵ Gordon 1993: 15.

signified a primordial 'caste' identity, or an ancient tradition of religious and social differentiation which was specifically Hindu in origin. On the contrary, as in the case of the title Rajput, these designations would not have acquired their modern-day significance without a great deal of sustained interaction between Muslim and Hindu dominion-builders in the relatively recent past.

A series of far-reaching changes was therefore set in train through Shivaji's bid for personal dynastic power beyond his original home terrain. In an environment where the Mughals and their great Rajput client lords were the best-known embodiments of kingship, Maratha-Kanbi origins were clearly not the appropriate antecedents for a would-be dynast. By the early 1670s Shivaji had used his formidable armies to create a core domain of directly administered revenue territories within the former realms of the Deccan Muslim sultanates. He also engaged in expansive revenue-taking operations which rapidly eroded the Mughals' sovereignty in their central Indian provinces, and as far south as the Thanjavur (Tanjore) delta of Tamilnad. Yet all these attainments were evanescent and vulnerable. No new man of power was safe from challenge in these uncertain circumstances. Within the loose grid of Mughal overlordship, everyone's environment was full of threatening newcomers; anyone's patrons and allies could be challenged or annihilated without warning.

But this man of modest origins was not content to leave himself as vulnerable as the refractory border chieftains and rebel generals whom the Mughals were still able to outmanoeuvre. In a period when only the grander Rajput rulers were known formally as thread-wearing Kshatriyas, Shivaji embarked on a strategy of unabashed self-promotion. His aim was to identify himself as a sovereign in terms that were intelligible both to his nominal Mughal overlords and to the peoples of the Deccan and central Mughal provinces from whom he was claiming military service and revenue dues.⁴⁶

As has already been seen, Mughal and Rajput conceptions of kingship had been interpenetrating and reinforcing one another since the sixteenth century, both through the marriages which Mughal rulers contracted with Rajput princesses and through the interactions of their court cultures. Shivaji also drew to his court service people who had

⁴⁶ On the merging and overlapping of Indo-Islamic and Hindu-derived forms of statecraft in the Maratha realms, see Wink 1986.

knowledge of both the Indic Muslim culture of the former Deccan sultanates and the syncretistic Vijayanagar-*nayaka* court traditions of the far south. Not surprisingly then, he turned to a mixed array of Vijayanagar, Mughal and Rajput symbols through which to assert his claims of lordliness. The key symbolic act of his reign came in two distinct stages. The first was Shivaji's recruitment of a Brahman preceptor from one of the devotional *sampradaya* sects, this being a known mark of kingship both in the classical scriptures and in the practices of contemporary Rajput courts. His second move was to gather Brahman priests and *literati* with the necessary ritual and genealogical skills to declare him a descendant of royal Rajput forebears. In 1674 these specialists invented an investiture rite for their new patron and installed him as *chhatrapati*, meaning lord of the *chhatra*, the ceremonial canopy which signifies both godhead and kingship in Hindu temple tradition.⁴⁷

These acts of statecraft transformed Shivaji the self-made conqueror into Shivaji the living embodiment of exalted thread-wearing Kshatriya kingship. The striking thing about this is that it was done in the teeth of strong resistance from eminent Brahmans in the great sacred centres of north India. These *literati* made much of the respected Hindu scriptural sources which held that mankind was living in a degenerate cosmic age, the Kaliyug. The hallmark of this dark epoch, they said, was the complete extinction of the Kshatriya varna. Only unworthy Shudras exercised power in this blighted world, which meant that there could be no grounds for investing Shivaji or any other self-made dynast with the thread and ritual devices of a Kshatriya. A similar principle had been pronounced by scriptural experts in south India, where both Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were widely thought to have disappeared at the dawn of the Kaliyug.⁴⁸

Remarkably, however, Shivaji assembled another set of Brahmans who also had links to the holy city of Banaras, and through them with Mewar (Udaipur), the most prestigious of the great Rajput kingdoms. These Brahmans said, in effect, that great men like the Mewar rulers were Kshatriyas because their actions had made them so. This was quite different from a picture of varna as having been reduced to a permanently truncated state, and it was also very far from a represen-

⁴⁷ O'Hanlon 1985: 20-1; Gordon 1993: 86-90; Wink 1986: 34-49, 57-9, 268-71.

⁴⁸ Grant Duff 1921, I: 204-6.

tation of caste as an immutable fact of birth and blood. On the contrary, what was being proposed here was that in present social and political circumstances there was need for the virtues of the Kshatriya. Therefore a man who acted as a Kshatriya by preserving the order of *dharma* (ordered moral conduct) and, above all, by sponsoring the performance of Brahman rituals would indeed deserve to be recognised as a true embodiment of the scriptural Kshatriya varna.

On this basis it was perfectly proper for Shivaji to send to Mewar, as indeed he did, for knowledge of the proper vedic rituals to perform in the domain of a Kshatriya king. It may even be that the assertion of these arguments on behalf of the great new powers of the late Mughal period helped to lay the foundations for the view of caste propounded in a very different form during the late nineteenth century by the radical theorists of the Arya Samaj, to the effect that even Brahmins were made and not born – in other words, that pious people should see the status of the Brahman as being determined by his personal virtue and learning, and not by his birth.

So Shivaji had himself reborn as a Kshatriya through investiture with the sacred thread, and by the anointing of his body with the sweet and transforming essences of Brahmanical rituals, in particular the sacred products of the all-nurturing and sacred cow: milk, curds and *ghee* (clarified butter). His ritualists reinforced the royal status of his new domain by initiating the ceremony of the vedic fire sacrifice at his rite of enthronement. These rites of king-making became a model for many other self-made dynasts in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as will be seen in Chapter 2.

This remaking of kings as Kshatriyas was much more than a matter of decorative rites and ceremonies. Real acts of statecraft were performed on this basis, and in a way that spread recognition of these more formalised jati and varna ideals to a considerable portion of the rulers' subjects. In classical sastric scripture, the thread-wearing king is by definition a maker and preserver of varna and can create lordly people (Kshatriyas) in his image. Indeed, the scriptures say that he must do so: if he does not issue and confirm jati and varna titles and order his retainers and subjects in the idiom of caste, he is no true embodiment of kingliness.

Rulers really did behave in this way in the turbulent eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In theory at least, a king was a perpetual provider of land and revenue-taking grants, like the *deshmukh* statuses

and *patilships* which were supposed to emanate as a ceaseless demonstration of power by the Maratha rulers. With this flow of assets and retainerships went the provision of 'caste' identities to the king's subjects.⁴⁹ In both the north and the south, aspiring dynasts and their lordly retainers recruited soldiers and other followers on this basis. Those who became part of these networks therefore had good cause to follow the lead of a patron who was willing to vest them with a jati title or other castelike designation. The forms of caste which were thus embraced identified such people as part of a 'community' in their lord's own image, or in the image of his affiliates and retainers.⁵⁰

This goes far to explain why the tradition of the lordly conqueror and arms-bearer continued to be so widely acknowledged even into the nineteenth century and beyond. The descendants of recently sedentarised 'peasant' and pastoralist arms-bearing groups did become significantly more cohesive over time, but without necessarily embracing the same forms of jati and varna as other so-called caste Hindus. These included such people as the users of the Tamil titles Marava and Kallar. In the former domains of the south Indian Nayaka rulers, East India Company forces contended for much of the eighteenth century with the fortress-based poligar chieftains whose ethnically diverse groups of armed retainers they knew as 'Colleries' (a rendering of Kallar).⁵¹ As with these other groups, Marava and Kallar 'caste' identity were clearly not ancient facts of life in the region. Insofar as these people of the turbulent poligar country really did become castes, their bonds of affinity were shaped in the relatively recent past.

We can see this happening in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when self-made dynasts like the Pudukkottai poligar chiefs were trying to secure their gains in areas which were cross-cut with dozens of conflicting and overlapping lordships. This gave the more successful of these armed clansmen an incentive to tell the world that they were rulers and the kin of rulers, with a mandate to enforce order and propriety in all things, including the policing of blood-lines by members of the 'royal' house. Even so, the local dynastic chronicles made it clear that the wider world knew Kallars as untamable

⁴⁹ Dirks 1987; Fox 1971; Gordon 'Legitimacy and loyalty in some successor states' in Richards 1978.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Pinch 1996: 86.

⁵¹ As noted above, this term comes from the Tamil name Kallar, which had the same connotations as the western Indian usage Koli, implying a background of upland pastoralism and an allegedly 'thievish' or predatory way of life.

despoilers of order and decency, and that Kallarness was hard to reconcile with Brahman-centred 'caste' values.

For these groups, becoming castelike was primarily a matter of being drawn into cults with only the most ambivalent connections to the formal pantheon of puranic Hinduism. Long after the demise of the Marava- and Kallar-ruled poligar realms, Kallar and Marava identity was still being preserved as traditions of martial prowess emphasising the cults of club-wielding hero tutelaries. As was seen above, many of these were not even nominally Hindu, but included Muslim *pirs* (saints) and deified warriors like the Kallars' cult hero 'Khan Sahib'. This was Muhammad Yusuf Khan (d. 1764), a self-made Muslim dominion-builder who had made the fortunes of many Kallar war-bands in his bid to build an independent dynastic realm within the former Mughal *subah* of Arcot.⁵²

North India too contains many former arms-bearing groups who acquired new bonds of affinity and castelike cohesion in the relatively recent past in much the same way, that is, without attaching great significance to Brahmans, and without conforming to standards of purity which disparaged the shedding of blood and the worship of warlike deities. These include many users of the titles Jat, Ahir, Koli and Kanbi who underwent what has come to be called caste formation in comparatively modern times. This occurred through service to self-made chiefs and rulers as recently as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and through allegiance to cult traditions which celebrated the virtues of warriors and heroic dynasts.

None of these new dynasts would have survived without recruiting warriors from pastoral frontier areas and treating with armed hillmen and forest people from areas which had previously been beyond the margins of conventional Indian statecraft. At the same time, no-one's gains were safe from their expansive rivals. So whether they were rulers or retainers, the newly advantaged arms-bearers had strong incentives to secure such gains as they had made, by identifying themselves with the ideals of lordliness that had become so widely deferred to in the new realms. These patricians who exalted the values of virility and lordliness were crucial in the making of what we now call caste. Their origins were often humble; their claims of dynastic legitimacy required them to tell the world that they were worthy to

⁵² S. Bayly 1989; compare Dirks 1987.

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wield power. So even if **they themselves** were not visibly castelike in the sense of following **strict marriage** rules and other 'pure' domestic practices, it was increasingly **important** for them to name and rank important classes of **their subjects** and dependants in a castelike fashion: it was this that **made them** recognisable as Kshatriyas, makers of order in a civilised or **dharmic** realm.

Yet the claims of **pro prowess on its own** were not sufficient to meet the needs of insecure dynasts in **these** increasingly complex realms. In the age of the later eighteenth-century warrior-dynasts an uneasy balance came to be struck between **the claims** of Kshatriya-like warrior-rulers and the very different **ideals and values** of the Brahman, the trader and the pacific scribal specialist. **These** classes of people came to play an increasingly critical role **as contributors** to 'traditional' caste ideologies, and it is on them that **the spotlight** falls in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: DEVELOPMENT AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN COLONIAL INDIA

Assumptions about the nature and course of Indian economic history lie at the heart of many analyses of South Asia's recent past. Accounts of peasant society, of political mobilisation, of imperial policy, of the social relations of caste, class and community, all include fundamental hypotheses and expectations about the nature of economic structure and change over time, and the relations between producers, consumers and the state. Furthermore, the whole sub-discipline of development economics, at crucial stages in its evolution, has drawn heavily on the Indian example – in stressing the destructive effects of imperialism, for example, or the mechanisms by which government planning can mobilise savings in poor economies. Modern India is a country where economic history is important, where current issues and problems, and many of the institutions and systems that shape the contemporary economy itself, are closely linked to the legacy of the past.

The wide spread of interest in our subject makes coherent generalisation about it more difficult. Accounts of social relations among rural producers, for example, are usually based on very different theories of the nature of economic behaviour than are institutional studies of government tariff policy, or statistically generated estimates of changes in the composition of the gross national product. The most detailed studies of production and consumption at the village level often assume that economic phenomena in India exist only as a function of social and cultural relations. Indeed, many scholars who approach the larger discipline of economic history by way of the history of social and economic structures in South Asia have suspected that accounts of autonomous and self-contained processes of economic development, growth and change in other parts of the world are oversimplified corruptions of a complex reality that has been seen through more clearly in India than elsewhere. In return, those studying the history of economic modernisation in the world as

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Table 1.2. *Estimates of Indian national product, 1900-1946*

	Constant prices aggregate			Constant prices per head		
	A	B	C	A	B	C
I. Indices (1913 = 100)						
1900	83	89	85	89	95	91
1913	100	100	100	100	100	100
1920	100	94	96	100	94	95
1929	127	110	126	116	100	115
1939	138	119	134	110	95	107
1946	149	127	142	109	93	104
II. Rate of growth (%)						
1900-13	1.44	0.90	1.26	0.93	0.42	0.74
1914-20	0.03	-0.86	-0.58	-0.05	-0.88	-0.70
1921-29	2.69	1.76	3.06	1.67	0.69	2.14
1930-39	0.82	0.79	0.59	-0.54	-0.51	-0.72
1940-46	1.10	0.93	0.63	-0.13	-0.30	-0.41

A: Sivasubramonian (1938-9 prices).

B: Maddison (1938-9 prices).

C: Heston (1946-7 prices).

Source: Raymond W. Goldsmith, *Financial Development of India*, table 1.2.

differ considerably in the relative shares of the total attributed to agriculture, manufacturing and services, and in the values assigned to each of these components, they do show a certain degree of convergence in identifying periods of growth and of stagnation.

The weakness of all these estimates is that we can have no certainty about the history of agricultural output in colonial India, especially the course of yield rates and productivity. The bulk of the Indian population remained employed in agriculture throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – the percentage of the workforce employed in agriculture may actually have risen very slightly in this period, and remained at over 70 per cent throughout – although the sectoral

London, 1971, pp. 167-8; A. Heston, 'National Income', in Dharma Kumar with Meghnad Desai, (ed.), *Cambridge Economic History of India: Volume II*, c. 1757-c. 1970, (hereafter CEHI, II) Cambridge, 1984, pp. 398-9. Maddison has updated his estimates somewhat in a recent article, 'Alternative estimates of the real product of India, 1900-1946', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 22, 2, 1985.

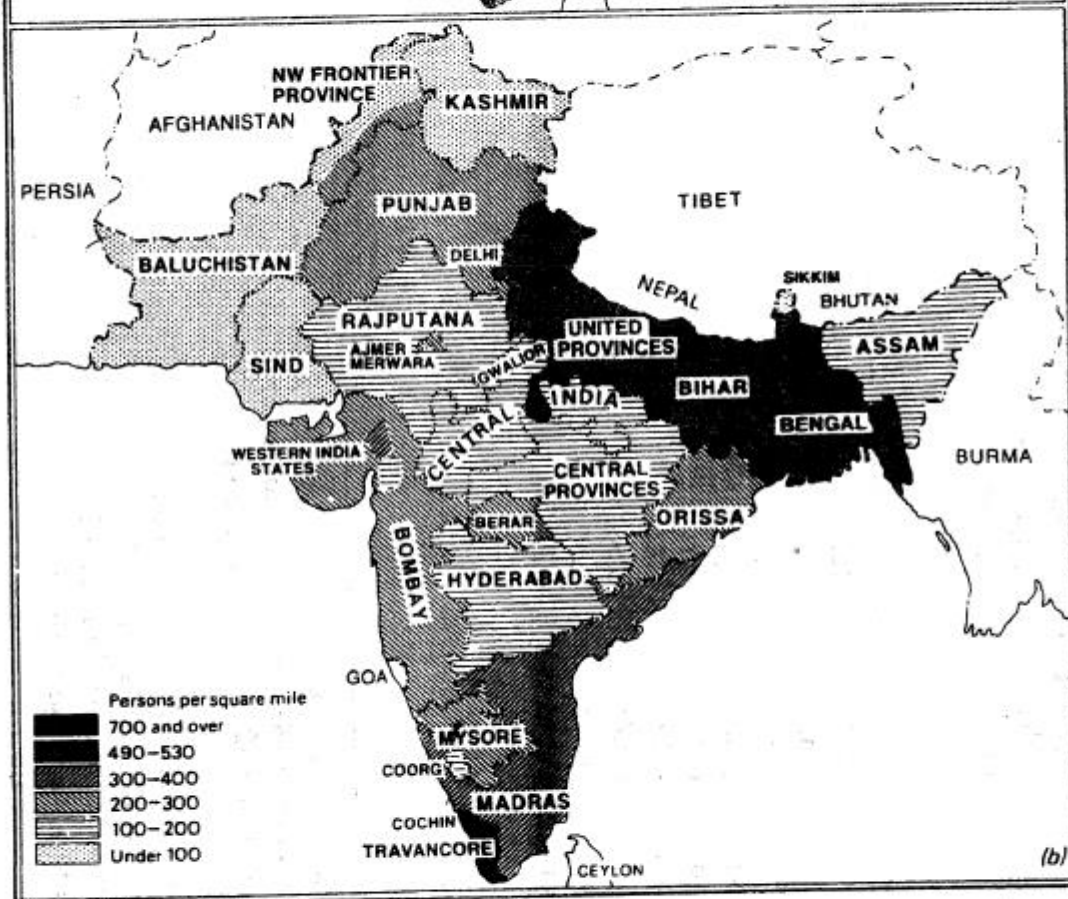
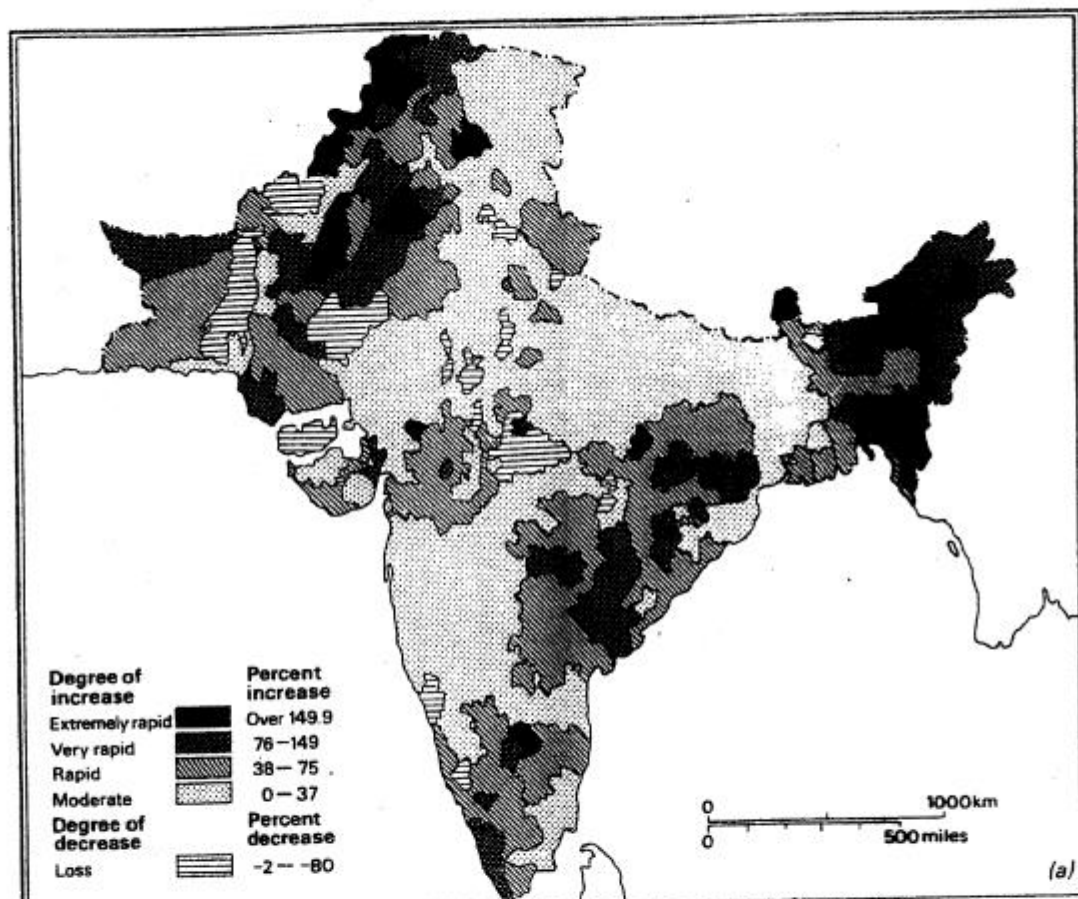
Table 1.1. *Demographic background, India 1871-1971*

Population India (mil)	Annual population growth rate (%) ^a	Birth rate (per thou) ^a	Death rate (per thou) ^a	Literacy rate %	Urban population %	Life expectancy at birth ^a
(1A)	(2A)	(3A)	(4A)	(5A)	(6A)	(7A)
1871	249.44	-	-	-	8.7 ^c	-
1881	254.51	0.20	-	-	9.3 ^c	-
1891	276.69	0.89	-	-	9.4	-
1901	280.87	0.11	50.0	6.1	10.0	20.1
1911	298.20	0.65	41.7	6.2	9.4	21.8
1921	299.63	0.09	48.6	7.0	9.4	23.9
1931	332.49	1.05	37.9	8.3	10.2	23.4
1941	382.56	1.41	31.0 ^b	9.2	11.1	20.1
(1B)	(2B)	(3B)	(4B)	(5B)	(6B)	(7B)
1951	360.2	40	27	15.1	12.8	28.1
1961	439.0	42	23	24.0	17.3	31.1
1971	561.0	40	16	29.4	18.0	34.9
					19.9	41.9
						46.4

^a Decade ending with year indicated. ^b Source as Column 3B and 4B. ^c includes Burma.
Columns 1A-6A cover Indian subcontinent, excluding Burma, Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Province; Columns 1B-6B, and 7A and 7B cover Indian Union.

Sources:

Cols. 1A-4A, 6A: Leela Visaria and Pravin Visaria, 'Population (1757-1947)', *CEHI*, 2, tables 5.8, 5.13, 5.16 and 5.19.
Cols. 5, 1B-6B: Raymond W. Goldsmith, *The Financial Development of India, 1860-1977*, New Haven, 1983, table 1-1.
Cols. 7A, 7B: Michelle B. McAlpin, 'Famines, Epidemics, and Population Growth: The Case of India', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 14, 2, 1983, table 3.



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contribution of agriculture to national product probably declined. The most widely accepted set of estimates available (those made by George Blyn in his *Agricultural Trends in India, 1891-1947* (1966)) suggests that productivity problems resulted in a clear fall of per capita agricultural output, especially for foodgrains, in the first half of the twentieth century.³ The basis of these calculations has often been disputed, and there is some evidence to suggest that under-reporting may have increased as the colonial administration loosened its grip on agricultural taxation in the inter-war period, but even Alan Heston's more optimistic account of national income and per capita output during the colonial period has concluded that the safest assumption is that aggregate agricultural productivity was static over the period from 1860 to 1950 as a whole, at the levels achieved in the early 1950s. On the basis of this assumption, which he could produce no direct evidence to support, Heston has estimated that real NDP rose by 53 per cent between 1868 and 1912, while population increased by only 18 per cent. Between 1900 and 1947 real NDP per head was virtually stagnant at best (the estimates summarised in table 1.2 all show a slight decline), with any net increase coming almost entirely from the service sector. Heston's figures also suggest that per capita income rose by over 30 per cent between 1871 and 1911, and then stagnated for the rest of the colonial period. These data make it clear that at the close of the colonial period in 1947 the extent of development in India was still very limited: average per capita foodgrain availability was about 400 grams, the literacy rate was 17 per cent of those over the age of 10, and life expectancy at birth only 32.5 years.⁴ While these indicators have risen somewhat in the forty-five years since Independence, India's economy has enjoyed a slower rate of growth than most others in the developing world, and she is still home to a large percentage of the world's poor.

This evidence, for what it is worth, suggests that there was a distinct but slow-moving process of economic change at work in India in the

³ For a further discussion of this issue, see below pp. 30-2.

⁴ Heston, 'National Income', *CEHI*, II, pp. 390, 397-9, 410-11.

1.2(a) Population, rates of increase by district, 1891-1941
Data plotted by districts in British Indian provinces, and by similar-size smaller states and agencies. Some of the 1891 data estimated.

1.2(b) Population densities by province, 1941

modern period, characterised by minimal improvements in rates of capital and labour productivity and resulting in fluctuating and uncertain patterns of growth. While precise comparisons are not possible, it would appear that crop yields, industrial productivity, and levels of human capital formation have been as low in India as anywhere else in Asia over the last 150 years.⁵ Such conclusions must be treated with care, however. The slight improvement in some indicators of living standards at various times over the last century of the colonial period is not evidence of the beneficial effects of British rule, while the evident poverty of large numbers of the Indian population at Independence does not conclusively prove that imperialism was the sole cause of the destitution of its subjects. More importantly, the bird's-eye view of the structure and characteristics of the Indian economy that can be derived from a very general interpretation of aggregate indicators should not lead us to the view that nineteenth-century India was a 'traditional' subsistence economy, awaiting the transforming touch of commercialisation and modernisation. Literacy, urbanisation, the growth of national product, improvements in productivity, and the spread of technical change, can only properly be understood in an ecological, social, economic and political context that pays due attention to local details as well as to national averages.

The economic history of India is not a story with a strong plot which lays bare the mechanism by which a set of progressive, or recessive, circumstances came about. The Indian economy of the 1970s was different to that of the 1860s, but it is hard to say that it had arrived at the end of a journey, or had even progressed along a clear path from one point to the other. For this reason it is unwise to introduce the subject by simply laying out for analysis the conventional indicators of performance and structure – output, patterns of asset-holding, sectoral employment and so on. Such an approach would underestimate the true extent and complexity of economic, social and political change, minimise regional diversity, and give too firm a meaning to ambiguous and inconclusive statistical and documentary evidence.

⁵ R. P. Sinha, 'Competing Ideology and Agricultural Strategy: Current Agricultural Development in India and China compared with Meiji Strategy', *World Development*, 1, 6, 1973, and Shigeru Ishikawa, *Essays on Technology, Employment and Institutions in Economic Development*, Tokyo, 1981, ch. 1.

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While the overall aggregate rate of growth was sluggish and unpredictable, this does not mean that nothing was happening in the Indian colonial economy. At certain times, in particular sectors and specific regions, there was quite considerable growth in output, associated with capital accumulation by peasants, landlords, merchants, bankers and industrialists, and some investment in productivity- and profit-enhancing production processes. Some agriculturalists were able to take advantage of increased world demand for crops such as jute, cotton and groundnuts, while Indian businessmen manufactured cotton yarn for export in the nineteenth century and a wide range of products for the domestic consumer market in the twentieth. Whatever the problems of agriculture, rural producers managed to just about sustain a steadily rising population, which increased at an average rate of 0.6 per cent per year between 1871 and 1941, and more rapidly since then. While all the best agricultural land was probably in use by 1900, some colonisation went on until the 1950s, and the area under irrigation almost doubled between 1900 and 1939, and rose sharply after 1947. There is also considerable evidence of technical change in agriculture, in handicrafts, and in mechanised industry. The spread of new seeds and crop-strains aided output growth in cotton and groundnuts, for example, while techniques such as the transplantation of rice and the ginning of cotton increased yields and marketability. Indian workmen had few difficulties acquiring the skills needed to operate modern textile machinery, while the Tata Iron and Steel Company, the premier industrial enterprise of colonial India, set up a successful Technical Institute in 1921 and an Indian-staffed Research and Control Laboratory in 1937. In handicrafts, fly-shuttle looms and the use of rayon and other artificial fibres broadened the technological base of the handloom weavers in the inter-war years. While demonstration programmes and official research institutes played some part in this process, the chief incentive to technical change was economic. As one government official pointed out to the *Indian Famine Commission* in 1880, the spread of improved cotton gins in central India and elsewhere was chiefly the result of 'the first cotton merchant who offered a fraction of an anna more for clean than dirty cotton', who had done 'more for Wardha cotton than I, with all the resources of the Government at my back, ever accomplished'.⁶

⁶ Quoted in D. R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times, 1860-1939*, 5th edn, Bombay, 1971, p. 74.

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This evidence all suggests strongly that some growth, capital accumulation, technical change and innovation occurred in colonial South Asia, but despite these signs of dynamism the Indian economy did not experience anything that can properly be called 'development' under British rule. Text-book definitions stress that development is a qualitatively distinctive phenomenon, that should not be confused with the more limited process of output growth; as Gerald Meier has summarised it, in the conventional view:

Development is taken to mean growth plus change; there are essential qualitative dimensions in the development process that extend beyond the growth or expansion of an economy through a simple widening process. This qualitative difference is especially likely to appear in the improved performance of the factors of production and improved techniques of technical change – in our growing control over nature. It is also likely to appear in the development of institutions and a change in attitudes and values.⁷

In addition to improvements in productivity as a result of technical innovation, many development economists stress equity considerations as a necessary part of any process of economic change that can properly be labelled development. Thus Meier's own preferred definition of development is of a '*process by which the real per capita income of a country increases over a long period of time – subject to the stipulations that the number of people below an "absolute poverty line" does not increase and that the distribution of income does not become more unequal.*'⁸ In the setting of densely populated agrarian economies such as those of South, South-East and East Asia, these conditions can only come about if, over time, labour achieves sustained increases in productivity, employment, and returns above subsistence. This definition of development also helps to bring its opposite, underdevelopment, into sharper focus. As Joseph Stiglitz has suggested, LDCs (Less Developed Countries) are those in which fewer people than average have the capacity for full personal fulfilment, giving economists and economic historians the task of explaining the reasons for 'the dramatically different standards of living of those who happen to live in different countries and within different regions within

⁷ Gerald M. Meier, *Leading Issues in Economic Development*, 5th edn, New York, 1989, p. 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*; italics in original.

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the same country' which Stiglitz has characterised as 'the most central issue facing most of mankind today.'⁹

For South Asia, then, our problem is to explain an economic history in which technical change and capital accumulation took place, but in which productivity and welfare did not improve very much. Economic historians have found it difficult to explain the absence of development in the modern world, and, like Gerschenkron and Schumpeter, have usually only managed to define 'backwardness' in terms of the absence of dynamic features seen in other countries or in the same country at a later date. Those such as Kuznets and Rostow, who have conceptualised the process of development as a series of preconditions or stages of growth, offer little help in understanding the history of economies which have failed to pass through the evolutionary processes laid down for them. Lloyd Reynolds's recent study, *Economic Growth in the Third World, 1850-1980*, follows Kuznets in distinguishing 'extensive' growth, in which population and output are growing at roughly the same rate, from 'intensive' growth, in which there is a rising trend of per capita output, and accepts that economies experiencing extensive growth can display economic sophistication and some innovation and institutional change. Thus Reynolds suggests that India in 1947 began intensive growth 'not from a situation of stagnation, but from an economy visibly in motion',¹⁰ but his account remains too one-dimensional, and too concerned to identify a link between a rising export: GDP ratio and the onset of intensive growth, to be of much use in explaining the South Asian experience.

The descriptions and explanations of the apparent lack of growth and development in the Indian economy produced during the colonial period itself were dominated by the nationalist critique of British rule and the imperial response to it. This debate, which has continued to haunt the modern literature as well, was political in origin, revolving around the question of whether India had suffered or benefitted from British rule. In economic terms it focused attention on the evident poverty of the mass of the Indian people in the late nineteenth century,

⁹ Joseph E. Stiglitz, 'Rational Peasants, Efficient Institutions, and a Theory of Rural Organization: Methodological Remarks for Development Economics', in Pranab Bardhan (ed.), *The Economic Theory of Agrarian Institutions*, Oxford, 1989, pp. 19-20.

¹⁰ Lloyd G. Reynolds, *Economic Growth in the Third World, 1850-1980: an Introduction*, New Haven, 1985, p. 30.

and the prevalence of famine in the 1870s and late 1890s, which seemed to suggest that agriculture could not support the population. The nationalist argument, put forward most forcefully by Dadabhai Naoroji, a Parsi businessman and founder of the Indian National Congress, who was elected to the House of Commons to speak for Indian interests in the 1890s, and by R. C. Dutt, who resigned from the ICS to pursue his attacks on the revenue administration of Bengal, focused on the distortions to the Indian economy brought about by British rule, and by the impoverishment of the mass of the population through the colonial 'drain of wealth' from India to Britain over the course of the nineteenth century.¹¹

The nationalist case was underpinned by assertions that the British had destroyed or deformed a successful and smoothly functioning pre-colonial Indian economy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The coming of British rule was seen to have removed indigenous sources of economic growth and power, and replaced them by imperial agents and networks. This deprived Indian entrepreneurs and businessmen in the 'modern' sector of the chance to lead a process of national regeneration through economic development, and also had severe welfare and distributional effects in the 'traditional' sector by imposing foreign competition on handicraft workers and forced commercialisation on agriculturalists.

As we will see, modern studies of the transition to colonialism in India provide a rather different contrast between the economies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Indian economy certainly underwent structural change over the course of the nineteenth century, but the causes and results of this were complex. From recent work on the pre-British economy we know that commercialisation and unequal social structures existed before colonialism, yet although the pre-colonial economy contained nodes of mercantilist growth, their development and welfare effects remain unclear. Indian capitalists played an active role in helping the East India Company to create its empire in South Asia, and in working with it when it came. While British rule caused a set-back for some activities of Indian merchants and commercial capitalists, it did not suppress all of them for long, and may have helped some areas, such as the Gujarati textile centre of Ahmedabad,

¹¹ Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule*, London, 1901; R. C. Dutt, *The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age*, London, 1906.

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which had suffered particularly badly from the consequences of political instability.

The central theme of the nationalist case was the way in which Indian resources were drained off to Britain by the mechanism of imperial rule. India had long appeared to be a major asset for Britain. When the East India Company first took control of Bengal in the 1760s, and became able to use tax revenue to purchase goods for export to England without needing to ship bullion to India, it seemed to some in London that these limitless revenues would become, in the words of the Earl of Chatham, 'the *redemption* of a nation ... a kind of gift from heaven.'¹² Yet as early as 1772, when a financial crisis in Bengal prevented the EIC from paying a dividend and required it to ask the British government for assistance, London was forced to face up to what became the great riddle of the Raj – whether India was Britain's foremost asset or her greatest liability. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century India was the largest purchaser of British exports, a major employer of British civil servants at high salaries, the provider of half of the Empire's military might, all paid for from local revenues, and a significant recipient of British capital.¹³ The crucial point for the nationalists was that India ran a persistent surplus in her current balance of trade account, with her exports of goods to the world as a whole meeting a large deficit in goods and services with Britain, plus interest charges and capital repayments in London.

The main lines of debate over the drain theory have long been established. Imperial apologists such as Sir Theodore Morison and Vera Anstey argued that most of India's payments to Britain were made in return for services or capital that increased the wealth of the local economy. The size of the unrequited transfers, those needed to meet the 'Home Charges' (the administrative and military expenses of the Indian Government in Britain), was small, running at around Rs 20 million a year, less than 2 per cent of total export values at the end of

¹² P. J. Marshall, *Problems of Empire: Britain and India, 1757–1813*, London, 1968, pp. 30–1.

¹³ According to the latest estimates for British capital exports from 1860 and 1914, between £239 and £290 million raised in London was invested in India, more than half of it in the form of government loans. The Indian total represented about 20 per cent of all capital sent to the Empire, and about 7 per cent of all capital exports from Britain. See Lance E. Davis & Robert A. Huttenback, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire. The Political Economy of British Imperialism, 1860–1912*, Cambridge, 1986, table 2.1

the nineteenth century and less than 1 per cent by 1913.¹⁴ Anstey herself claimed that if there had been no Home Charges and no loans in London, but India had provided for her own military and naval defence, then India would have come out the loser – ‘it is surely obvious that the “saving” effected would be a negative quantity’.¹⁵ Nationalists fiercely contested the assumptions on which such calculations were based, arguing in particular that India’s defence establishment was designed to meet Britain’s needs, and that the railways were an expensive military asset rather than an appropriate piece of developmental infrastructure. The classic nationalist case was that Britain’s entire favourable balance of payments with her colony represented the size of the drain of wealth, with a convenient floor-figure set by India’s export surplus in merchandise (representing the net total of Indian current payments to Britain less British capital exports to India). A recent re-calculation on this basis has suggested that the drain in 1882 amounted to Rs 1,355 million (in 1946–7 prices), more than 4 per cent of national income in that year.¹⁶

Whatever definitions of the drain are used, it is hard to demonstrate that the poverty of the rural economy was the direct result of high rates of taxation to fund unrequited transfer payments to Britain. Although taxation in India increased markedly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, partly to meet the increased exchange costs of remitting money to London while the silver-standard rupee was depreciating sharply against the gold-standard pound sterling, this did not fall primarily on agriculture. Between 1872 and 1893 central government tax revenue rose from Rs 374 million to Rs 501 million, but over one-third of the increase came from non-agricultural taxation such as tariffs, excises and the income tax. While total taxes rose by 34 per cent, agricultural prices rose by 44 per cent and taxes on agriculture by 23 per cent.¹⁷ By 1900 the land tax represented about 5 per cent of the value of gross agricultural output, and was responsible for less than half of the average per capita burden of taxation.

¹⁴ K. N. Chaudhuri, ‘India’s International Economy in the Nineteenth Century: An Historical Survey’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 2, 1, 1968, p. 44.

¹⁵ Anstey, *Economic Development of India*, p. 511.

¹⁶ Irfan Habib, ‘Studying a Colonial Economy – Without Perceiving Colonialism’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 19, 3, 1985, pp. 375–6.

¹⁷ Government of India, *Report of the Indian Currency Committee, 1898*, [Fowler Committee], Appendix II, no. 52.

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As S. B. Saul has shown,¹⁸ Britain's balance of payments surplus with South Asia was certainly an important element in the world pattern of settlements in the second half of the nineteenth century, enabling the United Kingdom to meet 30-40 per cent of her deficit with other industrialised nations, and helping to sustain her performance as an economy with a global balance of payments surplus long after her trading position in most parts of the world had declined. From the Indian end, however, the issues of the balance of payments surplus is complicated by the problem of classifying bullion imports of gold and silver, which are usually added into the commodity trade import figures. The Indian rupee was a silver currency on a bullion standard with open mints until 1893, and India was a major importer of silver in the late nineteenth century. About one third of India's trade surplus in goods between 1872 and 1893 was financed by imports of specie, mostly silver, the bulk of which was used as transaction coinage or 'saved' in the form of hoarded coin, bullion and jewellery. If the inflow of precious metals were regarded as the repatriated profits of the export trade in commodities, rather than as a visible commodity import, then it can be argued that the Indian economy was running a surplus on goods, services and capital combined, which she was liquidating by importing the medium of mass savings in the form of specie, some of which was minted to meet the need for increased monetary transactions in a period of commercial expansion and rising prices. The main elements of India's balance of payments in this period are set out in table 1.3.

This analysis sets South Asia's traditional role in world trade as a 'sink' for precious metals, first noted by Pliny in ancient times, and used by J. M. Keynes in his *Indian Currency and Finance* (1913) to strengthen the case for a gold-exchange standard for India with a token currency, against the late nineteenth century theory of the colonial drain of wealth from India to Britain. Although the gold price of silver in the world economy fell by about 40 per cent in this period it was not falling faster than any other gold price, and so it is difficult to sustain the argument that the world was somehow acquiring India's exports cheap by paying for them with a devalued commodity. After 1900, when the rupee was linked to gold at a fixed rate through an exchange

¹⁸ S. B. Saul, *Studies in British Overseas Trade, 1870-1914*, Liverpool, 1960, ch. VIII.

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standard with sterling, the story told by continued bullion imports is less ambiguous. In the pre-war trade boom between 1909-10 and 1912-13, for example, India imported Rs 1,174 million worth of gold, including Rs 45 million worth of sovereigns which went into circulation, increased her gold reserves by Rs 294 million, and imported a further Rs 549 million worth of silver, only a third of which was used for coinage.¹⁹

Specie imports by themselves do not reveal anything about the pattern of distribution inside the colonial economy. It is possible to imagine a set of circumstances in which inequality increased along with bullion imports, and some modern historians working within the nationalist tradition have argued that capital did increase in India, but that it accumulated in the hands of 'parasitic' groups of landlords, usurers and native aristocrats. Certainly the availability of silver and gold for hoarding may well have discouraged the development of flexible savings instruments that could have helped finance more dynamic investment and more efficient provision of liquidity. What the inflow of specie does suggest, however, is that some Indians were increasing their assets during the colonial period. This is an important point, since the central contention of the drain theory in its original form was that the mechanisms of British rule removed any investible surplus above subsistence from India, and that therefore no growth at all was possible: as Naoroji put it, 'the drain prevents India from making any capital'.²⁰ The imperial apologists who responded to this case argued that national income had increased somewhat in the late nineteenth century, but agreed that any process of economic growth was so slow as to be almost undetectable, being held back largely by social, cultural and religious barriers to material improvement. Despite the atavistic power of the debate over British rule and Indian 'improvement', this is the point at which the modern literature must part company with its colonial ancestor, for almost all current accounts of the recent economic history of India are concerned with classifying a distinguishable process of economic change, however distorted or sluggish it may have been, and analysing its effect on classes and interests inside rather than outside South Asia.

¹⁹ J. M. Keynes, *Indian Currency and Finance*, London, 1913, pp. 108-10, and G. Findlay Shirras, *Indian Finance and Banking*, London, 1920, p. 463.

²⁰ Dadabhai Naoroji, 'Poverty of India', p. 38, in *Poverty and Un-British Rule*.

Table 1.3. *India, annual balance of payments on current account, 1869-70 to 1894-8*
(£ millions, quinquennial averages)

	Balance Merchandise Trade	Net Treasure Imports	Balance Visible Trade (1+2)	Home Charges	Other Invisibles	All Invisibles (4+5)	Balance of Payments Current Account (3-6)
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1869-73	+22.6	-8.4	+14.2	-8.8	-15.6	-24.4	-10.2
1874-8	+21.0	-6.4	+14.6	-9.3	-18.0	-27.3	-12.7
1879-83	+23.8	-7.1	+16.7	-10.7	-17.7	-28.4	-11.7
1884-8	+23.8	-9.2	+14.6	-12.3	-18.0	-30.3	-15.7
1889-93	+25.2	-9.7	+15.5	-13.5	-19.4	-32.9	-17.4
1894-8	+20.7	-5.6	+15.1	-13.9	-18.9	-32.8	-17.7

Note: a plus sign (+) indicates net exports of goods; a minus sign (-) indicates net imports of goods and net exports of remittances, service charges and other invisibles.

The most thorough direct estimate of flows of long-term foreign capital into India from 1870 to 1899 gives a total of between £123.2 million and £144.8 million, most of which was in the form of sterling loans to the Secretary of State for India in London (see Lance E. Davis and Robert A. Huttenback, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire. The Political Economy of British Imperialism*, 1860-1912, Cambridge, 1986, table 2.1.)

Source: A. K. Banerji, *Aspects of Indo-British Economic Relations, 1858-1898*, Bombay, 1982, tables 34A and 40A.

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In general, mainstream economic theory, in all its variants, has had little to say about the absence of development. In neo-classical analysis all economies tend towards equilibrium, but it is difficult to identify or explain what is happening to those in which an equilibrium is reached below maximum efficiency. In both classical and orthodox Marxist analyses, capitalism is usually seen as a uniquely progressive force in an economy, with capital accumulation and investment the only way to increase productivity, raise output and provide a surplus that can be redistributed to maintain returns to labour above subsistence.

Karl Marx, like almost all his contemporaries, saw the Asian economies of India and China as having no history, being the products of societies in which political and economic networks and institutional systems did not interact. In *Capital*, and elsewhere, Marx developed the concepts of 'primitive accumulation' and of an 'Asiatic mode of production' to explain the existence of large, static Eastern economies and societies that were not likely by themselves to progress through feudalism to capitalism. The self-sufficiency of the Indian economy was based on 'village republics' with 'cut and dried' patterns of community organisation, which encompassed communal property rights in a combination of agriculture and handicraft manufacture. Villages were entirely self-sustaining, containing within themselves all the conditions of production and surplus accumulation, while cities were mere military or princely camps, in which despotic rulers received tribute from the countryside in return for the maintenance of irrigation works.²¹

Marx thought that the coming of British rule was the greatest threat to this existing social and economic order, and argued that it would prepare the way for a capitalist economy dominated, eventually, by a domestic bourgeoisie. However, he was also highly critical of the disruptive effects of colonial administration in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s, and saw the commercialisation of agriculture and the flooding of the Indian market with mass-produced Lancashire cotton goods as leading to the destruction of old social arrangements without any dynamic process of constructive change. Later theorists have followed these dual strands in Marx's own thinking by developing theories of imperialism that attribute the modes of production in the Third World

²¹ For a convenient, brief summary of Marx's views on India, see Daniel Thorner, *The Shaping of Modern India*, New Delhi, 1980, p. 363 ff.

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economies of the twentieth century directly to the impact of imperial systems and colonial states.

Central to many of these later accounts has been the concept of dependency, 'a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected.'²² This notion of dependent development does distinguish between the role of capitalism as a progressive force in the core but a regressive one in the periphery, and gives a major role to imperialism in tightly circumscribing the extent of any development that peripheral capitalism can achieve. However, empirical studies of the pattern of growth in many Third World countries since the 1960s have led to the revival of a more orthodox Marxist view of peripheral development, encapsulated in Geoffrey Kay's comment that 'capitalism created underdevelopment not because it exploited the underdeveloped world but because it did not exploit it enough'.²³ The best-known revisionist account, Bill Warren's, *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*,²⁴ explicitly took Marx's analysis of Britain's necessary role in transplanting capitalism in India as its starting-point. These 'menshevik' theories, as they have been called,²⁵ see capital as a progressive force, however exploitative, in Africa, Asia and Latin America. They are useful in disentangling capitalism from a functionalist relationship with imperialism, but they do not help much in analysing the inhibitory factors that prevented many economies subject to colonial rule from undergoing development. The notion of an underdeveloped world dominated by some sort of primitive economy in Marx's sense still lurks beneath their surface.

As we have seen, nationalist interpretations of Indian economic history from the late nineteenth century onwards argued that India was far from being a primitive economy before the British. Colonial rule was thought to have removed or distorted the developmental base reached by 'domestic industry and agriculture' in the eighteenth century, and then suppressed the entire economy in the nineteenth

²² T. Dos Santos, 'The Structure of Dependence', *American Economic Review*, 40, 2, 1970, p. 231.

²³ G. B. Kay, *Development and Underdevelopment: A Marxist Analysis*, London, 1975, p. x.

²⁴ Bill Warren, *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*, London, 1980.

²⁵ Colin Leys, *Conflict and Convergence in Development Theory*, in Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.), *Imperialism and After: Continuities and Discontinuities*, German Historical Institute, London, 1986, pp. 321-2.

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century by the mechanism of the drain of wealth. These ideas were sustained and refined in Indian Marxist analyses during the early twentieth century, notably in R. Palme Dutt, *India Today* (1940), and were then incorporated into dependency theory through the work of Paul Baran, who revived the notion that the coming of British rule in India had broken up pre-existing self-sufficient agricultural communities, and forced a shift to the production of export crops, which distorted the internal economy. In his *Political Economy of Growth* (1957), Baran took up the central insight of the nationalist analysis, suggesting that about 10 per cent of India's gross national product was transferred to Britain each year in the early decades of the twentieth century, and suggested that had this sum been invested in South Asia, 'India's economic development to date would have borne little similarity to the actual sombre record'.²⁶ To Baran, the colonial drain was a mercantilist concept – India's loss of economic resources and their transfer to Britain was a consequence of her political subordination. Thus asymmetrical power and political relations, rather than natural endowments or comparative advantage, determined the economic history of underdeveloped countries:

Far from serving as an engine of economic expansion, of technological progress, and of social change, the capitalist order in these countries has represented a framework for economic stagnation, for archaic technology, and for social backwardness.²⁷

The notion of colonial South Asia as host to a particular, regressive form of capitalism, leading to dependency, underdevelopment, or sustained backwardness, has been refined further, in the work of Amiya Bagchi and Hamza Alavi for example, into the concept of a distinct colonial mode of production.²⁸ This argues that British rule brought about a process of economic change in South Asia which had some dynamic features, but that these were functionally determined to serve the needs of the metropolitan economy and so established a dependent form of underdevelopment. Colonial rule broke down the autonomous economy of independent handicraft workers and self-

²⁶ Paul Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*, New York, 1957, p. 148. It is worth noting that this estimate of the size of the drain is more than double that of Irfan Habib cited above (p. 13).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²⁸ Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*, Cambridge, 1982; Hamza Alavi et al., *Capitalism and Colonial Production*, London, 1980.

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sufficient peasants, and directed domestic economic activity towards two main areas – export-oriented agriculture with very small returns to provide primary products for the West at bargain prices before Independence, and limited industrialisation dependent on alliances with foreign firms for technology since then. The laws, institutions and social structure of contemporary South Asia were thus a creation of Britain's requirement for cheap labour and cheap exports within the imperial system, and the dominant classes that have exercised control over agricultural and industrial capital for the last hundred years or so are identified as the product of this colonial transformation. By these means Indian labour has been exploited indirectly but effectively for the sake of metropolitan capital, and successive forms of colonial and post-colonial capitalism have been created that did not need to increase productivity or wages.

The analysis of dependent underdevelopment contends, like the nationalist critique of the colonial economy before it, that the British conquest was the chief reason for India's development problems over the last 200 years. As we have already seen, such arguments put a heavy interpretative loading on the impact of British rule, and tend to overestimate the extent to which this destroyed either a self-sufficient 'primitive' economy, or a burgeoning state-capitalist developmental one. The British certainly altered the political economy and state structure of India fundamentally in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and severely disrupted some established patterns of trade, of investment, and of agricultural and handicraft production, but the quantitative extent and qualitative significance of the consequences of this – in the form of de-industrialisation, forced commercialisation, and the transfer of land-holding to traders and moneylenders – is hard to assess. Studies of many different localities during the first century or so of British rule have stressed the extent of continuity rather than change in the holding and exercise of social and economic power. Local social structures, and the interaction between social power and economic opportunity, were often remarkably unaffected by the waxing and waning of imperial control; the chief reasons for economic stagnation were usually present before the British arrived, remained in place during their rule, and have stayed there after its ending.

India cannot be classified as a simple form of colonial economy, in

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which surplus extraction and functionally determined social organisation created a system of non-progressive economic activity. British imperialism had a very important impact on the economic history of modern South Asia, but it was not the only reason for the phenomenon of growth without development. The economic history of South Asia is not broadly dissimilar to that of other large and populous Asian economies such as China and Indonesia, which were not part of the British Empire. While these areas were exposed to European imperialism, formal or informal, in a broad sense, neither shared India's precise experience under foreign rule. The history of the Indian economy since 1947 has revealed many of the same problems of low productivity and non-developmental social organisation that were apparent in the colonial period. India, like other Third World economies, may have suffered from neglect by the liberal institutional structure of the post-war international economic system, and may have been subjected to neo-imperial ties through aid and direct private investment mechanisms, but such ties have been universal, affecting large numbers of countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and their impact in India cannot be attributed solely to her colonial past.

While Indian interests were clearly subordinated to British ones in important respects during the lifetime of the British raj, Indian economic history was not simply that of a subaltern, subservient economy. As in other applications of subaltern studies to Indian history, the separate levels of dominance and subservience among different groups of Indians must be accounted for. The theme of inequality runs strongly through Indian colonial history, but economic relations were as unequal within colonial society as they were between the imperial power and its colonial subjects. Subaltern studies do not give much help in understanding the dominant agents in a subordinate economy. Some Indian professionals, businessmen, landlords and surplus peasants²⁹ derived considerable benefits from the local power that was conferred on them by British rule; it is hard to see that these elites missed out on profits or advantages in the medium term because of India's subordinate position. Even those Indian businessmen who found their industrialising ambitions apparently thwarted by the

²⁹ 'Surplus' peasants are defined as those controlling family farms that could, in a normal year, grow and retain enough food and other produce to produce a surplus over their own subsistence requirements, without the need to seek off-farm employment.

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colonial government's commitment to laissez-faire economic policies were eventually able to supplant their expatriate rivals as the dominant element in the private sector. There was no such thing as an entirely subordinate economy within the British Empire – every country's economy contained both dominant and subordinate groups. Subalterns certainly suffered in colonial India, and were more plentiful there than in imperial Britain, but they did exist in the core as well as at the periphery of the imperial system.

Like Marx, the orthodox classical economists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were concerned to understand and explain processes of rapid and fundamental economic change. For the classical economists such change would inevitably be accompanied by the conventional measures of growth and development; the only alternative to a developing economy was a static one – a 'stationary state', in which there was no capital accumulation (profit) and no technical progress (investment or increased labour productivity). Thus, as Adam Smith commented on China (and by extension all Asian economies of the late eighteenth century):

In a country which had acquired that full complement of riches which the nature of its soil and climate, and its situation with respect to other countries, allowed it to acquire; which could, therefore, advance no further ... both the wages of labour and the profits of stock would probably be very low: ... Perhaps no country has yet arrived at this degree of opulence. China seems to have been long stationary, and had probably long ago acquired that full complement of riches that is consistent with the nature of its laws and institutions. But this complement may be much inferior to what, with other laws and institutions, the nature of its soil, climate and situation might admit of.³⁰

In the event, Smith argued, 'the poverty of the lower ranks of the people far surpasses that of the most beggarly nations of Europe'.³¹ Following Smith, later writers in the classical tradition, and the revisionist 'new-classical' school that has come to prominence in development economics over the last twenty years, have sought to explain economic backwardness in terms of inappropriate laws and

³⁰ *Wealth of Nations*, I, p. 106, quoted in H. W. Arndt, *The Rise and Fall of Economic Development*, Melbourne, 1978, p. 8.

³¹ *Wealth of Nations*, I, p. 73, quoted in H. W. Arndt, 'Development Economics before 1945', in Jagdish Bhagwati and Richard S. Eckaus (eds.), *Development and Planning: Essays in Honour of Paul Rosenstein Rodan*, London, 1972, p. 14.

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institutions which prevent the dynamics of capitalism from unleashing the forces of growth. Such arguments stress that all economies can achieve development, providing that they expose themselves to the efficiencies generated by free markets and unfettered competition. In poor, densely settled regions, population pressures may make dynamic growth harder to achieve, but simple Malthusian traps can be avoided by foreign trade, by migration, and by technical progress to make land and labour more productive.

Scholars adopting a 'new-classical' focus on the Smithian analysis of the 'laws and institutions' that have inhibited Indian development have produced important alternative interpretations of the economic history of modern South Asia. One of the earliest of these was Gunnar Myrdal's portrayal in *Asian Drama* of the Indian economy as determined by social systems that bound it to a 'low-level equilibrium' characterised by low labour productivity, low per capita incomes, traditional and primitive production techniques and low levels of living. This interconnected causal relationship between productivity and incomes, levels of living, and labour inputs and productivity, could only be overcome by a positive programme of modernisation that would promote rationality, equality, planning, democracy, and appropriate values as well as economic efficiency. The only force that Myrdal saw as powerful enough to overcome the forces of stagnation, social stability and equilibrium that would perpetuate poverty and inequality was the nation state. Here, however, he thought the Indian government unequal to the task, categorising it as a 'soft' state, unable to impose the social discipline needed to force economic, political and ideological change onto its unwilling subjects.³²

The economic activities of the Indian state have been examined more closely in a further extension of new-classical theory, based on the notion of 'rent-seeking' and the distortions that have followed from an inappropriate and ineffective regime of economic controls and planning. Bureaucratic controls in India have been seen, in the work of Anne Kreuger and others,³³ as forming an integral part of a 'rent-seeking society' in which the owners of scarce assets (land, capital) or

³² Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama. An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations*, Harmondsworth, 1968, Volume II, p. 895 ff. There is a convenient summary of these points in B. L. C. Johnson, *Development in South Asia*, Harmondsworth, 1983, pp. 16-19.

³³ A. O. Kreuger, 'The Political Economy of a Rent-Seeking Society', *American Economic Review*, 64, 1974.

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privileges (such as import licences) are simply rewarded for this ownership, rather than being forced to earn a return on them by efficient working in an open market. Thus productivity is not increased by competition; instead profits are maintained by limiting the number of rent-holders and closing off alternative routes for access to scarce assets. The result is political stability based on the interests of a narrow range of propertied and favoured groups, but this is accompanied by the economic irrationality of under-utilised industrial capacity, wasteful use of foreign exchange and industrial investment, inappropriate land reform, and a corrupt polity that makes any genuine development almost impossible.

Generally speaking, new-classical accounts of South Asian development identify Indian social and cultural arrangements as inhibitors of growth and change. However, culturalist explanations bring special problems with them, and should not be used on their own without very significant qualification. The apparent non-material spirituality of Hindu life and beliefs that was so often stressed by colonial officials is not a very useful explanatory variable – indeed, many of the most successful Indian businessmen had strong links to religious charities and institutions. Fatalism is stronger when choice is limited, and local cultural systems have often had strong connections to interlinked social, political and economic relationships. As Eric Stokes argued forcefully, agrarian history shows that the demands of economics often overrode the constraints of morality and law in village cultivation arrangements; in some parts of north India, for example, Brahmins did their own ploughing, and Rajput *thakurs* discarded their stereotypical image of indolent rentier pride when economic circumstances provided incentives.³⁴ Such examples can be matched and multiplied from all other parts of the sub-continent. Culturalist explanations also require us to believe that a unique culture will determine a unique performance, and yet the economic consequences of Hinduism for the South Asian economy over the last 200 years or so have not been so singular. South Asia is not a solely Hindu region, yet its modern economic history has a certain unity, and also exhibits striking similarities to other areas, such as Indonesia and China, which have a different cultural base. Where variations do exist in the comparative histories of

³⁴ Eric Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj. Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India*, Cambridge, 1978, pp. 234–6.

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these regions they can better be accounted for by secular factors than by dependence on culturalist explanations. Colonial India certainly exhibited an institutional rigidity in social and economic organisation, but this was not a uniquely Hindu, South Asian or colonial problem – indeed, much of the slow-down in Britain's own economic growth in the second half of the nineteenth century has often been attributed to the same cause.

The most complete new-classical interpretation of modern Indian economic history to date has been Deepak Lal's analysis of a 'Hindu equilibrium' of cultural stability and economic stagnation.³⁵ This work provides a functional explanation of Indian social organisation and agricultural systems as a second-best Pareto-efficient response to a specific environment. Lal argues that traditional Hindu society, based around the caste system, was organised to facilitate decision-making under conditions of uncertainty, brought about by the four long-run constraints of labour shortage, political decentralisation in local warrior-states, climatic variability and ecological fragility, and a culture-based undervaluation of merchant activity. This identification of economic stagnation is so aggregated as to be highly misleading, however. Lal uses very general indicators that ignore regional diversity, and assumes changelessness over long periods and large areas, rather than self-cancelling fluctuations in time and space; he also assumes that the uniqueness of Hindu culture produces a unique economic situation in India, ignoring parallel work on labour utilisation in other rice-cultivating regions of Asia that suggest similarities to Indian cases at the local and regional levels.

Such accounts of the South Asian economy assume a uniformity of agrarian social and economic relations based on a unified physical environment. This makes them very difficult to apply to the historical evidence, since historians of localities and regions stress a great variety of ecological circumstances. At the very simplest level, there is a frequently noted division into 'wet' and 'dry' regions (see below, pp. 39–40), with 'wet' regions being characterised by surplus labour and large rentier profits, while farms in 'dry' regions were operated by a recognizable peasantry of owner-cultivators using extensive cultivation to minimise risk and subject to interlinked factor and product

³⁵ Deepak Lal, *The Hindu Equilibrium: Cultural Stability and Economic Stagnation, India 1500 BC–1980 AD, Volume 1*, Oxford, 1984.

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markets. The distinct input requirements of different food crops also influenced social organisation; it is clear, for example, that classic self-sufficient, independent peasant family farms are more characteristic of dry-land wheat, than of wet-land rice, cultivation. Such accounts as Lal's also assume a straightforward chronology in which development, however slow, has been a cumulative process built on the accretions of the past. In practice, as we will see, both agriculture and industry in India experienced a much more erratic type of progress, with the form, nature and efficiency of production systems altering considerably as a result of fluctuating internal and external socio-political and economic circumstances.

Both Marxian and new-classical approaches demonstrate the increasing unity of capital, commodity and labour markets across the Indian subcontinent, linking the subsistence sector and the commercial economy together. South Asian economic history was not dualistic – we cannot identify and distinguish separate 'modern' and 'traditional' sectors, each with its own institutions and sphere of operations. The linkages and interconnections between the markets for agricultural land, labour and capital, and between industrial organisation and the control of labour discipline and wages were elaborate, and often intermixed 'modern' and 'traditional' forms in a complex and subtle way. The imperial economy of colonial South Asia took the form that it did because of the nature of the indigenous economy, while the indigenous economy was shaped, in turn, by the imperial economy. Market relations, in cash and kind, however imperfect, inefficient and often exploitative they may have been, suffused the South Asian economy as much as any other in the world throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The extent of market penetration, the character of the markets that operate, and the type of involvement of various economic groups of producers and consumers in them, have often been identified as important determinants of production conditions in Indian agriculture since 1947,³⁶ and these concepts provide a useful framework for

³⁶ Krishna Bharadwaj, *Production Conditions in Indian Agriculture*, Cambridge, 1974, reprinted in John Harriss, (ed.), *Rural Development. Theories of Peasant Economy and Agrarian Change*, London, 1982, ch. 12: see also her 'A View of the Commercialization in Indian Agriculture and the Development of Capitalism', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 12, 4, 1985.

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understanding the modern economic history of colonial South Asia was well. Many of the capital, labour and commodity markets were interlinked, since the availability of land, credit and employment was often concentrated in the hands of the same small groups of agricultural managers and industrial entrepreneurs, although such interlinking was not constant, and could change in type and intensity over time. In some sectors of the economy, notably in parts of the rural labour market and in mechanised industry and export-import trade, markets were internalised into institutional structures such as customary (*jajmani*) service networks or vertically integrated firms. These institutions represented alternatives to market arrangements, and could replace them, or be replaced by them, under certain circumstances. Where transactions costs were particularly high, especially the costs of labour discipline and recruitment, or the diffusion of information and technological capacity, such internalising institutions were common. They could be created to distort or bypass existing market arrangements by substituting tied for free labour in agriculture, for example, or by integrating manufacturing, sales and distribution with the securing of raw material supply in industry. At times, however, these institutions, could also collapse and fail, and by the end of the colonial period many had to be supported or replaced by state agencies.

The underlying characteristics of economic growth and development in colonial and post-colonial India were determined by the nature of the markets that decided how any surplus over subsistence was generated, and then divided it between capital, labour, and the state. Imperfections in these markets led to the emergence of public and private economic institutions that altered, replaced and substituted for them over time, affected economic performance and decision-making profoundly, and magnified problems of risk and risk management that were endemic in an underdeveloped economy with high levels of uncertainty. The process of creating economic institutions or markets was not entirely dominated by narrow classes or particular interest groups, but the arrangements that were made tended to favour the few rather than the many, and to reward the owners, or controllers, of scarce resources (land, capital, power) rather than the owners of the plentiful resource, labour. In addition, the colonial regime, which had its own peculiar priorities and purposes, played an important role in both shaping and directing the organisational framework of the

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economy. Thus the role of political and social power in economic relations was central, and the ideology and scope of the state also played an important role in shaping economic action. While both underconsumptionist and 'rent-seeking' theories focus on important issues, neither are enough, on their own, to analyse the interplay of development and underdevelopment in colonial South Asia fully. We need instead an historical context that can show the pattern of change and *stasis* over time. The chapters that follow will provide this by investigating, in more detail, the indigenous and imperial structures that determined the performance of agriculture, and trade and manufacture, and that shaped the relations between the colonial and post-colonial state and the economy of modern India.

Introduction

The Nature of 1857

BISWAMOY PATI

The 1857 rebellion was born out of historical processes ranging from the British policy of conquest and expansion to the colonial exploitation of India.¹ If one goes by the colonial mapping of the rebellion, it affected north-western, north, and central India. However, present-day research shows that the rebellion also touched parts of the east and the south.² It needs to be mentioned here that the nature of the 1857 rebellion has been debated from the time of the event itself. The basic idea of setting things in order to retain the 'emerging empire' provided the rationale to colonialists not only to ponder over what went wrong but also to assess the nature of this upheaval. It was perhaps this aspect which kept the rebellion 'alive' for some time among the colonial administrators. Shifts in the way the nature of 1857 was located, were visible within the initial reactions and written about very soon as well. Whereas the logic of retaining the monopoly of the East India Company defined 1857 as a 'Sepoy Mutiny' (or, *sipahi*—as the Company's 'native' soldier was called), the idea related to wiping out the Company's monopoly fuelled the thrust to uncover deeper problems that needed immediate attention. The sheer diversity of interpretations, even among contemporaries, creates an apparent problem of labelling or categorizing them into a simple set of opinions emanating from any specific geographical part of the world.

The 'Sepoy Mutiny'—as it was labelled initially by most members of the 'master race' in India—not only challenged colonialism, but also forced it to re-invent itself to face a future that seemed uncertain and full of major challenges.³ Those who focused on the 'Mutiny' theme saw it as the handiwork of a set of discontented sipahis who were unhappy with the introduction, in 1857, of the new Enfield rifle, with its distinct

ammunition, which required the bullet to be bitten before loading. Rumours that the grease used on the bullets was from the fat of cattle or pigs had deeper symbolic implications since cows were considered 'sacred' by the Hindus while the Muslims considered pigs to be 'polluting'. This created strong animosities and was perceived as an attack on Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs.⁴

Disraeli, representing a new generation of imperialists anxious about losing the fast-emerging 'crown jewel' of the British empire, pointed out that: 'The rise and fall of empires are not affairs of greased cartridges. Such results are occasioned by adequate causes, and by an accumulation of adequate causes'.⁵ For him, the causes of the uprising lay not so much in the 'conduct of men who were...the exponents of general discontent' amongst the Bengal army, as in the overall administration by the government, which had 'alienated or alarmed almost every influential class in the country'. Interestingly, in December 1857, Major Williams who was the Commissioner of the Military Police, North-Western Provinces, described 1857 as 'the great national insurrection in India'.⁶

Another feature influencing contemporary official thinking was the idea of the rebellion being the result of a conspiracy. More specifically, it was located as a 'Muslim conspiracy'. Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-98) wrote a tract (*Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind*: 1858), where he sought to examine the underlying features that determined the nature of 1857. This is interpreted by historians as an effort to counter the argument that located 1857 as a 'Muslim conspiracy'. However later on, in 1860, Khan wrote another tract (originally in Urdu) focusing on the 'loyal Muslims'.⁷ What is normally not highlighted is that S. A. Khan's was perhaps the first Indian viewpoint that located 1857 as a 'rebellion' (viz. *Baghawat*), and critiqued imperialism and its policies in order to explain the causes of the rebellion.⁸

Contemporary writings generated political hysteria and racism. Some accounts of 'eye-witnesses' in fact inscribed inventions like the rape of white women during the 'Mutiny'.⁹ These not only reinforced the barbaric image of the 'Indian' but also kept alive the need for retaining the 'civilizing mission' and providing legitimacy to colonial rule. It is striking that Charles Dickens, who was a major chronicler of the English working class, adopted a virtually condemnatory attitude vis-à-vis the rebellion. In fact, his racist stereotyping of all colonized peoples of Africa, the Indian Americans, and all other 'natives' was also shaped by a complex set of

factors conditioning responses to the rebellion in England.¹⁰

The 1857 rebellion demonstrated the way English opinion was divided at home. Thus, Chartists like Ernest Jones hailed the rebellion and unmasked the colonial exploitation of India.¹¹ The most serious dissenting voice was that of Karl Marx who linked the colonial exploitation of India to the anger displayed by the people during the rebellion. As he put it: 'The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked. Did they not, in India, to borrow an expression of that great robber, Lord Clive himself, resort to atrocious extortion, when simple corruption could not keep pace with their rapacity? While they prated in Europe about the inviolable sanctity of the national debt, did they not confiscate in India the dividends of the rajahs, who had invested their private savings in the Company's own funds?...These are the men of "Property, Order, Family, and Religion."'¹² Marx and Engels hailed the unity shown by the different religious communities opposed to British colonialism.¹³

Given its social composition, the Indian National Congress denounced the 1857 rebellion after its formation in 1885. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the rebellion attracted and inspired the first generation of Indian nationalists. The early nationalists were guided by the position of some colonial officials who, as outlined earlier, saw it as a 'national insurrection'. With the development of Indian nationalism, the rebellion was incorporated and appropriated as a part of the nationalist imagery. Thus, V. D. Savarkar, the first Indian to write about the rebellion from a nationalist position in 1909, called it the 'Indian War of Independence'. His pro-nationalist stance made Savarkar look with contempt at the British assertion of the greased bullets as sparking the 'war' and reject it. He argued, if this had been the issue it would be difficult to explain how the rebellion could attract Nana Sahib, the Emperor of Delhi, the Queen of Jhansi and Khan Bahadur Khan to join it. Besides, he also highlighted the fact that the rebellion continued even after the English Governor General had issued a proclamation to withdraw the offending greased bullets. Savarkar went ahead and connected the rebellion to the 'atrocities' committed by the British.¹⁴ This factor of unity—cutting across religious boundaries—in fact, makes his argument striking and goes against the subsequent shift in his position, that saw him accommodate

the Hindu-Muslim divide as a virtual 'fault-line' in Indian history. Consequently, the early nationalists described 1857 as a rebellion through which the 'Indians' opposed the sufferings and exploitation imposed on 'them' by British colonialism.

With the development of the working class movement in India, efforts were made to analyse the 1857 rebellion from a marxist position by pioneers like M. N. Roy and Rajni Palme Dutt. Roy was rather dismissive of 1857 and saw in its failure the shattering of the last vestiges of feudal power. He was emphatic about the 'revolution of 1857' being a struggle between the worn-out feudal system and the newly introduced commercial capitalism, that aimed to achieve political supremacy.¹⁵ In contrast, Palme Dutt saw 1857 as a major peasant revolt—even though it had been led by the decaying feudal forces—fighting to get back their privileges and turn the tide of foreign domination.¹⁶ Consequently, one witnesses the beginnings of a process that interrogated and critiqued the internal feudal order, even while lauding the popular basis of the rebellion.

The access to official records and archival sources since independence saw interesting developments related to debates on the nature of 1857. A rather sophisticated nationalist historiography that took cognizance of the complexities of the rebellion evolved in the process. It included nationalist historians like R. C. Majumdar, S. B. Chaudhuri, S. N. Sen, and K. K. Datta, who were not uniformly comfortable with the idea that the 1857 rebellion was the 'First War of Indian Independence'. One needs to note that S. N. Sen's work was sponsored by the state and his authoritative 'official' post-colonial account of 1857 obviously had an agenda—of celebrating Indian nationalism. In fact, the spirit of the Indian national movement left its deep imprints on these historians. This meant that some of them referred to ideas like nationalism supposedly witnessed during the rebellion or saw the very inception of the national movement contained in the 1857 rebellion. They went very clearly beyond the simple categorizations that had seen two dominant and opposing narratives—lauding the British, the victors who had 'won' the war and the claims of the 'rebellious Indians', who had been 'defeated'. This meant a shift to understanding the internal contradictions (viz. the Indian 'rich', which included the moneylenders and buniyas) and the popular basis of 1857. These views did not concentrate merely

on influential classes like the explanations provided by contemporary British officials, or statesmen like Disraeli. It is here that nationalist historiography worked on and developed the legacy of the marxists, even as some historians disapproved of labelling the rebellion as the 'First War of Independence'. In this sense at least nationalist historiography threatened to transgress the boundaries imposed on it by the early nationalists. The nationalist historians also accorded a space—however limited—to the popular basis of the rebellion.¹⁷ They highlighted the 'mutiny' component of 1857 that shifted and assumed the nature of a 'civil rebellion'. Nationalist historiography, therefore, most certainly opened up new possibilities.

Since peasants did/do not write their histories, their interactions with the rebellion remains undocumented. But, is it possible to ignore the folklore, issues related to moral economy and traditions of resistance associated with the 1857 rebellion? Moreover, can one afford to ignore the connections between 1857 and the peasant revolts of the preceding phase, or those outside the northern region of India? One can for example refer to the rebellions of the Bhills in 1852 (in Khandesh, Dhar and Malwa), the Santals in 1855-6 (in Rajmahal, Bhagalpur, Birbhum), the Mapillas over the 1836-54 period in Malabar, the Kandhas in Ghumsar and Baudh (1855-60), the Savaras of Parliakhemedi (1856-7). In the same way, the Indigo Revolt in Bengal (that began in 1859 and was directed against white planters) serves as an example, inspite of our being repeatedly told that the Permanent Settlement and *bhadraloks*, left Bengal as a 'zone of peace' in this phase.

Unless one locates historical processes in a narrow, factual manner, it would be indeed almost impossible to assume that peasants cannot think or incorporate components from the past while struggling against colonial rule and their immediate oppressors. It is, therefore, difficult to study the rebellion without taking into account the social history of peasant protest prior to 1857 and in the ensuing period.¹⁸ This would bring out the complexity of issues and invert many commonly-held positions associated with the rebellion, including the point that colonialism was its virtual 'creator', the over-emphasis on related 'economic' factors, or a point that has almost got frozen as common sense—that the impact of the 1857 rebellion was not felt outside the Indo-Gangetic plain.

With the passage of time the development of other historical approaches generated several debates on the nature of 1857. The first exhaustive work on the rebellion was published in 1957 to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the event. Edited by P. C. Joshi, this was the first attempt of marxist historians to focus on the diversities and the specificities of the 1857 rebellion. The efforts included assessing 1857 against the colonial backdrop, examining aspects of participation, and focusing in a major way on internal contradictions. Its significance lay in the use of Urdu sources and folk songs.¹⁹ In many ways this work inspired a serious spell of writings on the rebellion. Issues ranging from the way the nature of 1857 was conditioned by the background,²⁰ the demographic and ecological features, social composition, the role of the peasants, especially the 'rich' peasants²¹ to questions related to its organization,²² middle-level leadership,²³ activities in the areas where British authority had been subverted and whether it was indeed a restorative rebellion²⁴—have attracted the attention of historians. It is the popular level of the rebellion that concerned Ranajit Guha and the subaltern historians. Guha highlighted features such as the colonial labelling of 'dacoit leaders' and 'dacoit villages', the targeting of European properties, planters and factories, colonial records as well as sahuikars and buniyas.²⁵ Rudrangshu Mukherjee and Tapti Roy took up specific area studies to brought forth fascinating complexities of popular militancy that had earlier remained ignored.²⁶

More recently—since the 1990s—historians have focused on the popular dimensions of 1857, including the specificities of the involvement of adivasis,²⁷ low castes and outcastes,²⁸ popular culture²⁹ and mentalities,³⁰ and questions related to the alternative order that emerged.³¹ Present-day scholars working within the paradigms of cultural studies have also sought to delineate the way racism emerged as a virtual fall-out of the rebellion. By focusing on the 'rape' of white women during the rebellion, colonialists inscribed images of the 'barbaric Indian' in the colonial imagination.³²

The 1857 rebellion represents possibly one of the most powerful and dramatic anti-colonial movements that *also* questioned internal exploitation. The intricacies and contours of the rebellion have made it the subject of intense debate and interrogation, especially the emergence of regional studies has added several new dimensions to the existing

scholarship. In the last two centuries the focus of the debates have shifted from the mutinous 'sepoys' and seeing in it the origins of Indian nationalism to studying the internal contradictions, the participation of the common people, and the diversities of the rebellion. These features reflect corresponding shifts in modern Indian historiography, which have both influenced and been influenced by the way the nature of 1857 has been debated.

SEPOY MUTINY

[The] military outbreak that has, by its extent and duration, astonished the whole civilised world...at one time threatened seriously to affect the *prestige* of a flag that during the past century and a half has waved in proud supremacy over the fortresses and cities in India.

—Charles Ball, *The History of the Indian Mutiny*, Vol. 1, p. 1
(emphasis in original)

The Indian 'Mutiny' of 1857–8, began with Indian or 'native' soldiers in the Bengal army of the English East India Company. The starting point of the characterization of the rebellion as a 'Sepoy Mutiny' can be traced to the official accounts of people like William Muir, the secretary to the government of North-Western Provinces. For Muir, 1857 was a 'mutiny of troops'—a struggle between the government and its soldiers.³³ These initial interpretations concentrated on the 'mutiny' factor carefully disguising the problems created by the Company rule. The political effort to retain control over India and the counter-insurgency operations directed against the 'mutineers' made the colonial officials 'perceive' the discontent of the 'sepoys' as the primary factor in the debates. Interestingly, the Company's method of emphasizing caste in its army and giving importance to the religious angle were both ably sustained by and in turn reinforced the greased cartridges theory while explaining the nature of the rebellion.

Charles Ball and J. W. Kaye were among the pioneers who wrote about 1857 from the 'Sepoy Mutiny' perspective.³⁴ Both Ball and Kaye attached tremendous importance to caste status, which the sipahis thought were undermined in the cantonments. Ball ascribes the undermining of the caste status of the sipahis to stopping and curtailing of certain concessions. He cites factors like the loss of privileges, charging the sipahis for their

dak that had previously been allowed without postage tax, new tolls that were now levied on them when they travelled, withdrawal of privileges when they bought their provisions, and the curbs on their right to choose their postings (viz. whether they would or would not cross the sea on active service). Promotions—earlier based on seniority and not on merit or ability and decided by the men themselves—began now to be decided by military authorities. Being at the lower rungs of the army meant low salaries which left the sipahis dissatisfied. These features asserted European supremacy and were irritants, especially in a context wherein the few Europeans attached to the regiments did not speak or understand the language of the men they commanded.³⁵

Kaye underlines the importance of the greased cartridges which caused an alarm among the sipahis. The new Enfield rifle bullets were coated with grease made from the fat of cows (sacred to Hindus) and of pigs (anathema to Muslims). Since the cartridges had to be bitten before being used, the Hindu and Muslim sipahis interpreted it as part of a plot to force them to adopt Christianity. The 'native' sipahis believed that through the cartridges, their 'Christian masters' aimed to defile their caste and their religion. Both Ball and Kaye refer to this point and to the shock waves it generated when this was discovered in the cantonments. Similarly, both mention the Dharma Sabha in Calcutta (which they define as a body aimed to 'preserve' Hinduism from the onslaught of the English) projecting the issue of cartridges as a devise aimed at forcing the sipahis to embrace Christianity. The British replaced the cartridges when the mistake was realized; but suspicion persisted. In February 1857, began a series of incidents with sipahis refusing to use the cartridges.³⁶

In fact, present-day historians refer to the reforms of the 1830s, which disturbed power relations that had bestowed financial security and a high religious and social status for the sipahis and their families. Their *batta* (viz. allowance) which they received during service in foreign lands was discontinued. From the 1840s the sipahis were given permanent postings in distant military outposts of Sindh and Punjab—located as 'foreign lands'—away from their families raising apprehensions about the violation of the caste status of the Hindu sipahis.³⁷ Coming to the immediate background of 1857, the idea of turning towards internal recruiters like Kunwar Singh, Nana Sahib, or the Rani of Jhansi reflected a desire of the sipahis to get back their lost status.³⁸

NATIONALIST UPRISING

When ...taking the searching attitude of an historian, I began to scan that instructive and magnificent spectacle, I found to my great surprise the brilliance of a War of Independence shining in the 'mutiny of 1857'.

—V. D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*
(Author's Introduction, vii)

India's independence meant the availability of sources which was a great help for the nationalist historians. The pioneers in the field included R. C. Majumdar, S. B. Chaudhuri, S. N. Sen, and K. K. Datta.³⁹ R. C. Majumdar, while pointing to the 'mutiny'/'rebellion of the people' divide, was critical of the contemporary bhadraloks like Kishorichandra Mitra who wrote in 1858 that it was a 'revolt of a *lac* of sepoys' and some of the associations (like the British Indian Association and the Muhammadan Association of Calcutta) that had passed resolutions condemning the 'outbreak of the Mutiny'.⁴⁰ Examining the nature of 1857, Majumdar notes the 'civil population' revolting in the localities only after the withdrawal of British authority, in a context when British authority had collapsed and there was a political vacuum. Emphasizing the absence of coordination among the different groups of rebels, he highlights the personal interest of different groups and individual leaders to underline the absence of a common cause. Majumdar also mentions the involvement of the 'goonda elements' in 1857.

The widespread nature of the 1857 rebellion in northern India and the way it turned into a 'mass movement' in eastern Punjab is significant for Majumdar. Simultaneously, he specifies Awadh where the rebellion 'seemed to be of a popular or national character' due to 'particular local reasons' since it 'was so arbitrarily annexed only a year before the Mutiny'. Discussing some of the major leaders of the rebellion like Bahadur Shah, Nana Sahib, the Rani of Jhansi, and Kunwar Singh, he mentions the 'special grudge' they had against the British. Although these leaders could also have been inspired by patriotism, there was no evidence to support this aspect. Majumdar also questions the idea that these four were 'natural leaders' under whom the Indians fought the 'war of Independence' and the 'love for their country' that determined the participation of the civil population.

Majumdar is particularly critical about the tendency to see the unity of Hindus and Muslims that was displayed during the rebellion. He

cites the evidence of communal riots in parts of the United Provinces, where the Muslims shouted for the revival of the Muslim kingdom and the suspicion and jealousy among the Muslims on the one hand and the Marathas and the Sikhs on the other. Dismissing the idea of the rebellion being a national war of independence, he delves on the attempts by the local chiefs and talukdars to re-assert their lost rights and argues that it was not possible to see nationalism or patriotism in 1857 or at any time before it. In the frontline areas of the rebellion like Rohilkhand and Awadh, independence from British control had been achieved by the sipahis and it was more a question of 'maintaining and not gaining independence'. This phase however was marred by subversive activities and infighting based on the interests of 'individuals, classes and States' and the absence of patriotism among the people. He felt that the 'war of independence' theme involving the civil population could be accepted only to explain the anti-British component.

S. B. Chaudhuri emphasized the bifurcation of 1857 into two 'distinct historical aspects'—viz. the military mutiny and the civil rebellion—as a 'new approach', that enabled a proper evaluation of the nature of 1857.⁴¹ Whereas the sipahis struck the first blow, they did not produce the leadership necessary to canalize the activities of the 'rebellious troops'. This meant that some 'civil elements' assumed the leadership of the 'movement' and turned it to their advantage. This toned down the military character of the revolt and saw the merging of the military rising into a popular rebellion. Chaudhuri referred to the religious and race components that marked 1857. Describing the popular basis of the rebellion, he mentions the terror that was unleashed to suppress it. Chaudhuri analyses how the British government in India viewed 1857–8 as a vast upsurge of the people. He refers to various measures adopted to meet the crisis ranging from raising troops and taking loans to the failure to re-establish its authority in several areas. Although he views the 'civil rebellion' as mainly a talukdari movement, he refers to the participation of different sections of the people, including the low castes and cultivators.

1857 is both a mutiny and a rebellion for Chaudhuri. People directed their wrath against their oppressors and targeted government offices, records, police stations, telegraph poles, railway lines, and engines. Interestingly, he refers to areas like Saharanpur where the houses of *baniyas*

were burnt along with their accounts, accounts books were carried out of the town and torn up on the highway. As discussed, the *mahajans* were on the side of the British. Factories owned by Europeans were destroyed and indigo factories targeted. Paradoxically some feudal sections (like some of the big 'native princes' and chiefs) stayed out of a revolt that was very often characterized as feudal.

Significantly, leaders did not remain confined to their areas but sought to mobilize the people in adjacent tracts. Well-known leaders like the Fyzabad maulavi, Firuz Shah, Tantia Tope, the Rani of Jhansi, Rao Sahib, and Kunwar Singh were visible in many fronts during the rebellion in upper India. Madho Singh of Bhognipur, joined the rebels at Kalpi after the re-occupation of Kanpur by the British; Beni Bahdur Singh of Nasratpur fought the British at Allahabad and later joined the rebels at Lucknow; Mehndi Hasan of Sultanpur dominated the districts surrounding Awadh and surrendered only when the rebellion was dying out. Some of the other leaders Chaudhuri discusses are the palwar chief Madhoprasad of Birhar, whose activities could be traced upto Azamgarh; Udresh Singh who fought at Lucknow, Gorakhpur, and Azamgarh; and, the Sagar leader Daulat Singh who swept through Jalaun, Jhansi, Hoshangabad and Rajputana. This effort to create solidarity transcended barriers of caste, religion, and region and demonstrated a level of social brotherhood visible in different areas.

Chaudhuri is critical of colonial officials who refused to acknowledge the 'conversion' of the mutiny into a rebellion and considered it a mere 'mutiny' of troops. Labelling of 1857 as a rebellion of the riff-raff is unfounded and weak. Disagreeing with Majumdar that it was not the result of a conspiracy, Chaudhuri underlines its popular basis by referring to the background years of discontent and anger and focuses on Awadh to illustrate his point. He speculates about the possible inception of the nationalist movement in the 1857 rebellion.

The organizational aspects of the rebellion have been examined by S. N. Sen.⁴² He points out the significance of the circulation of *chappaties* observed in parts of north India by many colonial officials in the preceding phase of the rebellion. Sen closely studies the letter supposedly written by Rani Laxmi Bai in March 1856 to her family priest at Puri. His method of questioning its authenticity (on the basis of the English style of dating, the wrong seal used, and the reference to greased

cartridges—which did not come to India before November 1856—and the Rani's presumed presence in Meerut, from where this letter was written since there is no evidence that she had ever been there) reflects the development in the historian's craft over this phase in India. Sen is critical of arguments that saw the rebellion as a conspiracy inspired by any foreign power. According to him, the rebellion originated in sipahi discontent and then derived its strength from the widespread disaffection among the civil population.

Neither the entire non-European sipahi component nor all the people were behind the rebellion. A section of the sipahis fought for the government, while some regions like the Madras Presidency remained largely unaffected. The strength of the rebellion was precisely because it was supported by people from diverse sections ranging from the Sikhs in Delhi and tribesmen in the frontier, the Bhills in Rajputana and Central India to the Pasis in Awadh. No community, caste, or class was entirely for or against the rebellion. For Sen it united Hindus and Muslims. He saw Awadh as a region where the 'revolt assumed a national dimension'. Emphasizing the need to be cautious, he refers to the way the patriots fought for their 'king and country', although they were not champions of freedom. He is critical of the leaders who would have 'set the clock back' for the tenants in case the rebellion had been successful. Sen is dismissive of both the influence of religion on those who had joined in the rebellion and interpretations of a clash of civilization—between barbarism and civilization. About the latter, he emphasizes the logic of hatred and animosity based occasionally on rumours and mentioned the atrocities perpetuated on the common, innocent people during the counter-insurgency operations.

The policy of colonial expansion and the anger this bred in different parts of the 'vast country' were significant factors for K. K. Dutta. The presence of important pre-1857 movements illustrate that the rebellion was neither isolated nor sudden.⁴³ While discussing the crucial question whether 1857 was a 'mutiny' or a 'revolt', Dutta analyses a shift from mutiny to revolt. He emphasizes that the people actively supported the rebellion, especially in the United Provinces and Bihar, and focuses on the indiscriminate and ruthless methods adopted in different parts to suppress the rebellion which demonstrate the popularity of the rebellion.⁴⁴

RESTORATIVE MOVEMENT

It is true that the 1857 uprising was led by Indian feudals (but not them alone!) and they were not the makers of events, nor sole masters of India's destiny.

P. C. Joshi '1857 in our History' (from his edited collection 1857: A Symposium, 182).

Among the historians who reflect on the nature of the 1857 rebellion from the point of view of a restorative movement mention must be made of Talmiz Khaldun and E. I. Brodtkin. Khaldun teases out the strong anti-imperialist component of 1857 that got diffused after the initial success of the rebellion.⁴⁵ In this context feudal rivalries emerged. This was not just between the Mughals and the Marathas but also the feudal zamindari elements who had hoped to regain their lost privileges. Problems developed when they realized that their control over the rebellion was getting increasingly undermined. Moreover, whereas Bahadur Shah was declared the Shahenshah-e-Hind on 11 May 1857, he was actually reduced to a mere figure-head. Formal power was vested with the Court of Administration. This body had six members from the army and four from the civilian department. Bahadur Shah had the right to attend the Court and decisions had to have his stamp of approval, though these were taken by the latter and the Emperor was forced to put his signature.

The restored Emperor was subjected to a system where he had to accept decisions taken in line with the panchayat system the rebels. The inner tensions among the people wielding power were due to deeper conflicts between the dying aristocracy and the new peasant proprietors. The feudal aristocracy was unhappy with the way efforts were made to undermine its position by the rebels. On the other hand, the class origins of the peasant-sipahi rebels prevented them from attempting any form of land nationalization or control of prices and they had to depend on arbitrary taxation to raise resources. The Court did pass orders to uproot the zamindari system, provide property titles to the real tiller and overhaul the system of revenue assessment. However, these were not implemented, since the Court had a short life. It becomes clear from Khaldun's account that the restoration of the feudal order was far from being a reality, even as it was undermined.

The crucial question related to the use of labels such as 'rebels' and 'loyalists' by the colonial officials to define some of the princes and landed

sections that gained currency during and after the rebellion. Brodtkin critiques these simple categorizations based on the panic generated by the rebellion among the British. As he points out, some of the 'rebels' were forced by the prevailing circumstances to be on the side of the rebellion. The examples he cites range from the nawab of Farrukhabad to the emperor Bahadur Shah, who were virtual prisoners of the rebels. He focuses on the emergence of traditional rivalries in many parts of northern India after the retreat of British authority. This saw the rise of major struggles of succession, which meant that the labels of 'loyalty' and 'rebel' lost their relevance.

Brodtkin suggests that in case the struggles involved Hindu-Muslim rivalry the British tended to categorize these stereotypically—viz. the Hindu factions as 'loyal' and the Muslim factions as 'rebellious'. He provides examples to illustrate this point. In the Rohilkhand tract the Pathans along with the nawab of Rampur emerged successful and succeeded the British, although only the former were located as 'rebels'. Similarly, Mahmud Khan, the nawab of Najibabad was falsely labelled a 'rebel' for restoring Pathan power over the Rajput Thakurs who claimed to be on the side of the British. These formulations question simple conceptions of restoration of the erstwhile landed sections after the retreat of the British.

CONSPIRACY VERSUS ORGANIZED MOVEMENT

As regards the rebellion of 1857, the fact is that for a long time, many grievances had been rankling in the hearts of the people. In course of time, a vast store of explosive material had been collected. It wanted but the application of a match to light it, and that match was applied by the Mutinous army.

—Syed Ahmad Khan, *The Causes of the Indian Revolt* (page 3)

The categorization of the nature of 1857 as a conspiracy can be traced to the time of the rebellion itself. In government circles, 1857 was often described as a 'Muslim conspiracy'. This was one very major factor that prompted Syed Ahmad Khan to counter it.⁴⁶ K. M. Ashraf studies the connections between the Wahabis and the 1857 rebellion, pointing to its revivalist components.⁴⁷ This was rooted in their century-old hostility vis-à-vis the British, which was conditioned by the anger of the 'Muslim ruling classes'.⁴⁸ Ashraf touches upon the references to *jihad* (holy war) and the *fatwas* (decrees), against the British, by maulavis in the cities.

Moreover, he analyses the association of leaders like General Bakht Khan, a Wahabi, with the rebellion, together with a network of the Wahabis in northern India. He examined the role of the Wahabis in the 1857 rebellion both in and outside Delhi. His essay illustrates the merging of the identity of the Wahabis with the rebellion in some areas.

The Gwalior contingent that played a vital role during the rebellion in Gwalior.⁴⁹ Iqtidar Alam Khan delineates the organized nature of the sipahis in the rebellion. This contingent was created with the disbandment of a large part of Scindia's force in 1844. As per the arrangement, whereas Scindia provided the resources to maintain it, the unit was under the control of the English, headed by a brigadier. The contingent included people following different religions and also low castes. Its size increased over the 1844-57 period. Khan mentions the presence of other bodies of troops that were present in the territory of Gwalior who participated in the rebellion.

Before the news of the sipahi revolts in Meerut and Delhi reached Gwalior the contingent was efficiently administered and managed. The sipahis had not demonstrated any indication of being affected by the news of the rebellion even after two weeks. They were promised that their positions would be elevated so that they would be at par with those in direct employment. However, the situation altered subsequently.

The sipahis of the Gwalior contingent were organized on the basis of certain specific features. They had their spokesmen and carefully planned out military strategies collectively. The contingent avoided individual desertions and seemed to have preferred to act as a unit. It kept blood-thirsty acts under check after the initial killings of a few officers. Their intention was to force the English officers to leave Gwalior and the cantonments immediately. They attempted to keep the fanatical ones among them under check and prevent them from creating any chaos—a policy that was accepted by the rank and file of the contingent without much opposition.

The idea of announcing the appointment of Inayat Ali as a new commanding officer, with the designation of general, and other officers in high positions was intended to fill up the vacuum and direct the activities of the contingent in an organized manner. These ensured efficient management of the contingent and retaining its fighting capabilities. The contingent also refused to work under Scindia. The sipahis wanted Scindia

to accept their conditions so as to lure him to take the contingent's services to regain the territories that had been lost to the English over the last three decades by his predecessor. This was unacceptable to Scindia who along with his sirdars knew that the English would soon re-establish their authority. Such intervention shows the determination of the sipahis to fight the English. Their decisions were based on collective bodies like the panchayats. Even though differences cropped up among the sipahis, Khan mentions how the contingent took over Kanpur, even though briefly, from British control.

POPULAR PROTEST

In the commencement of 1857 while marching through the Mynpoorie district, my attention was drawn by Zumindars in villages adjoining the road to a mysterious distribution of chupattees, (or small wheaten cakes), with astonishing rapidity through the country. The bearers knew apparently no more than those from whom they last received the cakes what the purport of the injunction was which directed the preparation of five cakes to be carried on to the villages in advance.... [T]his way the chupattees or their counterparts travelled often over 160 or 200 miles in a night.

George Harvey, B. C. S., Commissioner of the Agra Division,
cited in J. A. B. Palmer, *The Mutiny Outbreak at Meerut in 1857*, p. 1

It is indeed surprising that the popular dimension of the rebellion has been seriously investigated by very few historians. The contemporary official sources, archival material available from the different provinces, including the hurriedly published documents by different provincial governments under the Freedom Movement series (published in the early years after the independence of India), as well as the oral/folklore traditions associated with 1857 contain major possibilities that can be tapped by researchers. The counter-insurgency operations refer to the ruthless and brutal suppression of the rebellion which included large scale destruction of villages, public hangings, and blowing off people from canons in a desperate effort to restore colonial authority. Historians who have explored the rebellion from the point of view popular participation and subsequently popular protest include Eric Stokes, Rudrangshu Mukherjee, and Tapti Roy.⁵⁰ Gautam Bhadra and K. S. Singh have contributed to enrich our understanding of the tribal component involved in 1947.⁵¹ Badri

Narayan, and more recently Rajat Kanta Ray, have captured the imagination, popular culture, and mentalities associated with the 1857 rebellion.⁵²

The new spell of research that delved into this area began with Eric Stokes.⁵³ While Stokes accepts the 'low Muslim rabble' as a strong revolutionary force in the cities and towns like Aligarh, he emphasizes the elitist nature of the rural revolt in 1857 in the upper and central Doab region. To substantiate this argument he studied the peasant masses whose role was minimal and when involved, 'tamely' followed their 'caste superiors'. The dominant castes and communities leading the rebellion represented a small section of the population and those who were landowners were an even smaller group. Stokes attributes the rebellion to caste mobilization. He also stresses the importance of the economic and social dislocations brought in by the British. Thus, the emergence/non-emergence of an 'enterprising' rural magnate proved to be crucial in determining the nature of political allegiance during the rebellion. In areas where they developed, like the Mathura and Aligarh districts, they held down the peasant revolt. Contrarily, in areas where they had failed to develop owing to the absence of major economic and social changes, the old aristocracy held power and led the people into the rebellion.

Stokes develops his arguments in his next work which he did not live to complete.⁵⁴ A few of his arguments—that 1857 was not one movement or his emphasis on its diversities and variations—remained unaltered. Nevertheless, some of his positions did change. He did away with his idea that had provided centrality to caste, though his analysis did accept caste as a descriptive category. This resulted primarily due to his detailed work on the Delhi region that he completed after his visit to India in 1975-6. This meant that he directed his attention towards the diverse impact generated by colonialism even when it involved a single caste like Jats, Gujars, and Rajputs. This work goes beyond caste and takes into account inter and intra-regional variations while examining the nature of the rebellion.

Stokes' *The Peasant Armed* does not remain bound by strictly economic explanations and weaves in factors like ecology, culture, and mentalities. Here Stokes shifts focus to the common people and moved towards forms of popular protest during the 1857 rebellion. In fact, the very title of this book marked a shift in the way Stokes located 1857 as a peasant revolt. As shown, large sections of rural society were involved with the

rebellion, though strict categorizations of peasants—like 'rich', 'middle', and 'poor'—were not applicable. Nevertheless, this did not lead Stokes to look at the popular dynamism of the rebellion in regions like Awadh which could have provided deeper insights into this dimension.

Uncovering the dimension of popular peasant protest,⁵⁵ Rudrangshu Mukherjee moves away from official accounts and the position of Eric Stokes—including his revised position—that emphasizes the elite nature of the rebellion. Mukherjee examines the linkages between the talukdars and the peasants. Analysing the leadership of the talukdars in the Awadh region, he argues that the real strength of the talukdars' resistance and the 1857 rebellion was based on the general support of the peasantry and the people in the countryside. This solidarity was facilitated by the agrarian relations in the region marked by an inter-dependence of the talukdars and the peasants.

In his effort to explore the popular basis of rebellion, Mukherjee mentions the number of ordinary and common weapons that were recovered, including firearms from ordinary peasants. He extends his argument by citing an official source that mentioned: 'Twenty thousand one hundred and twenty people' had 'taken advantage of the Amnesty and returned to their homes... [though] 200,000 is more likely to represent the number who have actually come in'. He quoted a source which mentioned that '*three fourths of the adult male population of Oudh, had been in rebellion...*'⁵⁶

On the basis of these sources he contests the dominant picture provided by the 'mutiny' literature about the 'magnate leadership'. The peasants did not play a mere rear-guard, subaltern role. They were on the side of the rebellion in areas where the talukdars remained loyal to the British. This illustrates that the rebellion was not always elitist in character and that in Awadh it had a mass, popular base.

The participation and initiatives of the peasantry in the rebellion had a clear sipahi component and explains that the sipahis were peasants in uniform.⁵⁷ However, Mukherjee clarifies that this link did not impose a subordinate position on the peasants, for they actually played a decisive influence on many occasions. Whereas the talukdars could and did manage to get pardoned, the mass of the sipahis and the peasants faced the certain risk of being massacred in case they surrendered. These features determined the nature of the rebellion in Awadh, where the opposition

to the alien order of the British was universal and assumed the form of a peoples' resistance.

Tapti Roy explores the countryside in the Bundelkhand region and its relationship with the 1857 rebellion.⁵⁸ Here it began by targeting government officials, bankers and mahajans, burning official papers, and 'plundering' neighbouring towns. These symbolized selective targeting and driving out all visible forms of British power with which the peasants had interacted. Therefore, these reflected the negative forms of political assertion which marked the most obvious and widespread form of rural 'jacqueries'.⁵⁹ She attributes this to both the knowledge about and the vulnerability of the adversary in a rather volatile context that reinforced the belief about the end of British rule and authority. This could account for the involvement of large numbers of people, sometimes as many as three to four thousand men of different areas (viz. Johurpur, Bainda, Simree, and Wasilpur) who had assembled at Tindwaree on 11 June 1857.

There was a shift in the rebellion after this initial phase. After this the anger of the common people was directed against those associated with colonial power and the internal order of exploitation. Those targeted included the auction-purchasers, decree-holders, merchants, and bankers—people responsible for the disruption and disorder that set in with the advent of colonialism which affected the mass of the people.⁶⁰ Roy mentions, after taking over the urban centres the sipahis began their 'attacks' on affluent people. After they left, people from the countryside continued to be involved with this trend, on occasions along with zamindars. This was a symbolic way of displaying power by challenging the contested order. Plunder emerged as a virtual system after the retreat of the British in some areas. This was linked to yet another strand that saw the peasants arming themselves to defend their alternative political order, for which they had chosen 'their king'.

Roy emphasizes the need to recognize rumours as an indication of the strong involvement of common people. Official positions sometimes present a mono-dimensional picture. As an example, she cites the western districts of Lalitpur, Jhansi, and Jalaun, where it was labelled as a rebellion of the thakurs. This was primarily a feature linked to the counter-insurgency operations that gave the thakurs primacy. On the contrary, Roy points to the role of the peasants that slipped into a secondary position, even though both strands strengthened each other and were a part of the rebellion.

Taking note of the intensity of the counter-insurgency operations, Roy weaves in the large-scale desertions of people from their villages in an attempt to explain the intensity of popular participation. The zamindars and peasants set up their own zones and made some rebel leaders, including some from outside their areas, head them. There was unity between peasants and the landed sections against the British who were a common enemy and some sections associated with colonialism. Analysing the enquiries conducted to punish the 'offenders', Roy illustrates the participation of the low castes and the marginal people. She explains the high level of solidarity and mass participation by pointing out the marginality of agricultural production in the Bundelkhand region which was a leveller among the different sections in the village. This posed acute problems and united the peasants and the landlords who faced impoverishment. It was this factor that undermined categories such as 'leaders', 'followers', 'zamindars', and 'peasants' and united diverse sections in the countryside that shaped and expressed rural dissent.

Gautam Bhadra and K. S. Singh study the world of the tribals. Bhadra examines the rebellion in the Chotanagpur region, focusing on Gonoo, a Kol leader.⁶¹ This tract had a pre-history of popular protest and the sipahi element was marginal during 1857. The rebellion began with the sipahis of the Ramgarh battalion. The Kols opposed the sipahis as the latter wanted to appropriate the plundered treasury, whereas the Kols looked at these resources as their own. This context saw traditional rivalries between the chiefs of Kharswan and Porahat surfacing, with the latter playing a confused role and vacillating between the British and the rebels. There emerged strong pressures from below, with the circulation of the arrow that called for rebellion. This transformed the mutiny of the Ramgarh battalion into a popular rebellion of the Kols directed against the British. It saw the emergence of Gonoo, a Kol, as a tribal leader. The rebellion seemed to transgress the framework of the chiefs. However, Bhadra refers to Gonoo who described himself as a 'mere follower of the Rajah (of Singhbhum)' and 'not a leader'. As described, he interprets this not as an attempt to evade responsibility, but a genuine expression of his limitation as a typical Kol rebel of his time.⁶²

The complexities of tribal protest went beyond the sipahi component and K. S. Singh examines its forms in the Chotanagpur region, central, and western India.⁶³ He demonstrates the diversities of the tribal

movements, delving on their specificities. These included efforts not only by sections of the feudal aristocracy, but also by tribals and non-tribals. Besides struggles to restore lost power and rights, these saw the unity of tribals with non-tribals. The tribals also fought against internal exploitation by moneylenders and traders, whose entry into their world was intimately connected with the advent of colonialism. In the essay, Singh explores diverse forms of tribal protests, which included depredations, strategic alliances, and confrontations with the British.

The 1857 rebellion was situated and retained in local traditions, folklores, and popular culture.⁶⁴ On the basis of oral evidence, Badri Narayan explores diversities ranging from the perception of the firangi and the folk heroes of the rebellion to the question of popular memory. Throwing light on the fascinating possibilities of oral history, he delineates the way the rebellion captured popular imagination and incorporated popular protest.

The exploration of popular mentalities of the 1857 rebellion, by Rajat Kanta Ray, offers fascinating clues to grasp its spirit and collective cosmology.⁶⁵ The sipahis provided the crucial link between town and country, since they were recruited mostly from the countryside. In areas like Bengal and the Punjab they failed to ignite the country and the rebellion did not go beyond the cantonments. Ray explains that the notion of race was an integral component of 1857. The rebellion led to sudden reversals in power relations, with the dominated race rising against the white, English regime. Hindus and Muslims jointly asserted their respective religious creeds and not in terms of a nation asserting its independence from colonial rule. The rebellion was based on patriotism rooted in a spontaneous desire for independence from alien rule. Ray connects this to the people selecting and setting up their kings in some of the storm-centres of the rebellion. Such acts assumed significance since the restored chiefs had to accept the position of the sipahi councils which epitomized peoples' power.

The alternative order that emerged as one that was curiously republican-democratic and which co-existed with a hierarchical, princely structure. After all, argues Ray, the restored feudal chiefships of 1857 were not like the old regimes of the eighteenth century since the rebellion had a mass movement behind it. In terms of collective mentality, 1857 marked a race war against the white oppressors, who formed the master race.

Nevertheless, ideologically this was projected as a struggle between the true religions (viz. Hinduism and Islam) and the false one (viz. Christianity). This did not result due to the efforts to impose the false doctrine of the 'trinity'. Instead, it was related to the question of identity of the 'Hindus and Muslims of Hindustan' that had been threatened by the moral and material aggrandizement of the arrogant imperial power. These features provided the dynamism for a new meaning to the reinstated chiefs of the eighteenth century.

The dialectic of 1857, especially its nature in terms of popular mentalities and their peculiarity are underlined by Ray. It was a war of races, without being race war, since the subject race conceived it as a war of religion. It was a religious war that cannot be categorized entirely in this way, since the rebellion was not directed at the religion of the master race, but its political domination. It was a patriotic war of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood—Ray calls this the 'inchoate social nationality' of Hindustan—but not a national war. Conceptually, it was rooted in the past but groped for an alternative to the technologically advanced British rule. In this sense it was not traditional, but was neither modern. The people involved in the 1857 rebellion felt that it was a 'war' of 'the Hindoostanis' to protect their '*dharma*' and '*deen*' and to 'save the country'. Ray explains that the rebellion did not form a part of the national movement nor can it be seen as the dying 'throes of the old order'.

1857 was a patriotic war, Ray argues, of the people who expressed their sense of national identity through the brotherhood of the two principal religions of a common land. Ideologically it reflected a foetal national community opposed to civil society, with outposts in the enclaves of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. Factors of racial subjugation created a sense of oneness that was, however, untainted by ideas of national sovereignty. The rebellion could express itself only through the political vocabulary of restoration that the people were accustomed to. It was marked by a disjunction from the past in the way peoples' power expressed itself through the sipahi councils. Consequently, even while the rebellion failed to generate a new order it was unrecognizable to tradition itself. The white man—and not the rebellion—had turned the world upside down. What was attempted during the rebellion was to turn it back. However, since the old order had been transformed it could never be restored.

Among the latest publications on the 1857 rebellion there has been a special issue of the *Economic and Political Weekly* (henceforth EPW).⁶⁶ It demonstrates the fascinating possibilities that exist in the 'margins'. Here one can specifically mention Shashank S. Sinha, 'In Search of Alternative Histories of 1857: Witch-hunts, Adivasis, and the Uprising in Chotanagpur'. Investigating the occasioning of mass witch-hunts among the adivasis of Chotanagpur during 1857, Sinha argues that witch-hunts formed a conscious contour of resistance combining both (the obvious) gender and anti-colonial tensions. Badri Narayan's, 'Reactivating the Past: Dalits and Memories of 1857' and Charu Gupta's, 'Dalit Virangas and the Re-invention of 1857', in the issue explore a relatively new dimension of the Dalits and Dalit women in parts of northern India relate to and remember the rebellion in their everyday life and the presence of counter-histories of the rebellion in their memory.

There have also been some fresh efforts to capture the world of cultural representations associated with the rebellion in the EPW issue. Aishwarya Lakshmi's, 'The Mutiny Novel: Creating the Domestic Body of the Empire', focuses on what is often referred to as the 'Mutiny novels' while noting the shifts and changes from the earlier period. She emphasizes the re-alignment and re-reading of the late nineteenth century 'adventure novel' within the post-mutiny domestic ideology and figuration of the empire. Indrani Sen's, 'Inscribing the Rani of Jhansi in Colonial "Mutiny" Fiction', probes the diversities of representations and the shifts in fictional works of the period. She argues that the strategic importance of this literary genre and its enormous popularity can be traced to post-'Mutiny' insecurities and anxieties and the need to present epic narratives of British heroics and the solidarity of colonizers. Alongside, Swarupa Gupta's, '1857 and Ideas about Nationhood in Bengal: Nuances and Themes', studies the uniqueness of the Bengali regional representation of an iconic 'national' event. She emphasizes that the location of 1857 in history was crucial in the grounding of nationhood.

And, finally, Lata Singh's, 'Visibilizing the "Other" in History: Courtesans and 1857 Revolt', brings to life the performing community of courtesans. Thus *tawaif*, the term used for the courtesan, has value-loaded connotations and is often equated to a whore, marginalizing these women performers into silence. By negotiating the courtesan through a modern play *Azizun Nisa San Sattavan ka Kissa* ('A courtesan and the 1857

Revolt':1999) written by Tripurari Sharma, Singh touches a dimension left untouched by social historians and feminist scholars. She argues, that the significance of the play is not just in retrieving the courtesans who were denied agency or a presence by the colonial project of misrepresentations, but also in bringing them back into the creative domain.

COMPREHENDING THE REBELLION

The 1857 rebellion was a major anti-colonial movement and is comparable to the Taiping Movement that shook China around the same phase. The rebellion symbolized resistance against the aggression of imperialist policies over the first half of the nineteenth century. It needs to be stressed that 1857 was not based only on 'economic' factors and that it was a mass political struggle. Besides shaking the foundations of colonial rule in large parts of northern India, the vibrations of the rebellion were felt elsewhere too. The rebellion inspired later anti-colonial imagination and movements. The significant presence of the landed sections in the rebellion however undermined its social transformative content.

There were risings by sipahis prior to 1857. For example, in Vellore during July 1806, Indian sipahis had revolted against the East India Company's garrison. 'Order' was restored very soon and this revolt did not go beyond the confines of the cantonment. Such mutinies were set in a context of the growing resentment against imperialism over the first half of the nineteenth century owing to its large-scale economic and political interventions.

Some historians like S. B. Chaudhuri suggest that 1857 had two distinct strands—the military rising and the mass rebellion. The methodological problem of this position is that it does not view historical processes holistically. Thus, this point would be difficult to sustain if the background of 1857 is kept in mind. Besides, it needs to be stressed that the sipahi, who was a 'peasant in uniform', articulated the problems and anxieties of the countryside. He provided the crucial link between both these components. This issue can be resolved in a serious manner in case more research is directed towards local studies that exploring popular participation and protest.

A point that needs some elaboration is the emphasis given to the religious angle and the so called 'clash of cultures' during the rebellion, echoes of which are strangely heard even today. It is here that one needs to

examine the position of K. M. Ashraf on the Wahabis. Did the 'Muslim'—a rather nebulous label—always follow the preacher or more specifically the Wahabi leaders? In fact, in a recent unpublished paper Iqtidar Alam Khan shows that many of the people clubbed together by Ashraf as Wahabis included Sufis. Secondly, he demonstrates the complexities involved in the interactions between the Wahabis and the English over the first half of the nineteenth century, which oscillated between collaboration and confrontation and was not based on opposition alone. Finally, Khan reveals how the meaning of jihad—'religious war'—has been misunderstood since in the context of the rebellion it meant a 'just war' against imperialism.⁶⁷

In studies of popular participation, the formulations of subaltern historians like Ranajit Guha and Gautam Bhadra have been revised. Guha refers to the territoriality component in 1857, which saw peasants remaining confined to their local boundaries. Tapti Roy's work contradicts this assertion. She demonstrates that the peasants not only moved to urban centres but also welcomed rebels from outside their immediate areas as their leaders. This feature of participation is also applicable to the adivasi tracts and in fact K. S. Singh refers to the unity of the tribals and non-tribals. Further, Gautam Bhadra's acceptance of the Kol leader Gonoo's version—that he was not a leader but a simple follower of the Rajah of Singhbhum—after his arrest illustrates the simplistic and elitist approaches often employed in the studies of adivasis.

The basic thrust of the 1857 rebellion was directed against the colonial regime though various categories directly associated with the rebellion emerged after its entry into northern India. Thus, the rebellion was against not only the planters and colonial officials, but also the buniyas and moneylenders who represented the internal order of exploitation. Moreover, the adivasi struggles in this phase went beyond those of the sipahis. This area has not received significant attention from historians considering that the world of the adivasis had a history of major movements prior to 1857. One needs to mention here some of the adivasi rebellions, conventionally called the Kol and the Santal rebellion, in the immediate background of 1857.⁶⁸ Besides, there is a need to unveil the problems related to the ill-treatment and sexual exploitation of adivasi women, which seem to have links with some of these rebellions. Similarly the over-emphasis on sipahis like Mangal Pandey blurs the role of the outcastes and low castes in the cantonments as well as outside. Studies

on these aspects would enable us to bring to light some specificities of the popular struggles of the adivasis, outcaste and low caste groups and gender-related issues in the 1857 rebellion.⁶⁹ This would help in unravelling the fascinating complexities of the struggle not only against imperialism, but also against the internal structure of oppression and exploitation—vital elements in the understanding of colonial Indian social history.

NOTES

1. To get an idea about these dimensions see Bipan Chandra *Essays on Colonialism*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1999; Irfan Habib, 'The Coming of 1857', in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 26: Nos 1–4, January–April, 1998, pp. 6–15; Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004; and Barbara Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and their States: The New Cambridge History of India*, III, 6, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

2. The bulk of the research on 1857 is unfortunately bound by this 'mapping'; in fact, the actual picture could be very different if some effort was directed to work on the diverse regions of India on the basis of local repositories. For example, N. Rajendran, 'Upsurge in South', *Frontline*, 29 June, pp. 19–22, shows the way the rebellion affected parts of south India; similarly, my on-going research on Orissa shows the vibrancy of the rebellion, leading to large-scale guerilla warfare in western Orissa.

3. In fact, the taking over of India by the Crown in 1858 symbolized this shift.

4. See for example, Charles Ball, *The History of the Indian Mutiny: Giving a Detailed Account of the Sepoy Insurrection in India; and a Concise History of the Great Military Events which have tended to Consolidate British Empire in Hindostan*, 2 Volumes, London: The London Printing and Publishing Co., 1858–9 and John William Kaye, *History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857–58*, 3 Volumes; London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1864–76; reprinted, Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1988.

5. Quoted in George Earl Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli Earl of Beaconsfield*, Vol. IV, London: John Murray, 1916, p. 91.

6. Cited in K. K. Datta, *Reflections on the Mutiny*, Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1967, pp. 11–12.

7. Syed Ahmad Khan, *An Account of the Loyal Mahomedans of India*, J. A. Gibbons, Meerut, 1860.

8. See Syed Ahmad Khan, *The Causes of the Indian Revolt (Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind)*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000.

2 *Civil Rebellions and Tribal Uprisings*

The Revolt of 1857 was the most dramatic instance of traditional India's struggle against foreign rule. But it was no sudden occurrence. It was the culmination of a century long tradition of fierce popular resistance to British domination.

The establishment of British power in India was a prolonged process of piecemeal conquest and consolidation and the colonialization of the economy and society. This process produced discontent, resentment and resistance at every stage.

This popular resistance took three broad forms: civil rebellions, tribal uprisings and peasant movements. We will discuss the first two in this chapter.

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The series of civil rebellions, which run like a thread through the first 100 years of British rule, were often led by deposed *rajas* and *nawabs* or their descendants, uprooted and impoverished *zamindars*, *landlords* and *poligars* (landed military magnates in South India), and ex-retainers and officials of the conquered Indian states. The backbone of the rebellions, their mass base and striking power came from the rack-rented peasants, ruined artisans and demobilized soldiers.

These sudden, localized revolts often took place because of local grievances although for short periods they acquired a broad sweep, involving armed bands of a few hundreds to several thousands.

The major cause of all these civil rebellions taken as a whole was the rapid changes the British introduced in the economy, administration and land revenue system. These changes led to the disruption of the agrarian

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society, causing prolonged and widespread suffering among its constituents. Above all, the colonial policy of intensifying demands for land revenue and extracting as large an amount as possible produced a veritable upheaval in Indian villages. In Bengal, for example, in less than thirty years land revenue collection was raised to nearly double the amount collected under the *Mughals*. The pattern was repeated in other parts of the country as British rule spread. And aggravating the unhappiness of the farmers was the fact that not even a part of the enhanced revenue was spent on the development of agriculture or the welfare of the cultivator.

Thousands of *zamindars* and *poligars* lost control over their land and its revenues either due to the extinction of their rights by the colonial state or by the forced sale of their rights over land because of their inability to meet the exorbitant land revenue demanded. The proud *zamindars* and *poligars* resented this loss even more when they were displaced by rank outsiders — government officials and the new men of money — merchants and moneylenders. Thus they, as also the old chiefs, who had lost their principalities, had personal scores to settle with the new rulers.

Peasants and artisans, as we have seen earlier, had their own reasons to rise up in arms and side with the traditional elite. Increasing demands for land revenue were forcing large numbers of peasants into growing indebtedness or into selling their lands. The new landlords, bereft of any traditional paternalism towards their tenants, pushed up rents to ruinous heights and evicted them in the case of non-payment. The economic decline of the peasantry was reflected in twelve major and numerous minor famines from 1770 to 1857.

The new courts and legal system gave a further fillip to the dispossessors of land and encouraged the rich to oppress the poor. Flogging, torture and jailing of the cultivators for arrears of rent or land revenue or interest on debt were quite common. The ordinary people were also hard hit by the prevalence of corruption at the lower levels of the police, judiciary and general administration. The petty officials enriched themselves freely at the cost of the poor. The police looted, oppressed and tortured the common people at will. William Edwards, a British official, wrote in 1859 that the police were 'a scourge to the people' and that 'their oppression and exactions form one of the chief grounds of dissatisfaction with our government.'

The ruin of Indian handicraft industries, as a result of the imposition

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of free trade in India and levy of discriminatory tariffs against Indian goods in Britain, pauperized millions of artisans. The misery of the artisans was further compounded by the disappearance of their traditional patrons and buyers, the princes, chieftains, and *zamindars*.

The scholarly and priestly classes were also active in inciting hatred and rebellion against foreign rule. The traditional rulers and ruling elite had financially supported scholars, religious preachers, priests, *pandits* and *maulvis* and men of arts and literature. With the coming of the British and the ruin of the traditional landed and bureaucratic elite, this patronage came to an end, and all those who had depended on it were impoverished.

Another major cause of the rebellions was the very foreign character of British rule. Like any other people, the Indian people too felt humiliated at being under a foreigner's heel. This feeling of hurt pride inspired efforts to expel the foreigner from their lands.

The civil rebellions began as British rule was established in Bengal and Bihar, and they occurred in area after area as it was incorporated into colonial rule. There was hardly a year without armed opposition or a decade without a major armed rebellion in one part of the country or the other. From 1763 to 1856, there were more than forty major rebellions apart from hundreds of minor ones.

Displaced peasants and demobilized soldiers of Bengal led by religious monks and dispossessed *zamindars* were the first to rise up in the Sanyasi rebellion, made famous by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in his novel *Anand Math*, that lasted from 1763 to 1800. It was followed by the Chuar uprising which covered five districts of Bengal and Bihar from 1766 to 1772 and then, again, from 1795 to 1816. Other major rebellions in Eastern India were those of Rangpur and Dinajpur, 1783; Bishnupur and Birbhum, 1799; Orissa *zamindars*, 1804-17; and Sambalpur, 1827-40.

In South India, the Raja of Vizianagram revolted in 1794, the *poligars* of Tamil Nadu during the 1790's, of Malabar and coastal Andhra during the first decade of the 19th century, of Parlekamedi during 1813-14. Dewan Velu Thampi of Travancore organized a heroic revolt in 1805. The Mysore peasants too revolted in 1830-31. There were major uprisings in Vizagapatnam from 1830-34, Ganjam in 1835 and Kurnool in 1846-47.

In Western India, the chiefs of Saurashtra rebelled repeatedly from 1816 to 1832. The Kolis of Gujarat did the same during 1824-28, 1839

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and 1849, Maharashtra was in a perpetual state of revolt after the final defeat of the Peshwa. Prominent were the Bhil uprisings, 1818-31; the Kittur uprising, led by Chinnava, 1824; the Satara uprising, 1841; and the revolt of the Gadkaris, 1844.

Northern India was no less turbulent. The present states of Western U.P. and Haryana rose up in arms in 1824. Other major rebellions were those of Bilaspur, 1805; the *taluqdars* of Aligarh, 1814-17; the Bundelas of Jabalpur, 1842; and Khandesh, 1852. The second Punjab War in 1848-49 was also in the nature of a popular revolt by the people and the army.

These almost continuous rebellions were massive in their totality, but were wholly local in their spread and isolated from each other. They were the result of local causes and grievances, and were also localized in their effects. They often bore the same character not because they represented national or common efforts but because they represented common conditions though separated in time and space.

Socially, economically and politically, the semi-feudal leaders of these rebellions were backward looking and traditional in outlook. They still lived in the old world, blissfully unaware and oblivious of the modern world which had knocked down the defences of their society. Their resistance represented no societal alternative. It was centuries-old in form and ideological and cultural content. Its basic objective was to restore earlier forms of rule and social relations. Such backward looking and scattered, sporadic and disunited uprisings were incapable of fending off or overthrowing foreign rule. The British succeeded in pacifying the rebel areas one by one. They also gave concessions to the less fiery rebel chiefs and *zamindars* in the form of reinstatement, the restoration of their estates and reduction in revenue assessments so long as they agreed to live peacefully under alien authority. The more recalcitrant ones were physically wiped out. Velu Thampi was, for example, publicly hanged even after he was dead.

The suppression of the civil rebellions was a major reason why the Revolt of 1857 did not spread to South India and most of Eastern and Western India. The historical significance of these civil uprisings lies in that they established strong and valuable local traditions of resistance to British rule. The Indian people were to draw inspiration from these traditions in the later nationalist struggle for freedom.

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The tribal people, spread over a large part of India, organized hundreds of militant outbreaks and insurrections during the 19th century. These uprisings were marked by immense courage and sacrifice on their part and brutal suppression and veritable butchery on the part of the rulers. The tribals had cause to be upset for a variety of reasons. The colonial administration ended their relative isolation and brought them fully within the ambit of colonialism. It recognized the tribal chiefs as *zamindars* and introduced a new system of land revenue and taxation of tribal products. It encouraged the influx of Christian missionaries into the tribal areas. Above all, it introduced a large number of moneylenders, traders and revenue farmers as middlemen among the tribals. These middlemen were the chief instruments for bringing the tribal people within the vortex of the colonial economy and exploitation. The middlemen were outsiders who increasingly took possession of tribal lands and ensnared the tribals in a web of debt. In time, the tribal people increasingly lost their lands and were reduced to the position of agricultural labourers, share-croppers and rack-rented tenants on the land they had earlier brought under cultivation and held on a communal basis.

Colonialism also transformed their relationship with the forest. They had depended on the forest for food, fuel and cattle-feed. They practised shifting cultivation (*jhum*, *podu*, etc.), taking recourse to fresh forest lands when their existing lands showed signs of exhaustion. The colonial government changed all this. It usurped the forest lands and placed restrictions on access to forest products, forest lands and village common lands. It refused to let cultivation shift to new areas.

Oppression and extortion by policemen and other petty officials further aggravated distress among the tribals. The revenue farmers and government agents also intensified and expanded the system of *begar* — making the tribals perform unpaid labour.

All this differed in intensity from region to region, but the complete disruption of the old agrarian order of the tribal communities provided the common factor for all the tribal uprisings. These uprisings were broad-based, involving thousands of tribals, often the entire population of a region.

The colonial intrusion and the triumvirate of trader, moneylender and revenue farmer in sum disrupted the tribal identity to a lesser or greater degree. In fact, ethnic ties were a basic feature of the tribal rebellions. The rebels saw themselves not as a discreet class but as having a tribal identity.

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At this level the solidarity shown was of a very high order. Fellow tribals were never attacked unless they had collaborated with the enemy.

At the same time, not all outsiders were attacked as enemies. Often there was no violence against the non-tribal poor, who worked in tribal villages in supportive economic roles, or who had social relations with the tribals, such as *telis*, *gwalas*, *lohars*, carpenters, potters, weavers, washermen, barbers, drummers, and bonded labourers and domestic servants of the outsiders. They were not only spared, but were seen as allies. In many cases, the rural poor formed a part of the rebellious tribal bands.

The rebellions normally began at the point where the tribals felt so oppressed that they felt they had no alternative but to fight. This often took the form of spontaneous attacks on outsiders, looting their property and expelling them from their villages. This led to clashes with the colonial authorities. When this happened, the tribals began to move towards armed resistance and elementary organization.

Often, religious and charismatic leaders — messiahs — emerged at this stage and promised divine intervention and an end to their suffering at the hands of the outsiders, and asked their fellow tribals to rise and rebel against foreign authority. Most of these leaders claimed to derive their authority from God. They also often claimed that they possessed magical powers, for example, the power to make the enemies' bullets ineffective. Filled with hope and confidence, the tribal masses tended to follow these leaders to the very end.

The warfare between the tribal rebels and the British armed forces was totally unequal. On one side were drilled regiments armed with the latest weapons and on the other were men and women fighting in roving bands armed with primitive weapons such as stones, axes, spears and bows and arrows, believing in the magical powers of their commanders. The tribals died in lakhs in this unequal warfare.

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Among the numerous tribal revolts, the Santhal *hool* or uprising was the most massive. The Santhals, who live in the area between Bhagalpur and Rajmahal, known as Daman-i-koh, rose in revolt; made a determined attempt to expel the outsiders — the *dikus* — and proclaimed the complete 'annihilation' of the alien regime. The social conditions which drove them

to insurrection were described by a contemporary in the *Calcutta Review* as follows: 'Zamindars, the police, the revenue and court alas have exercised a combined system of extortions, oppressive exactions, forcible dispossession of property, abuse and personal violence and a variety of petty tyrannies upon the timid and yielding Santhals. Usurious interest on loans of money ranging from 50 to 500 per cent; false measures at the *haut* and the market; wilful and uncharitable trespass by the rich by means of their untethered cattle, *tattoos*, ponies and even elephants, on the growing crops of the poorer race; and such like illegalities have been prevalent.'¹

The Santhals considered the *dikus* and government servants morally corrupt being given to beggary, stealing, lying and drunkenness.

By 1854, the tribal heads, the *majhis* and *parganites*, had begun to meet and discuss the possibility of revolting. Stray cases of the robbing of *zamindars* and moneylenders began to occur. The tribal leaders called an assembly of nearly 6000 Santhals, representing 400 villages, at Bhaganidihi on 30 June 1855. It was decided to raise the banner of revolt, get rid of the outsiders and their colonial masters once and for all, the usher in *Satyug*, 'The Reign of Truth,' and 'True Justice.'

The Santhals believed that their actions had the blessings of God. Sido and Kanhu, the principal rebel leaders, claimed that Thakur (God) had communicated with them and told them to take up arms and fight for independence. Sido told the authorities in a proclamation: 'The Thacoor has ordered me saying that the country is not *Sahibs* . . . The Thacoor himself will fight. Therefore, you *Sahibs* and Soldiers (will) fight the Thacoor himself.'²

The leaders mobilized the Santhal men and women by organizing huge processions through the villages accompanied by drummers and other musicians. The leaders rode at the head on horses and elephants and in *palkis*. Soon nearly 60,000 Santhals had been mobilized. Forming bands of 1,500 to 2,000, but rallying in many thousands at the call of drums on particular occasions, they attacked the *mahajans* and *zamindars* and their houses, police stations, railway construction sites, the *dak* (post) carriers — in fact all the symbols of *diku* exploitation and colonial power.

The Santhal insurrection was helped by a large number of non-tribal and poor *dikus*. *Gwalas* (milkmen) and others helped the rebels with provisions and services; *lohars* (blacksmiths) accompanied the rebel bands, keeping their weapons in good shape.

Once the Government realized the scale of the rebellion, it organized

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a major military campaign against the rebels. It mobilized tens of regiments under the command of a major-general, declared Martial Law in the affected areas and offered rewards of upto Rs. 10,000 for the capture of various leaders.

The rebellion was crushed ruthlessly. More than 15,000 Santhals were killed while tens of villages were destroyed. Sido was betrayed and captured and killed in August 1855 while Kanhu was arrested by accident at the tail-end of the rebellion in February 1866. And 'the Rajmahal Hills were drenched with the blood of the fighting Santhal peasantry.' One typical instance of the heroism of Santhal rebels has been narrated by L.S.S. O'Malley: 'They showed the most reckless courage, never knowing when they were beaten and refusing to surrender. On one occasion, forty-five Santhals took refuge in a mud hut which they held against the Sepoys. Volley after volley was fired into it . . . Each time the Santhals replied with a discharge of arrows. At last, when their fire ceased, the Sepoys entered the hut and found only one old man was left alive. A Sepoy called on him to surrender, whereupon the old man rushed upon him and cut him down with his battle axe.'

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I shall describe briefly three other major tribal rebellions. The *Kols* of Chhotanagpur rebelled from 1820 to 1837. Thousands of them were massacred before British authority could be re-imposed. The hill tribesmen of Rampa in coastal Andhra revolted in March 1879 against the depredations of the government-supported *mansabdar* and the new restrictive forest regulations. The authorities had to mobilize regiments of infantry, a squadron of cavalry and two companies of sappers and miners before the rebels, numbering several thousands, could be defeated by the end of 1880.

The rebellion (*ulgulan*) of the Munda tribesmen, led by Birsa Munda, occurred during 1899-1900. For over thirty years the Munda *sardars* had been struggling against the destruction of their system of common land holdings by the intrusion of *jagirdars*, *thikadars* (revenue farmers) and merchant moneylenders.

Birsa, born in a poor share-cropper household in 1874, had a vision of God in 1895. He declared himself to be a divine messenger, possessing miraculous healing powers. Thousands gathered around him seeing in him a Messiah with a new religious message. Under the influence of the

sardars, the religious movement soon acquired an agrarian and political content. Birsa began to move from village to village, organizing rallies and mobilizing his followers on religious and political grounds. On Christmas Eve, 1899, Birsa proclaimed a rebellion to establish Munda rule in the land and encouraged 'the killing of *thikadars* and *jagirdars* and Rajas and *Hakims* (rulers) and Christians.' *Satyug* would be established in place of the present-day *Kalyug*. He declared that 'there was going to be a fight with the *dikus*, the ground would be as red as the red flag with their blood.'⁴ The non-tribal poor were not to be attacked.

To bring about liberation, Birsa gathered a force of 6,000 Mundas armed with swords, spears, battle-axes, and bows and arrows. He was, however, captured in the beginning of February 1900 and he died in jail in June. The rebellion had failed. But Birsa entered the realms of legend.

3 *Peasant Movements and Uprisings after 1857*

It is worth taking a look at the effects of colonial exploitation of the Indian peasants. Colonial economic policies, the new land revenue system, the colonial administrative and judicial systems, and the ruin of handicrafts leading to the over-crowding of land, transformed the agrarian structure and impoverished the peasantry. In the vast *zamindari* areas, the peasants were left to the tender mercies of the *zamindars* who rack-rented them and compelled them to pay the illegal dues and perform *begar*. In *Ryotwari* areas, the Government itself levied heavy land revenue. This forced the peasants to borrow money from the moneylenders. Gradually, over large areas, the actual cultivators were reduced to the status of tenants-at-will, share-croppers and landless labourers, while their lands, crops and cattle passed into the hands of landlords, trader-moneylenders and rich peasants.

When the peasants could take it no longer, they resisted against the oppression and exploitation; and, they found whether their target was the indigenous exploiter or the colonial administration, that their real enemy, after the barriers were down, was the colonial state.

One form of elemental protest, especially when individuals and small groups found that collective action was not possible though their social condition was becoming intolerable, was to take to crime. Many dispossessed peasants took to robbery, dacoity and what has been called social banditry, preferring these to starvation and social degradation.

The most militant and widespread of the peasant movements was the

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Indigo Revolt of 1859-60. The indigo planters, nearly all Europeans, compelled the tenants to grow indigo which they processed in factories set up in rural (*mofussil*) areas. From the beginning, indigo was grown under an extremely oppressive system which involved great loss to the cultivators. The planters forced the peasants to take a meager amount as advance and enter into fraudulent contracts. The price paid for the indigo plants was far below the market price. The comment of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, J.B. Grant, was that 'the root of the whole question is the struggle to make the *raiya*s grow indigo plant, without paying them the price of it.' The peasant was forced to grow indigo on the best land he had whether or not he wanted to devote his land and labour to more paying crops like rice. At the time of delivery, he was cheated even of the due low price. He also had to pay regular bribes to the planter's officials. He was forced to accept an advance. Often he was not in a position to repay it, but even if he could he was not allowed to do so. The advance was used by the planters to compel him to go on cultivating indigo.

Since the enforcement of forced and fraudulent contracts through the courts was a difficult and prolonged process, the planters resorted to a reign of terror to coerce the peasants. Kidnapping, illegal confinement in factory godowns, flogging, attacks on women and children, carrying off cattle, looting, burning and demolition of houses and destruction of crops and fruit trees were some of the methods used by the planters. They hired or maintained bands of *lathiyals* (armed retainers) for the purpose.

In practice, the planters were also above the law. With a few exceptions, the magistrates, mostly European, favoured the planters with whom they dined and hunted regularly. Those few who tried to be fair were soon transferred. Twenty-nine planters and a solitary Indian *zamindar* were appointed as Honorary Magistrates in 1857, which gave birth to the popular saying '*je rakhak se bhakak*' (Our protector is also our devourer).

The discontent of indigo growers in Bengal boiled over in the autumn of 1859 when their case seemed to get Government support. Misreading an official letter and exceeding his authority, Hem Chandra Kar, Deputy Magistrate of Kalaroa, published on 17 August a proclamation to policemen that 'in case of disputes relating to Indigo *Ryots*, they (*ryots*) shall retain possession of their own lands, and shall sow on them what crops they please, and the Police will be careful that no Indigo Planter nor anyone

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else be able to interface in the matter.²²

The news of Kar's proclamation spread all over Bengal, and peasants felt that the time for overthrowing the hated system had come. Initially, the peasants made an attempt to get redressal through peaceful means. They sent numerous petitions to the authorities and organized peaceful demonstrations. Their anger exploded in September 1859 when they asserted their right not to grow indigo under duress and resisted the physical pressure of the planters and their *lathiyals* backed by the police and the courts.

The beginning was made by the *ryots* of Govindpur village in Nadia district when, under the leadership of Digambar Biswas and Bishnu Biswas, ex-employees of a planter, they gave up indigo cultivation. And when, on 13 September, the planter sent a band of 100 *lathiyals* to attack their village, they organized a counter force armed with lathis and spears and fought back.

The peasant disturbances and indigo strikes spread rapidly to other areas. The peasants refused to take advances and enter into contracts, pledged not to sow indigo, and defended themselves from the planters' attacks with whatever weapons came to hand — spears, slings, lathis, bows and arrows, bricks, bhel-fruit, and earthen-pots (thrown by women).

The indigo strikes and disturbances flared up again in the spring of 1860 and encompassed all the indigo districts of Bengal. Factory after factory was attacked by hundreds of peasants and village after village bravely defended itself. In many cases, the efforts of the police to intervene and arrest peasant leaders were met with an attack on policemen and police posts.

The planters then attacked with another weapon, their *zamindari* powers. They threatened the rebellious *ryots* with eviction or enhancement of rent. The *ryots* replied by going on a rent strike. They refused to pay the enhanced rents; and they physically resisted attempts to evict them. They also gradually learnt to use the legal machinery to enforce their rights. They joined together and raised funds to fight court cases filed against them, and they initiated legal action on their own against the planters. They also used the weapon of social boycott to force a planter's servants to leave him.

Ultimately, the planters could not withstand the united resistance of the *ryots*, and they gradually began to close their factories. The cultivation of indigo was virtually wiped out from the districts of Bengal by the end

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of 1860.

A major reason for the success of the Indigo Revolt was the tremendous initiative, cooperation, organization and discipline of the *ryots*. Another was the complete unity among Hindu and Muslim peasants. Leadership for the movement was provided by the more well-off *ryots* and in some cases by petty *zamindars*, moneylenders and ex-employees of the planters.

A significant feature of the Indigo Revolt was the role of the intelligentsia of Bengal which organized a powerful campaign in support of the rebellious peasantry. It carried on newspaper campaigns, organized mass meetings, prepared memoranda on peasants' grievances and supported them in their legal battles. Outstanding in this respect was the role of Harish Chandra Mukherji, editor of the *Hindoo Patriot*. He published regular reports from his correspondents in the rural areas on planters' oppression, officials' partisanship and peasant resistance. He himself wrote with passion, anger and deep knowledge of the problem which he raised to a high political plane. Revealing an insight into the historical and political significance of the Indigo Revolt, he wrote in May 1860: 'Bengal might well be proud of its peasantry . . . Wanting power, wealth, political knowledge and even leadership, the peasantry of Bengal have brought about a revolution inferior in magnitude and importance to none that has happened in the social history of any other country . . . With the Government against them, the law against them, the tribunals against them, the Press against them, they have achieved a success of which the benefits will reach all orders and the most distant generations of our countrymen.'

Din Bandhu Mitra's play, *Neel Darpan*, was to gain great fame for vividly portraying the oppression by the planters.

The intelligentsia's role in the Indigo Revolt was to have an abiding impact on the emerging nationalist intellectuals. In their very political childhood they had given support to a popular peasant movement against the foreign planters. This was to establish a tradition with long term implications for the national movement.

Missionaries were another group which extended active support to the indigo *ryots* in their struggle.

The Government's response to the Revolt was rather restrained and not as harsh as in the case of civil rebellions and tribal uprisings. It had just undergone the harrowing experience of the Santhal uprising and the Revolt of 1857. It was also able to see, in time, the changed temper of the

1 India's Struggle for Independence

peasantry and was influenced by the support extended to the Revolt by the intelligentsia and the missionaries. It appointed a commission to inquire into the problem of indigo cultivation. Evidence brought before the Indigo Commission and its final report exposed the coercion and corruption underlying the entire system of indigo cultivation. The result was the mitigation of the worst abuses of the system. The Government issued a notification in November 1860 that *ryots* could not be compelled to sow indigo and that it would ensure that all disputes were settled by legal means. But the planters were already closing down the factories — they felt that they could not make their enterprises pay without the use of force and fraud.

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Large parts of East Bengal were engulfed by agrarian unrest during the 1870s and early 1880s. The unrest was caused by the efforts of the *zamindars* to enhance rent beyond legal limits and to prevent the tenants from acquiring occupancy rights under Act X of 1859. This they tried to achieve through illegal coercive methods such as forced eviction and seizure of crops and cattle as well as by dragging the tenants into costly litigation in the courts.

The peasants were no longer in a mood to tolerate such oppression. In May 1873, an agrarian league or combination was formed in Yusufshahi Parganah in Pabna district to resist the demands of the *zamindars*. The league organized mass meetings of peasants. Large crowds of peasants would gather and march through villages frightening the *zamindars* and appealing to other peasants to join them. The league organized a rent-strike — the *ryots* were to refuse to pay the enhanced rents — and challenged the *zamindars* in the courts. Funds were raised from the *ryots* to meet the costs. The struggle gradually spread throughout Pabna and then to the other districts of East Bengal. Everywhere agrarian leagues were organized, rents were withheld and *zamindars* fought in the courts. The main form of struggle was that of legal resistance. There was very little violence — it only occurred when the *zamindars* tried to compel the *ryots* to submit to their terms by force. There were only a few cases of looting of the houses of the *zamindars*. A few attacks on police stations took place and the peasants also resisted attempts to execute court decrees. But such cases were rather rare. Hardly any *zamindar* or *zamindar's* agent

was killed or seriously injured. In the course of the movement, the *ryots* developed a strong awareness of the law and their legal rights and the ability to combine and form associations for peaceful agitation.

Though peasant discontent smouldered till 1885, many of the disputes were settled partially under official pressure and persuasion and partially out of the *zamindar's* fear that the united peasantry would drag them into prolonged and costly litigation. Many peasants were able to acquire occupancy rights and resist enhanced rents.

The Government rose to the defence of the *zamindars* wherever violence took place. Peasants were then arrested on a large scale. But it assumed a position of neutrality as far as legal battles or peaceful agitations were concerned. The Government also promised to undertake legislation to protect the tenants from the worst aspects of *zamindari* oppression, a promise it fulfilled however imperfectly in 1885 when the Bengal Tenancy Act was passed.

What persuaded the *zamindars* and the colonial regime to reconcile themselves to the movement was the fact that its aims were limited to the redressal of the immediate grievances of the peasants and the enforcement of the existing legal rights and norms. It was not aimed at the *zamindari* system. It also did not have at any stage an anti-colonial political edge. The agrarian leagues kept within the bounds of law, used the legal machinery to fight the *zamindars*, and raised no anti-British demands. The leaders often argued that they were against *zamindars* and not the British. In fact, the leaders raised the slogan that the peasants want 'to be the *ryots* of Her Majesty the Queen and of Her only.' For this reason, official action was based on the enforcement of the Indian Penal Code and it did not take the form of armed repression as in the case of the Santhal and Munda uprisings.

Once again the Bengal peasants showed complete Hindu-Muslim solidarity, even though the majority of the *ryots* were Muslim and the majority of *zamindars* Hindu. There was also no effort to create peasant solidarity on the grounds of religion or caste.

In this case, too, a number of young Indian intellectuals supported the peasants' cause. These included Bankim Chandra Chatterjea and R.C. Dutt. Later, in the early 1880s, during the discussion of the Bengal Tenancy Bill, the Indian Association, led by Surendranath Banerjea, Anand Mohan Bose and Dwarkanath Ganguli, campaigned for the rights of tenants, helped form *ryot* unions, and organized huge meetings of upto 20,000 peasants in the districts in support of the Rent Bill. The Indian

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Association and many of the nationalist newspapers went further than the Bill. They asked for permanent fixation of the tenant's rent. They warned that since the Bill would confer occupancy rights even on non-cultivators, it would lead to the growth of middlemen — the *jotedars* — who would be as oppressive as the *zamindars* so far as the actual cultivators were concerned. They, therefore, demanded that the right of occupancy should go with actual cultivation of the soil, that is, in most cases to the under-*ryots* and the tenants-at-will.

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A major agrarian outbreak occurred in the Poona and Ahmednagar districts of Maharashtra in 1875. Here, as part of the Ryotwari system, land revenue was settled directly with the peasant who was also recognized as the owner of his land. Like the peasants in other Ryotwari areas, the Deccan peasant also found it difficult to pay land revenue without getting into the clutches of the moneylender and increasingly losing his land. This led to growing tension between the peasants and the moneylenders most of whom were outsiders — Marwaris or Gujaratis.

Three other developments occurred at this time. During the early 1860s, the American Civil War had led to a rise in cotton exports which had pushed up prices. The end of the Civil War in 1864 brought about an acute depression in cotton exports and a crash in prices. The ground slipped from under the peasants' feet. Simultaneously, in 1867, the Government raised land revenue by nearly 50 per cent. The situation was worsened by a succession of bad harvests.

To pay the land revenue under these conditions, the peasants had to go to the moneylender who took the opportunity to further tighten his grip on the peasant and his land. The peasant began to turn against the perceived cause of his misery, the moneylender. Only a spark was needed to kindle the fire.

A spontaneous protest movement began in December 1874 in Kardah village in Sirur *taluq*. When the peasants of the village failed to convince the local moneylender, Kalooram, that he should not act on a court decree and pull down a peasant's house, they organized a complete social boycott of the 'outsider' moneylenders to compel them to accept their demands in a peaceful manner. They refused to buy from their shops. No peasant would cultivate their fields. The *bullotedars* (village servants) — barbers,

Peasant Movements and Uprisings after 1857

washermen, carpenters, ironsmiths, shoemakers and others would not serve them. No domestic servant would work in their houses and when the socially isolated moneylenders decided to run away to the *taluk* headquarters, nobody would agree to drive their carts. The peasants also imposed social sanctions against those peasants and *bullotedars* who would not join the boycott of moneylenders. This social boycott spread rapidly to the villages of Poona, Ahmednagar, Sholapur and Satara districts.

The social boycott was soon transformed into agrarian riots when it did not prove very effective. On 12 May, peasants gathered in Supa, in Bhimthari *taluk*, on the bazar day and began a systematic attack on the moneylenders' houses and shops. They seized and publicly burnt debt bonds and deeds — signed under pressure, in ignorance, or through fraud — decrees, and other documents dealing with their debts. Within days the disturbances spread to other villages of the Poona and Ahmednagar districts.

There was very little violence in this settling of accounts. Once the moneylenders' instruments of oppression — debt bonds — were surrendered, no need for further violence was felt. In most places, the 'riots' were demonstrations of popular feeling and of the peasants' newly acquired unity and strength. Though moneylenders' houses and shops were looted and burnt in Supa, this did not occur in other places.

The Government acted with speed and soon succeeded in repressing the movement. The active phase of the movement lasted about three weeks, though stray incidents occurred for another month or two. As in the case of the Pabna Revolt, the Deccan disturbances had very limited objectives. There was once again an absence of anti-colonial consciousness. It was, therefore, possible for the colonial regime to extend them a certain protection against the moneylenders through the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act of 1879.

Once again, the modern nationalist intelligentsia of Maharashtra supported the peasants' cause. Already, in 1873-74, the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, led by Justice Ranade, had organized a successful campaign among the peasants, as well as at Poona and Bombay, against the land revenue settlement of 1867. Under its impact, a large number of peasants had refused to pay the enhanced revenue. This agitation had generated a mentality of resistance among the peasants which contributed to the rise of peasant protest in 1875. The Sabha as well as many of the nationalist

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newspapers also supported the D.A.R. Bill.

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Peasant resistance also developed in other parts of the country. Mappila outbreaks were endemic in Malabar. Vasudev Balwant Phadke, an educated clerk, raised a Ramosi peasant force of about 50 in Maharashtra during 1879, and organized social banditry on a significant scale. The Kuka Revolt in Punjab was led by Baba Ram Singh and had elements of a messianic movement. It was crushed when 49 of the rebels were blown up by a cannon in 1872. High land revenue assessment led to a series of peasant riots in the plains of Assam during 1893-94. Scores were killed in brutal firings and bayonet charges.

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There was a certain shift in the nature of peasant movements after 1857. Princes, chiefs and landlords having been crushed or co-opted, peasants emerged as the main force in agrarian movements. They now fought directly for their own demands, centered almost wholly on economic issues, and against their immediate enemies, foreign planters and indigenous *zamindars* and moneylenders. Their struggles were directed towards specific and limited objectives and redressal of particular grievances. They did not make colonialism their target. Nor was their objective the ending of the system of their subordination and exploitation. They did not aim at 'turning the world upside down.'

The territorial reach of these movements was also limited. They were confined to particular localities with no mutual communication or linkages. They also lacked continuity of struggle or long-term organization. Once the specific objectives of a movement were achieved, its organization, as also peasant solidarity built around it, dissolved and disappeared. Thus, the Indigo strike, the Pabna agrarian leagues and the social-boycott movement of the Deccan *ryots* left behind no successors. Consequently, at no stage did these movements threaten British supremacy or even undermine it.

Peasant protest after 1857 often represented an instinctive and spontaneous response of the peasantry to its social condition. It was the result of excessive and unbearable oppression, undue and unusual deprivation and exploitation, and a threat to the peasant's existing,

established position. The peasant often rebelled only when he felt that it was not possible to carry on in the existing manner.

He was also moved by strong notions of legitimacy, of what was justifiable and what was not. That is why he did not fight for land ownership or against landlordism but against eviction and undue enhancement of rent. He did not object to paying interest on the sums he had borrowed; he hit back against fraud and chicanery by the moneylender and when the latter went against tradition in depriving him of his land. He did not deny the state's right to collect a tax on land but objected when the level of taxation overstepped all traditional bounds. He did not object to the foreign planter becoming his *zamindar* but resisted the planter when he took away his freedom to decide what crops to grow and refused to pay him a proper price for his crop.

The peasant also developed a strong awareness of his legal rights and asserted them in and outside the courts. And if an effort was made to deprive him of his legal rights by extra-legal means or by manipulation of the law and law courts, he countered with extra-legal means of his own. Quite often, he believed that the legally-constituted authority approved his actions or at least supported his claims and cause. In all the three movements discussed here, he acted in the name of this authority, the *sarkar*.

In these movements, the Indian peasants showed great courage and a spirit of sacrifice, remarkable organizational abilities, and a solidarity that cut across religious and caste lines. They were also able to wring considerable concessions from the colonial state. The latter, too, not being directly challenged, was willing to compromise and mitigate the harshness of the agrarian system though within the broad limits of the colonial economic and political structure. In this respect, the colonial regime's treatment of the post-1857 peasant rebels was qualitatively different from its treatment of the participants in the civil rebellions, the Revolt of 1857 and the tribal uprisings which directly challenged colonial political power.

A major weakness of the 19th century peasant movements was the lack of an adequate understanding of colonialism — of colonial economic structure and the colonial state — and of the social framework of the movements themselves. Nor did the 19th century peasants possess a new ideology and a new social, economic and political programme based on an analysis of the newly constituted colonial society. Their struggles, however militant, occurred within the framework of the old societal order.

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They lacked a positive conception of an alternative society — a conception which would unite the people in a common struggle on a wide regional and all-India plane and help develop long-term political movements. An all-India leadership capable of evolving a strategy of struggle that would unify and mobilize peasants and other sections of society for nation-wide political activity could be formed only on the basis of such a new conception, such a fresh vision of society. In the absence of such a new ideology, programme, leadership and strategy of struggle, it was not too difficult for the colonial state, on the one hand, to reach a conciliation and calm down the rebellious peasants by the grant of some concessions and, on the other hand, to suppress them with the full use of its force. This weakness was, of course, not a blemish on the character of the peasantry which was perhaps incapable of grasping on its own the new and complex phenomenon of colonialism. That needed the efforts of a modern intelligentsia which was itself just coming into existence.

Most of these weaknesses were overcome in the 20th century when peasant discontent was merged with the general anti-imperialist discontent, and their political activity became a part of the wider anti-imperialist movement. And, of course, the peasants' participation in the larger national movement not only strengthened the fight against the foreigner, it also, simultaneously, enabled them to organize powerful struggles around their class demands and to create modern peasant organizations.

Introduction

Modern contexts of religion

Linda Woodhead

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Modernity

Since the subject of this book is religions in the modern world, it is useful to begin by clarifying what we mean by 'modern world' and 'modernity'.

'Modernity' is an academic term used to refer to a distinctive era which breaks with what comes before, or 'pre-modernity'. Theories of modernity seek to isolate the distinctive characteristics of modern societies. Although different theories often single out different aspects of modernity, they tend to agree that Western, industrial societies typify what is meant by modernity, and that although modernization proceeds at a different pace in different parts of the world, when it occurs it follows the Western model. They also assume that modernization involves the loss of 'traditional' features of pre-modern societies; some theorists celebrate this change as progress, others see it as involving loss as well as gain. It is also common for theories of modernity to date the modern era from the time when science, technology and industry became powerful forces in the West, at some point in the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries.

Taken together, the chapters in this book present a somewhat different picture of modernity. What they suggest is that the modern world comes in different guises and times in different parts of the world. Once one begins to look at religious change in a global perspective, easy generalizations about modernity begin to fail, and the assumption that all cultures and societies inevitably progress through uniform stages of development from the pre-modern to the modern, thus repeating the experience of the West, becomes less plausible.

In this book we allow each chapter to determine what counts as modernity for the particular tradition, region or form of religion with which it is concerned. For example, the chapter on Christianity considers the rise of the modern nation state to be decisive for Christian churches, and so dates modernity from around the time of the French Revolution in 1789. By contrast, the chapter on Chinese religions speaks of a 'long' modernity in China which has had a thousand years of slow emergence and is characterized by the growth of commerce, monetary economy, contractual and share-holding agreements, long-distance trade and banking, cities of manufacture and commerce and luxurious consumption. This is contrasted with a more recent political or 'republican' modernity, characterized by the institution of a nation state and mass politics, both of which have had a much more dramatic effect on religious practices. And, as a final example, the chapter on Sikhism distinguishes between a modernity which is in effect an imposition of colonialism, initiated by the British conquest of the Punjab in the 1840s, and a later postcolonial phase which begins with Indian independence in 1947 and in which many aspects of the older modernity of the colonial period begin to be questioned.

and discarded in favour of new forms of traditionalized modernity or modernized tradition.

This global perspective on modernization serves as a helpful reminder that:

1. the West (Europe and then America) only really became economically, technologically and possibly culturally dominant on the world stage after 1800, and before that time other civilizations including Chinese and Islamic ones were often more advanced and powerful culturally as well as politically;
2. modernization is not exclusive to the West, but can and has taken place in non-Western cultures, without Western stimulus;
3. modernization may be a process internal to a particular society, or may be imposed from outside, most notably by colonial intervention (or some combination of these two);
4. the Western experience of modernity and modernization is not a sole definitive model of 'evolution' and 'development' which all cultures and societies are destined to follow;
5. there are several varieties of modernization worldwide, and many different ways of being modern.

Instead of giving a single definition of modernity which implies that it is identical with the social and cultural changes experienced by Western societies in the last two hundred years or so, it is therefore more helpful to think of modernity in terms of a number of different processes, dynamics and societal characteristics which may operate together or in some combination, in different parts of the world and at different times. They may be characterized as a series of profound changes, or even revolutions, which operate at political, economic, social and cultural levels. On the basis of the evidence presented in the chapters which follow, five appear to be particularly significant as contexts for religion and spirituality worldwide.

1. The nation state

There are few religions which have not been profoundly affected by the rise of the nation state. Nations themselves are not new (ancient Israel was a nation, for example), but what is new is the rise of the secular nation state with its extensive apparatus of control over a huge range of aspects of social and political life. What is also new is the way in which the nation state has become the almost universal unit of territorial control worldwide. Increasingly, such states are constitutional, that is to say they exist to serve not those who rule but those who are ruled, and their power is checked in order to protect the freedom of their citizens. They are secular in the sense that they seek to keep religion out of politics.

Only in the course of the twentieth century have truly democratic states developed, in which government is by representatives elected by all adult citizens. Many chapters in this volume remind us that the twentieth century has also witnessed the rise of the

one-party state, in which a single party is established to govern (most communist and fascist regimes, for example). The 'triumph' of democracy is very recent.

As the chapters which follow demonstrate, interactions between religions and nation states take many forms. Some states have been profoundly and violently hostile to religion: this is an extreme version of the 'secular' state. It has been particularly true of communist states – see, for example, Chapter 3 on the way in which China tried to eliminate Buddhism in Tibet. On the other hand, other communist states and regimes have tried to win the support of religious leaders and devotees in the attempt to legitimize their rule, as Chapter 3 also shows in relation to Buddhism in Laos, Burma and Thailand. (In the long run, the co-option of religion to support the state may prove a mixed blessing for religion, since to become 'established' by this process is to lose independence and so become tainted and compromised in the eyes of many.)

At the opposite end of the spectrum, religions may be antagonistic to the policies of nation states. Thus the Catholic Church in Poland played a key role in the overthrow of communism in the late 1980s (see Chapter 8). A more extreme example is provided by religious groups which organize themselves as religious alternatives to the secular nation state. The success of religious nationalism since the latter part of the twentieth century has surprised many commentators who believed that religion no longer had political significance in an era of nation states. In 1979, for example, the increasingly secular state in Iran was overthrown by Islamic nationalists. Religious nationalism is also a potent force in many other Islamic countries, as well as in India (Hinduism), Israel (Orthodox Judaism) and the former Yugoslavia (Roman Catholic Christianity, Orthodox Christianity, Islam).

In Western Europe and the USA, by contrast, religion (preponderantly Christianity) has come to accept the legitimacy of the nation state and democracy, and even to construct itself as the defender of democracy. Yet even so, religion remains capable of political opposition, as the rise of the Civil Rights movement, and more recently the Christian Right, in the USA has demonstrated. Even where it tries to ignore the nation state and keep out of politics, religion is inevitably affected by the state's creeping control of many areas of social life. The process which is called 'social-differentiation' involves the state taking control not only of governmental matters, but of education, welfare and community organization, and thereby challenging religious activity in these areas. If the process is unchallenged, the secular state may succeed in turning religion into a cultural rather than a political force, which relates more to the sphere of private and domestic than public life. As many chapters show, however, religion in the modern world often resists such shrinkage, and the modern state is also capable of recognizing and supporting some of religion's public functions (for example, in education and social welfare).

2. Colonialism

Many chapters in this volume remind us that colonialism has been an extremely important dynamic of the modern world. Colonialism is a modern variant of imperialism. Empires have always existed, and imperialism refers to the general process whereby

states extend their power and dominion by force (usually military, but also political and economic). Colonialism normally refers to something more specific: the modern European expansion whereby foreign territories were settled and ruled over by whites who controlled populations of indigenous peoples by military, legal and political means. (Arguably, non-Western forms of modern imperialism, for example Japanese, might also fit into the category of colonialism.)

Western colonialism can be dated back to 1500 and the expansion of Spain and Portugal, but its decisive phase began three hundred years later when modernizing Western nations like Britain and France rapidly expanded their territories. In 1800 Western nations controlled 35 per cent of the world's land surface; by 1914 they were in charge of 84 per cent. By the 1970s, the vast majority of these empires had been dismantled and new independent nation states created in their wake.

The fates of religion and colonialism have been bound up together in several ways.

First, colonialism has been aided by religion, most notably by Christian missions. In some cases missions explicitly legitimated colonialism, but more often Christian missionary work supported the colonial enterprise implicitly, and often unintentionally, by acting as the agent of a cultural imperialism. At the same time, however, Christianity provided cultural resources – not least education – which would, in time, serve as resources which colonized peoples could deploy to win independence from foreign rule.

Second, colonialism affected the religion of the colonizers. Not only was Christianity affected by its contact with other cultures (see Chapter 8), but it has been a major factor in what is sometimes called 'the easternization of the West', the process whereby oriental religions have been absorbed into the cultural life of the West, often giving rise to new forms of religion and spirituality (see the chapters on Buddhism, Spirituality, Paganism and New Religious Movements).

Third, religions carried by colonialism have affected the people and places to which they spread. For example, Christianity has been appropriated by many colonized peoples, most notably in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. Interestingly, widespread Christianization has only taken place in the post-colonial era, but its spread has been dramatic. Christianity is now the largest of the world religions, and there are more Christians in the Southern than the Northern hemisphere.

Fourth, colonialism had a profound effect on indigenous religions within colonized territories. Amongst elites, it often generated reforming and revisionist activity as they sought to modernize their religious traditions to conform more closely to Western models. For example, new forms of 'reformed Hinduism' came into being as Westernized intellectuals in India sought to interpret Hinduism as a text-based, ethical, universal religion (see Chapter 2). In other cases, religions were revitalized as they became markers of colonized peoples' identity, and were mobilized to oppose colonialism (see Chapter 4 on Sikhism).

As we will see throughout this volume, there has also been a widespread backlash against the West and Western culture in the wake of colonialism, a backlash which is often expressed in religious terms.

3. Capitalism and 'rationalization'

The rise of the economic system we call capitalism has both subtle and profound implications for religion. Capitalism is a flexible, varied and rapidly changing form of economic organization which centres around:

1. a money-based economy with a developed banking system in which capital accumulation is possible, and in which a large proportion of capital is in the hands of institutions and corporations as well as private individuals;
2. the separation of ownership from control, and the development of complex managerial hierarchies;
3. the determination of individual and corporate activity by the overriding goal of profit;
4. a competitive and free market regulating supply and demand;
5. the division and specialization of labour (both between different trades, and within the manufacture of a single product);
6. the provision of labour by specialized and educated workers who are free agents, and the growth of a middle class;
7. the global expansion of markets, commerce and production;
8. the expansion of consumerism, such that consumption (buying things) becomes an important aspect of modern people's lives.

Although the capitalist form of economic organization was resisted in the modern period by communist alternatives, the collapse of communism since the late 1980s has left capitalism free to dominate the world order.

Capitalism is accompanied, and furthered, by what the sociologist Max Weber called 'rationalization'. Rationalization refers both to cultural and broader socio-economic developments. At the cultural level it is associated with the Enlightenment movement of the eighteenth century, and its successful championing of 'reason' and the scientific method. More broadly, rationalization refers to the process by which more and more aspects of social life are shaped by the aim of achieving their goals in the most effective and efficient way, irrespective of other values, whether humanitarian or environmental. This process involves the growth of bureaucratic arrangements. It is bound up with capitalism, because capitalism dictates the overriding goal of profit.

In many ways capitalism and rationalization seem to exclude religion. Impersonal, rational calculation in order to maximize profit overrides and excludes religious motives and ends. This does not necessarily mean that capitalism undermines religion, but it at least excludes it from huge swathes of life. Certainly, many forms of religion do not attempt to interfere with or influence the economic sphere, and many religious people work in capitalist enterprises, without feeling that this relates significantly to their religious commitment, whether positively or negatively.

However, many of the chapters in this volume suggest that there are also important two-way relations between religion and capitalism. Thus religion in the modern world may:

1. aid and support capitalism. Max Weber himself pointed out the compatibility between the work ethic of Protestant Christianity and the spirit of capitalism. Evangelical and Charismatic forms of Christianity continue to sustain personal values necessary for success in a capitalist economy (see Chapter 8 on Christianity). There are many forms of modern religion which make explicit promises to help their followers achieve greater prosperity;
2. serve as a way of coping with the severe inequalities, disruptions, stresses and strains which capitalism generates;
3. resist and oppose capitalism. Many forms of contemporary Islam, for example, are highly critical of capitalism, and seek to replace or temper it with more egalitarian forms of 'Islamic' economic and social arrangement. Capitalism is seen as Western and secular. Other forms of religion serve as spaces in which people may retreat from capitalism and try to forge other forms of economic arrangement – for example, some New Religious Movements and some forms of paganism involve communal living and the abandonment of monetary exchange. Monasticism provides another example.

Religion has equally varied relations with science and technology. Most religions have been more than happy to appropriate modern technology to serve their own ends – for example, disseminating their teachings via the mass media. As for science, some have claimed that its findings are entirely compatible with their own beliefs and teachings (Buddhism, for example, often stresses its empirical credentials), whilst others have gone even further by claiming that their scriptures anticipated scientific findings (some forms of neo-Vedic Hinduism, for example). Another observable phenomenon is that whereby modern men and women compartmentalize their lives, living part of them in conformity with rational principles (in the laboratory, workshop or workplace), and others in conformity to non-rational or supra-rational beliefs and practices (asking invisible deities for worldly success, placing faith in alternative forms of medicine). Still other forms of religion resist and oppose certain aspects of modern science very fiercely. Many conservative Muslims and Christians, for example, remain firmly opposed to a Darwinian account of evolution, because it contradicts their scriptures, and undermines their values and way of life.

4. Equality, human rights, and individualism

Modern societies are characteristically committed to a set of cultural values which affirm the dignity, inviolable value, and equality of all human persons. This commitment is institutionalized in different forms, including legal codes. It is closely related to more egalitarian social arrangements and increased affluence.

All of the world religions have played some part in supporting and defending these values, with their 'liberal' wings being particularly associated with such commitments. Religion continues to serve as the moral conscience of many societies. But many other

forms of religion – often within the same tradition – have also played a part in opposing these same values. In relation to the struggle for gender equality, for example, religion has served to support and motivate women to claim equality with men, as well as reinforcing the idea that there is a sacred, God-given difference between the sexes, which dictates that women should be under the control of men (see Chapter 19, Religion and gender). Likewise, religion can serve to break down barriers between ethnic groups in the name of a common humanity and the brotherhood of man, or to mark and defend the distinctiveness of a particular people.

This cluster of modern values involves a commitment to the value of the individual which may be corrosive not only of the solidarity often required by religions, but of their commitment to tradition – to an authority which is considered external to and higher than the individual self. The authority of the past, of a clerical elite, of established religious institutions and practices, and even of a transcendent deity may all be called into question by the modern tendency to authorize individual reason and experience. Religions may resist such a 'turn to the self' and 'detraditionalization', or they may positively accommodate it. Thus at one end of the spectrum modern societies encourage highly traditionalized religions, often called 'fundamentalisms', which assert the absolute and literal authority of their sacred scriptures. At the other end we see the emergence of new forms of religion which draw on traditional authorities only insofar as they resource the individual self. Some move so far away from tradition that they reject the title 'religion' altogether, and prefer the language of 'spirituality'. Interestingly, this volume suggests that such religions and spiritualities are not confined to the West (as in the New Age movement and some New Religious Movements), but are also found in many other parts of the world (see, for example, discussion in Chapter 5 of Chinese religions, and Chapter 6 of Japanese religions).

5. Secularism and secularization

Secularization, or the decline of religion, has often been seen as an inevitable consequence of modernization. Chapter 21, Secularization and secularism, explains the reasoning behind this view. A good deal of evidence from Europe, where churchgoing has declined for well over a century, supports this idea. However, as many chapters in this volume reveal, secularization in Europe has not been matched elsewhere. Not only is religion flourishing outside the West, but even in the richest, most powerful, and arguably most 'modern' of all Western societies – the United States of America – religion continues to have a central place both in private and public life. Such examples of religious vitality cast doubt on the assumption that the decline of traditional forms of Christianity in modern Europe necessarily points the way to the inevitable fate of religion in all modernizing societies.

As the following chapters illustrate, just as modernization takes different forms in different parts of the world, so religion plays significantly different roles in the process in different contexts. In some, modernization may be corrosive of religion, whereas in others religion may itself be a modernizing force. One of the key variables is the extent



FIGURE 0.1 Face veiling

Across Europe the Muslim veil has become a symbolic focus of conflicts about the place of religion in modern 'secular' Western societies. Courtesy Image Source.

to which 'secularism' gains support, and shapes the public life and institutions of a particular country. 'Secularism' refers to ideologies which seek to restrict, restrain or even destroy religion (see Chapter 21). Where there is active support for a 'secular state', for example, religion may be more likely to decline in influence than where religion retains close ties with politics and a political elite.

Late modernity

Most people today would accept the designation 'modern', and most of us would accept that we live in a 'modern world'. Yet twenty-first century societies are often significantly different from the earlier, industrial societies which were first called 'modern'. This has led some scholars to propose that we have actually left modernity behind, and now live in 'postmodernity'. Since most of the dynamics and trends characteristic of modernity are still clearly in evidence, however, it is more plausible to claim that societies may be entering a new phase of modernity, which may be referred to as 'advanced' or 'late' modernity. In addition to the dynamics listed above, late modern societies are characterized by processes of globalization and mediatization, and some can be described as entering a phase of 'postsecularism'.

1. Globalization

'Globalization' refers to increasingly important and extensive flows of people, capital, and culture across the world. Globalization is closely linked to advanced forms of capitalism, to new technologies including communication technologies, increased affluence, and new forms of political co-operation. Migrations of people, for economic and political reasons, have become increasingly significant since the 1950s, and have led to important ethnic and cultural changes in many societies. A major result has been a growing religious and cultural pluralism in many societies, which may challenge the secular nation state. Migrations, and associated diasporas, create new mixtures of religion in a single territory. Moreover, they create new transnational connections, since migrants in contemporary societies are more able and likely to retain strong connections with the places and cultures from whence they have come. On the one hand, globalization seems to perpetuate Western privilege, since Western societies remain economically powerful, and outsource to non-Western countries. On the other hand, globalization connects the world as never before, and challenges Western values and self-centredness by showing that there are other ways of being modern.

2. 'Mediatization'

The last few decades have witnessed the proliferating variety and increased effectiveness of media of communication, including television, the internet, and other digital technologies. It is now relatively easy to transmit and receive a vast amount of information and entertainment, and it has become virtually impossible to control and regulate such flows. Some people view such processes as corrosive of religion, not only because religion relies for many of its most important functions on face-to-face collective gatherings, but because traditional authority and knowledge is often highly regulated, and hostile to alternative influences. But whilst some forms of religion may suffer, others may make active use of new media to further their causes. As Chapter 20 on Religion and popular culture shows, for example, some new forms of religion not only make use of new media to spread their message and support their communities, they are actually reshaped as they are 'mediated' by new technologies and new forms of culture.

3. Postsecularism

Although modern societies are often characterized by a distrust or active hostility to religion, particularly on the part of powerful elites, such secularism is often challenged in late modern societies. The challenge comes from many sources, including migrations, and disillusionment with aspects of the modern project (for example, its failures to support human and environmental values, and its dismissal of tradition). Whereas in premodern societies religion was often a force by which majorities defended their interests, in late modern societies it is more likely to be a force by which minorities defend their interests and challenge secular majorities. This does not mean that secularism

is dethroned, but that it has to defend itself, and that it can no longer assume that it is the only possible face of human progress.

A note on 'religion'

There is a vast, and ever-expanding, literature on the concept of 'religion', and there will never be an end to debates about the meaning of 'religion' and how the term can be defined. One way to approach the issue is to try to isolate distinctive characteristics of religion (what religion *is*) – such as belief in a higher power or powers, in a realm beyond this world, or in a God or gods. Another is to look for the distinctive functions of religion (what religion *does*) – such as gather people together in communities of solidarity, give meaning and purpose to life, and shape human emotions. Combining both approaches, we may say that religions are social forms which use practices, symbols and beliefs, usually in a collective setting, to orient people to a higher or ultimate level of reality, thereby providing them with a template for ordering social and personal relationships in this life.

Like any other definition of religion, however, this one must be treated with caution, because religion is not a 'thing' which can be captured and pinned down. Rather, 'religion' is just a useful word which helps us identify certain aspects of human life, but which is nothing more than a tool or framework of analysis and understanding (just like 'politics' or 'class'). We can always divide things up in a different way (including the many religious traditions considered in this book), and we always need to be wary of approaches which say that religion can only be this, not that. What counts as religion is always an open, empirical question, for religion is constantly being constructed in new ways. There is always an element of persuasion in a definition of religion, and there is often a power-play. For example, there may be political advantages in saying that one's own community is religious, whereas that one over there is not – or vice versa.

As well as addressing 'religion', this book considers 'spirituality'. Chapter 12 notes that significant numbers of people in contemporary societies prefer to describe themselves as 'spiritual' rather than 'religious'. What they often mean by this is that they are committed to the 'inner truth' of religion as it affects personal life, but not to the external, social manifestations of religion (like buildings, rituals, priests). Thus the term 'spirituality' can only be understood in terms of a particular, linked, sense of 'religion' (which it rejects). In this book we used religion in a much broader sense than this – a sense indicated by the working definition offered above. As such, we treat spirituality as one particular manifestation of religion in the modern world.

How Does Culture Matter?

AMARTYA SEN

Introduction

Sociologists, anthropologists, and historians have often commented on the tendency of economists to pay inadequate attention to culture in investigating the operation of societies in general and the process of development in particular. While we can consider many counterexamples to the alleged neglect of culture by economists, beginning at least with Adam Smith (1776/1976, 1790/1976), John Stuart Mill (1859/1974, 1861/1962), or Alfred Marshall (1891), nevertheless, as a general criticism, the charge is, to a considerable extent, justified.

This neglect (or perhaps more accurately, comparative indifference) is worth remedying, and economists can fruitfully pay more attention to the influence of culture on economic and social matters. Further, development agencies such as the World Bank may also reflect, at least to some extent, this neglect, if only because they are so predominately influenced by the thinking of economists and financial experts. The economists' skepticism of the role of culture may thus be indirectly reflected in the outlooks and approaches of institutions like the World Bank. No matter how serious this neglect is (and here assessments can differ), the cultural dimension of development requires closer scrutiny in development analysis. It is important to investigate the different ways—and they can be very diverse—in which culture should be taken into account in examining the challenges of development, and in assessing the demands of sound economic strategies.

The issue is not whether culture matters, to consider the title of an important and highly successful book jointly edited by Lawrence Harrison and Samuel Huntington (2000). That it must be, given the pervasive influence of culture in human life. The real issue, rather, is how—not whether—culture matters. What are the different ways in which culture may influence development? How can the influences be better understood, and how might they modify or alter the development policies that seem appropriate? The interest lies in the nature and forms of the connections and on their implications for action and policy, not merely in the general—and hardly deniable—belief that culture does matter.

I discuss these "how" questions in this essay, but in the process I must also take up some "how not" questions. There is some evidence, I shall argue, that in the anxiety to take adequate note of the role of culture, there is sometimes a temptation to take rather formulaic and simplistic views of the impact of culture on the process of development. For example, there seem to be many supporters of the belief—held explicitly or by implication—that the fates of countries are effectively sealed by the nature of their respective cultures. This would be not only a heroic oversimplification, but it would also entail some assignment of hopelessness to countries that are seen as having the "wrong" kind of culture. This is not just politically and ethically repulsive, but more immediately, it is, I would argue, also epistemic nonsense. So a second object of this essay is to take up these "how not" issues.

The third object of the chapter is to discuss the role of learning from each other in the field of culture. Even though such transmission and education may be an integral part of the process of development, their role is frequently underestimated. Indeed, since each culture is often taken, not implausibly, to be unique, there can be a tendency to take a somewhat insular view of culture. In understanding the process of development, this can be particularly deceptive and substantively counterproductive. Indeed, one of the most important roles of culture lies in the possibility of learning from each other, rather than celebrating or lamenting the rigidly delineated cultural boxes in which the people of the world are firmly classified by muscular taxonomists.

Finally, while discussing the importance of intercultural and inter country communication, I must also discuss the threat—real or perceived—of globalization and the asymmetry of power in the contemporary world. The view that local cultures are in danger of destruction has often been expressed, and the belief that something should be done to resist this can have considerable plausibility. How this possible threat should be understood and what can be done to address—and if necessary counter—it are also important subjects for development analysis. That is the fourth and final issue that I intend to scrutinize.

Connections

It is particularly important to identify the different ways in which culture can matter to development (Rao and Walton, this volume; Wolfensohn 2000). The following categories would seem to have some immediacy as well as far-reaching relevance.

1. Culture as a constitutive part of development. We can begin with the basic question: what is development for? The furtherance of well-being and freedoms that we seek in development cannot but include the enrichment of human lives through literature, music, fine arts, and other forms of cultural expression and practice, which we have reason to value. When Julius Caesar said of Cassius, "He hears no music: seldom he smiles," this was not meant to be high praise for Cassius's quality of life. To have a high GNP per head but little music, arts, literature, etc., would not amount to a major developmental success. In one form or another, culture engulfs our lives, our desires, our frustrations, our ambitions, and the freedoms that we seek. The freedom and opportunity for cultural activities are among the basic freedoms the enhancement of which can be seen to be constitutive of development.

2. Economically remunerative cultural activities and objects. Various activities that are economically remunerative may be directly or indirectly dependent on cultural facilities and more generally on the cultural environment. The linkage of tourism with cultural sites (including historical ones) is obvious enough.⁵ The presence or absence of crime or welcoming traditions may also be critical to tourism and in general to domestic as well as cross-boundary interactions. Music, dancing, and other cultural activities may also have a large commercial—often global—market. The presence of centers of such artistic activities can, in addition, help to attract people to particular countries or regions, with various indirect effects.

There can, of course, be room for doubt as to whether cultural—including religious—objects or sites should be used for the purpose of earning money, and it may well be decided that in some cases, in which the significance of the objects or sites are threatened by commercial use, the opportunity of earning an income should be forgone. But even after

excluding commercial uses that can be threatening, there will tend to remain plenty of other opportunities to combine economic use with cultural pursuits. Furthermore, people who come to visit well-administered sites of cultural or religious importance, without any direct commercial involvement, could still, indirectly, boost the tourist trade of the country or region as a whole.

3. Cultural factors influence economic behavior. Even though some economists have been tempted by the idea that all human beings behave in much the same way (for example, relentlessly maximize their self-interest defined in a thoroughly insulated way), there is plenty of evidence to indicate that this is not in general so. Cultural influences can make a major difference to work ethics, responsible conduct, spirited motivation, dynamic management, Entrepreneurial initiatives, willingness to take risks, and a variety of other aspects of human behavior which can be critical to economic success (Sen 1973, 1982; Basu 1980; Hirschman 1982; Margolis 1982; Akerlof 1984; Frank 1985, 1988; Granovetter 1985; Elster 1986; Mansbridge 1990; Ostrom 1990, 1998; Greif 1994a,b; Brittan and Hamlin 1995; Fukuyama 1995; Zamagni 1995; Becker 1996; Hausman and McPherson 1996; Frey 1997a,b; Ben-Ner and Putterman 1998; Akerlof and Kranton 2000; Throsby 2001).

Also, successful operation of an exchange economy depends on mutual trust and implicit norms. When these behavioral modes are plentifully there, it is easy to overlook their role. But when they have to be cultivated, that lacuna can be a major barrier to economic success. There are plenty of examples of the problems faced in precapitalist economies because of the underdevelopment of basic virtues of commerce and business.

The culture of behavior relates to many other features of economic success. It relates, for example, to the prevalence or absence of economic corruption and its linkages with organized crime. In Italian discussions on this subject, in which I was privileged to take part through advising the Anti-Mafia Commission of the Italian parliament, the role and reach of implicit values was much discussed.⁶ Culture also has an important role in encouraging environment-friendly behavior (Ostrom 1990, 1998; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993; Putnam 1993). The behavioral contribution of culture would vary with the challenges encountered in the process of economic development.

4. Culture and political participation. Participation in civil interactions and political activities is influenced by cultural conditions. The tradition of public discussion and participatory interactions can be very critical to the process of politics, and can be important for the establishment, preservation, and practice of democracy. The culture of participation can be a critical civic virtue, as was extensively discussed by Condorcet, among other leading thinkers of European Enlightenment (Condorcet 1795/1955; Hume 1777/1966; Smith 1790/1976).

Aristotle did, of course, point out that human beings tend to have a natural inclination toward civil interaction with each other. And yet the extent of political participation can vary between societies. In particular, political inclinations can be suppressed not only by authoritarian rules and restrictions, but also by a "culture of fear" that political suppression can generate. There can also be a "culture of indifference" drawing on skepticism that turns into apathy. Political participation is critically important for development, both through its effects on the assessment of ways and means, and even through its role in the formation and

consolidation of values in terms of which development has to be assessed (Sen 1999).

5. Social solidarity and association. Aside from economic interactions and political participation, even the operation of social solidarity and mutual support can be strongly influenced by culture. The success of social living is greatly dependent on what people may spontaneously do for each other. This can profoundly influence the working of the society, including the care of its less fortunate members as well as preservation and guardianship of common assets. The sense of closeness to others in the community can be a major asset for that community. The advantages flowing from solidarity and supportive interactions have received much attention recently through the literature on "social capital" (Ostrom 1990, 1998; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993; Putnam 1993).

This is an important new area of social investigation. There is, however, a need to scrutinize the nature of "social capital" as "capital"—in the sense of a general purpose resource (as capital is taken to be). The same sentiments and inclinations can actually work in opposite directions, depending on the nature of the group involved. For example, solidarity within a particular group (for example, long-term residents of a region) can go with a less than friendly view of nonmembers of that group (such as new immigrants). The influence of the same community-centered thinking can be both positive for intracommunity relations and negative in generating or sustaining exclusionary tendencies (including violent "anti-immigrant" sentiments and actions, as can be observed in some regions of impeccable "within community" solidarity). Identity-based thinking can have dichotomous features, since a strong sense of group affiliation can have a cementing role within that group while encouraging rather severe treatment of nonmembers (seen as "others" who do not "belong"). If this dichotomy is right, then it may be a mistake to treat "social capital" as a general-purpose asset (as capital is, in general, taken to be), rather than as an asset for some relations and a liability for others. There is, thus, room for some searching scrutiny of the nature and operation of the important, but in some ways problematic, concept of "social capital."

6. Cultural sites and recollection of past heritage. Another constructive possibility is the furtherance of a clearer and broader understanding of a country's or community's past through systematic exploration of its cultural history. For example, by supporting historical excavations, explorations and related research, development programs can help to facilitate a fuller appreciation of the breadth of—and internal variations within—particular cultures and traditions. History often includes much greater variety of cultural influences and traditions than tends to be allowed by intensely political—and frequently a historical—interpretations of the present. When this is the case, historical objects, sites and records can help to offset some of the frictions of confrontational modern politics.

For example, Arab history includes a long tradition of peaceful relation with Jewish populations. Similarly, Indonesian past carries powerful records of simultaneous flourishing of Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian cultures, side by side with the Islamic traditions. Butrint in Albania as a historical site shows flourishing presence of Greek, Roman, and later Christian cultures, as well as Islamic history. The highlighting of a diverse past that may go with the excavation, preservation, and accessibility of historical objects and sites can, thus, have a possible role in promoting toleration of diversity in contemporary settings, and in countering confrontational use of "monocultural" readings of a nation's past.

For example, the recent attempt by Hindu activists to see India as just a "Hindu country," in which practitioners of other religions must have a less privileged position, clashes with the great diversity of Indian history. This includes a thousand years of Buddhist predominance (with sites all over India), a long history of Jain culture, conspicuous presence of Christians from the fourth century and of Parsees from the eighth, Muslim settlements of Arab traders in South India from about the same time, massive interactions between Muslims and Hindus all over the country (including new departures in painting, music, literature, and architecture), the birth and flourishing of Sikhism (as a new Indian religion that drew on but departed from previous ones), and so on. The recollection of history can be a major ally in the cultivation of toleration and celebration of diversity, and these are—directly and indirectly—among important features of development.

7. Cultural influences on value formation and evolution. Not only is it the case that cultural factors figure among the ends and means of development, they can also have a central role even in the formation of values. This in turn can be influential in the identification of our ends and the recognition of plausible and acceptable instruments to achieve those ends. For example, open public discussion—itself a cultural achievement of significance—can be powerfully influential in the emergence of new norms and fresh priorities.

Indeed, value formation is an interactive process, and the culture of talking and listening can play a significant part in making these interactions possible. As new standards emerge, it is public discussion as well as proximate emulation that may spread the new norms across a region and ultimately between regions. For example, the emergence of norms of low fertility rates, or nondiscrimination between boys and girls, or wanting to send children to schools, and so on, are not only vitally important features of development, they may be greatly influenced by a culture of free discussion and open public debate, without political barriers or social suppression (Basu 1992; Sen, Germain, and Chen 1994; Dreze and Sen 1995, 2002).

Integration

In seeing the role of culture in development, it is particularly important to place culture in an adequately capacious framework. The reasons for this are not hard to seek. First, influential as culture is, it is not uniquely pivotal in determining our lives and identities. Other things, such as class, race, gender, profession, and* politics also matter, and can matter powerfully. Our cultural identity is only one of many aspects of our self-realization and is only one influence among a great many that can inspire and influence what we do and how we do it. Further, our behavior depends not only on our values and predispositions, but also on the hard facts of the presence or absence of relevant institutions and on the incentives—prudential or moral—they generate (North 1981, 1990; Ostrom 1990, 1998; Douglas 1992; Blau 1993; Goody 1996; Bowles 1998; Platteau 2000; Arizpe, this volume; Sen 1984).

Second, culture is not a homogeneous attribute—there can be great variations even within the same general cultural milieu. Cultural determinists often underestimate the extent of heterogeneity within what is taken to be "one" distinct culture. Discordant voices are often "internal," rather than coming from outside. Since culture has many aspects, heterogeneity can also arise from the particular components of culture on which we decide to concentrate (for example, whether we look particularly at religion, or at literature, or at music, or generally at the style of living).

Third, culture absolutely does not sit still. Any presumption of stationarity—explicit or implicit—can be disastrously deceptive. To talk of, say, the Hindu culture, or for that matter the Indian culture, taken to be well defined in a temporally stationary way, not only overlooks the great variations within each of these categories, but also ignores their evolution and their large variations over time. The temptation toward using cultural determinism often takes the hopeless form of trying to fix the cultural anchor on a rapidly moving boat.

Finally, cultures interact with each other and cannot be seen as insulated structures. The isolationist view—often implicitly presumed—can be deeply delusive (Goody 1996; Throsby 2001). Sometimes we may be only vaguely aware how an influence came 'from outside, but it need not be unimportant for that reason. For example, while chili was unknown in India before the Portuguese brought it there in the 16th century, it is now a thoroughly Indian spice. Cultural features—from the most trivial to the most profound—can change radically, sometimes leaving little trace of the past behind.

Taking culture to be independent, unchanging and unchangeable can indeed be very problematic. But that, on the other hand, is no reason for not taking full note of the importance of culture seen in an adequately broad perspective. It is certainly possible to pay adequate attention to culture, along with taking into account all the qualifications just discussed. Indeed, if culture is recognized to be nonhomogeneous, nonstatic, and interactive, and if the importance of culture is integrated with rival sources of influence, then culture can be a very positive and constructive part in our understanding of human behavior and of social and economic development.

Bigotry and Alienation

However, the "how not" issue does deserve extremely serious attention, since rapid-fire cultural generalizations can not only undermine a deeper understanding of the role of culture, but also serve as a tool of sectarian prejudices, social discrimination, and even political tyranny. Simple cultural generalizations have great power in fixing our way of thinking, and often enough they are not just harmless fun. The fact that such generalizations abound in popular beliefs and in informal communication is easily recognized. Not only are these under examined implicit beliefs the subject matter of many racist jokes and ethnic slurs, they sometimes surface as pernicious grand theories. When there is an accidental correlation between cultural prejudice and social observation (no matter how casual), a theory is born, and it may refuse to die even after the chance correlation vanishes altogether.

For example, concocted jokes against the Irish (such crudities as "how many Irishmen do you need to change a light bulb"), which have had some currency in England for a long time, appeared to fit well with the depressing predicament of the Irish economy, when the Irish economy was doing quite badly. But when the Irish economy started growing astonishingly rapidly—indeed faster than any other European economy (as it did, for many years) - the cultural stereotyping and its allegedly profound economic and social relevance were not junked as sheer and unmitigated rubbish. Theories have lives of their own, quite defiantly of the phenomenal world that can be actually observed.

As it happens, cultural prejudice did play a role in the treatment that Ireland received

from the British government, and had a part even in the non prevention of the famines of the 1840s, which killed a higher proportion of the population than in any other recorded famine. Joel Mokyr (1983) has discussed the contribution of cultural alienation in London's treatment of Irish problems. As Lebow has argued, while poverty in Britain was typically attributed to economic change and fluctuations, Irish poverty was widely viewed in England as being caused by laziness, indifference, and ineptitude, so that "Britain's mission" was not seen as one to alleviate Irish distress but to civilize her people and to lead them to feel and act like human beings."

The cultural roots of the Irish famines extend, in this sense, at least as far back as Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, published in 1590, and perhaps even earlier. The art of blaming the victims, plentifully present in the *Faerie Queene* itself, survived through the famines of the 1840s, and the Irish taste for potato was added to the list of the calamities which the natives had, in English view, brought on themselves. Charles Edward Trevelyan, the Head of the Treasury during the famines, expressed his belief that Britain had done what it could for Ireland, even as the famine—with little public relief—killed rampantly, and even as ship after ship, laden with wheat, oats, cattle, pigs, eggs, and butter, sailed down the Shannon, bound for England (which had greater purchasing power than starving Ireland and could buy what the Irish—hit by the potato blight—could not afford). Trevelyan also pointed to some remarkable cultural explanations of the hunger, including: "There is scarcely a woman of the peasant class in the West of Ireland whose culinary art exceeds the boiling of a potato."

The connection between cultural bigotry and political tyranny can be very close. The asymmetry of power between the ruler and ruled can be combined with cultural prejudices in explaining failures of governance, as is spectacularly observed through the Irish famines of the 1840s (O Grada 1989; Eagleton 1995; Mokyr 1983; Woodham-Smith 1962). Similar use of cultural prejudice for political irresponsibility (or worse) can also be seen in the history of European empires in Asia and Africa. Winston Churchill's famous remark that the Bengal famine of 1943 was caused by the tendency of people there to "breed like rabbits" belongs to this general tradition of blaming the colonial victim, and it had a profound effect in crucially delaying famine relief in that disastrous famine. Cultural critique of the victims can be used by the rulers to justify hugely inefficient – as well as deeply iniquitous – tyrannies.

Cultural Determinism

While the marriage of cultural prejudice and political asymmetry can be quite lethal, the need to be cautious about jumping to cultural conclusions is more pervasive. It can even influence the way experts see the nature and challenges of economic development. Theories are often derived from fairly scanty evidence. Half-truths or quarter-truths can grossly mislead—sometimes even more than straightforward falsity, which is easier to expose.

Consider, for example, the following argument from the influential and important book jointly edited by Lawrence Harrison and Samuel Huntington called *Culture Matters* (to which I referred earlier), and in particular from Huntington's introductory essay in that volume called "Cultures Count":

In the early 1990, I happened to come across economic data on Ghana and South Korea in the

early 1960s, and I was astonished to see how similar their economies were then. Thirty years later, South Korea had become an industrial giant with the fourteenth largest economy in the world, multinational corporations, major exports of automobiles, electronic equipment, and other sophisticated manufactures, and per capita income approximately that of Greece. Moreover it was on its way to the consolidation of democratic institutions. No such changes had occurred in Ghana, whose per capita income was now about one-fifteenth that of South Korea. How could this extraordinary difference in development be explained? Undoubtedly, many factors played a role, but it seemed to me that culture had to be a large part of the explanation. South Koreans valued thrift, investment, hard work, education, organization, and discipline. Ghanians had different values. In short, cultures count. (Harrison and Huntington 2000, xiii)

There may well be something of interest in this engaging comparison (perhaps even a quarter-truth torn out of context), and the contrast does call for probing examination. And yet, as used in the explanation just cited, the causal story is extremely deceptive. There were many important differences other than their cultural predispositions—between Ghana and Korea in the 1960s when they appeared to Huntington to be much the same, except for culture. First, the class structures in the two countries were quite different, with a very much bigger- and proactive - role of business classes in South Korea. Second, the politics were very different too, with the government in South Korea willing and eager to play a prime-moving role in initiating a business-centered economic development in a way that did not apply to Ghana. Third, the close relationship between the Korean economy and the Japanese economy, on the one hand, and the United States, on the other, made a big difference, at least in the early stages of Korean development. Fourth—and perhaps most important—by the 1960s South Korea had acquired a much higher literacy rate and much more expanded school system than Ghana had. The Korean changes had been brought about in the post-World War II period, largely through resolute public policy, and it could not be seen just as a reflection of age-old Korean culture (McGinn et al. 1980).

On the basis of the slender scrutiny offered, it is hard to justify either the cultural triumphalism in favor of Korean culture, or the radical pessimism about Ghana's future that the reliance on cultural determinism would tend to suggest. -Neither can be derived from the over rapid and under analyzed comparison that accompanies the heroic diagnostics. As it happens, South Korea did not rely just on its traditional culture. From the 1940s onward, it deliberately followed lessons from abroad to use public policy to advance its backward school education.

And it has continued to learn from global experience even today. Sometimes the lessons have come from experience of failure rather than success. The East Asian crisis that overwhelmed South Korea among other countries in the region brought out some of the penalties of not having a fully functioning democratic political system, when things moved up and up together, the voice that democracy gives to the underdog may not have been immediately missed, but when the economic crisis came, and divided they fell (as they typically do in such a crisis), the newly impoverished missed the voice that democracy would have given them to use for protest and to demand economic redress. Along with the recognition of the need to pay attention to downside risks and to economic security, the bigger issue of democracy itself became a predominant focus of attention in the politics of economic crisis. This happened in the countries hit by the crisis, such as South Korea, Indonesia,

Thailand, and others, but there was also a global lesson here about the special contribution of democracy in helping the victims of disaster, and the need to think not only about "growth with equity" (the old Korean slogan), but also about "downturn with security" (Sen 1999).

Similarly, the cultural damning of the prospects of development in Ghana and other countries in Africa is simply overhasty pessimism with little empirical foundation. For one thing, it does not take into account how rapidly many countries—South Korea included—have changed, rather than remaining anchored to some fixed cultural parameters. Misidentified quarter-truths can be dreadfully misleading.

There have, of course, been various earlier attempts at cultural determinism in explaining economic development. Indeed, a century ago, Max Weber (1930), the great sociologist, had presented a major thesis on the decisive role of Protestant ethics (in particular of Calvinist ethics) in the successful development of a capitalist industrial economy. Weberian analysis of the role of culture in the emergence of capitalism drew on the world as he had observed it in the late 19th century. It is of particular dialectical interest in the contemporary world in light especially of the recent success of market economies in non-Protestant and even non-Christian societies.

Max Weber was particularly clear that Confucianism was quite unsuited for a dynamic industrial economy. "The Calvinist ethic," Anthony Giddens summarizes Weber, "introduced an activism into the believer's approach to worldly affairs, a drive to mastery in a quest for virtue in the eyes of God, that are altogether lacking in Confucianism," adding: "Confucian values do not promote such rational instrumentalism!"¹⁶ In sharp contrast with this view, many writers in present-day Asia make the opposite claim that Confucian ethics is particularly suited for success of industrial and economic progress, as illustrated by the performance of East Asia. There have, in fact, been several different theories seeking explanation of the high performance of East Asian economies in terms of local culture. Michio Morishima (a great economist) has traced the roots of "the Japanese ethos" to the special history of its feudal system; Ronald Dore (a great sociologist) has emphasized the contribution of "Confucian ethics"; Eiko Ikegami (a brilliant young Japanese historian) has focused on the influence of the "Samurai code of honour."

There is much to learn from these theories, and the empirical connections they have brought out have been insightful. And yet it is also remarkable how the specific aspects of cultural explanations, based on observing the past, have often foundered in the light of later experience. Indeed, theories of cultural determinism have often been one step behind the actual world. By the time Max Weber's privileging of "Protestant ethics" (based on 19th-century experience) was getting widely recognized, many of the Catholic countries, including France and Italy, were beginning to grow faster than Protestant Britain or Germany. The thesis had to be, then, altered, and the privileged culture was taken more generally to be Christian and western, rather than specifically Protestant.

However, by the time that Eurocentric view of the culture of development got established, Japan was growing much faster than the West. So Japan had to be included in the privileged category, and there was useful work on the role of Japanese ethos, Samurai culture, etc. But, by the time of specialness of Japan was well understood, the East Asian economies

were growing very fast, and there was a need to broaden the theory of Japan's specialness to include the wider coverage of "Confucian" ethics and a wider and a more spacious regional tradition, fuzzily described as "Asian values." However, by the time that "Confucian" theory had become well established, the fastest growing economy in the world was Thailand, which is a Buddhist country. Indeed, Japan, Korea, China, and Taiwan too have much Buddhist influence in their culture. The grand cultural theories have a propensity to trail one step behind the world of practice, rather than serving as a grand predictive device.

This record need not, however, be seen as one of embarrassment, since we have learned many things from a closer understanding of the cultural linkages emerging from these specialized studies. But attempts to view culture as a singular, stationary and independent source of development have not—and could not have—worked.

Just to illustrate, consider Korea again, which is often seen as a quintessential exemplification of the power of "Asian values" and of the reach of Confucian ethics in industrial development. Confucianism has indeed been a major cultural influence in this country, but there have been many different interpretations of Confucianism. For example, in the 15th century onward, the "Neo-Confucian literati" (Sarim) challenged the earlier readings of Confucianism, and interpretational disputes were powerfully pursued by the different sides. Neo-Confucians themselves divide into different schools, according to different lines of division, including the classic Chinese distinction between li and ch'i (called, I understand, I and ki in Korea). In the 17th and early 18th century, the contest between the "Old Doctrine" (Noron), led by Song Si-yol, and the "Young Doctrine" (Sorun), led by Yun Chung, related in part to different views of good behavior and of good social arrangements. Confucianism does not speak in one voice, and the particular emphasis on li (or i, in Korean) in the authoritarian interpretations of Confucius is by no means the only claim that obtains loyalty.

There are also influences other than Confucianism. Buddhism, as was mentioned before, has been a major force in Korea, as it has been in China and Japan. From the seventh century when Buddhism became the state religion, it has had political ups and downs, but a constant cultural presence in this country. Christianity too has had a major presence in Korea, and from the 18th century, regular intellectual confrontations can be seen between the creed of so-called western learning, which disputed Confucian orthodoxy, along with other challengers, such as the individualist doctrines of the Wang Yang ming school of Neo-Confucianism, and of course various theorists of Buddhism. The richness and diversity in Korea's cultural past cannot be reduced into a simple story of cultural determinism, woven around an allegedly homogeneous Confucian ethics, or the overarching role of an ill-defined "Asian values" (Han 1971; Henthorn 1971; Lee 1984).

Interdependence and Learning

While culture does not work in isolation from other social influences, once we place culture in adequate company, it can greatly help to illuminate our understanding of the world, including the process of development and the nature of our identity. Let me refer again to South Korea, which was a much more literate and more educated society than Ghana in the 1960s (when the two economies appeared rather similar to Huntington). The contrast, as was already mentioned, was very substantially the result of public policies pursued in South Korea

in the post World War II period.

To be sure, the postwar public policies on education were also influenced by antecedent cultural features. It would be surprising had there been no such connection. In a two-way relation, just as education influences culture, so does antecedent culture have an effect on educational policies. It is, for example, remarkable that nearly every country in the world with a powerful presence of Buddhist tradition has tended to embrace widespread schooling and literacy with some eagerness. This applies not only to Japan and Korea, but also to China, and Thailand, and Sri Lanka. Indeed, even miserable Burma, with a dreadful record of political oppression and social neglect, still has a higher rate of literacy than its neighbors in the subcontinent. Seen in a broader framework, there is probably something here to investigate and learn from.

It is, however, important to see the interactive nature of the process in which contact with other countries and the knowledge of their experiences can make a big difference in practice. There is every evidence that when Korea decided to move briskly forward with school education at the end of the second world war, it was influenced not just by its cultural interest in education, but also by a new understanding of the role and significance of education, based on the experiences of Japan and the West, including the United States (Lee 1984; McGinn et al. 1980).

There is a similar story, earlier on, of interaction and response in Japan's own history of educational development. When Japan emerged from its self-imposed isolation from the world from the beginning of the 17th century, under the Tokugawa regime, it already had a relatively well-developed school system, and in this Japan's traditional interest in education would have played a significant part. Indeed, at the time of Meiji restoration in 1868, Japan had a higher rate of literacy than Europe, despite being economically quite underdeveloped. And yet the rate of literacy in Japan was still low (as indeed it was in Europe too), and no less importantly the Japanese education system was quite out of touch with knowledge and learning in the industrializing West.¹⁹ When, in 1852, Commodore Mathew Perry chugged into the Edo Bay, puffing black smoke from the newly designed steamship, the Japanese were not only impressed-and somewhat terrified- and were driven to accept diplomatic and trade relations with the United States, they also had to reexamine and reassess their intellectual isolation from the world. This contributed to the political process that led to the Meiji restoration, and along with that came a determination to change the face of Japanese education. In the so-called Charter Oath, proclaimed also in 1868, there is a firm declaration on the need to "seek knowledge widely throughout the world" (Cummings 1980, 17).

The Fundamental Code of Education issued three years later, in 1872, put the new educational determination in unequivocal terms: "There shall, in the future, be no community with an illiterate family, nor a family with an illiterate person. Kido Takayoshi, one of the most influential leaders of that period, put the basic issue with great clarity:

Our people are no different from the Americans or Europeans of today; it is all a matter of education or lack of education.

That was the challenge that Japan took on with determination, and things moved rapidly forward.

Between 1906 and 1911, education consumed as much as 43% of the budgets of the towns and villages, for Japan as a whole (Gluck 1985). By 1906, the recruiting army officers found that, in contrast with late 19th century, there was hardly any new recruit who was not literate. By 1910, it is generally acknowledged that Japan had universal attendance in primary schools. By 1913, even though Japan was still economically very poor and underdeveloped, it had become one of the largest producers of books in the world—publishing more books than Britain and indeed more than twice as many as the United States. Indeed, Japan's entire experience of economic development was, to a great extent, driven by human capability formation, which included the role of education and training, and this was promoted both by public policy and by a supportive cultural climate (interacting with each other). The dynamics of associative relations are extraordinarily important in understanding how Japan laid the foundations of its spectacular economic and social development.

To carry the story further, Japan was not only a learner but also a great teacher. Development efforts of countries in East and Southeast Asia were profoundly influenced by Japan's experience in expanding education and its manifest success in transforming society and the economy. There is a fund of cultural and economic wisdom there from which the world can draw lessons in development. India today may be immensely more advanced technologically and even economically than Japan in the Meiji period, and yet India is paying a very heavy price for ignoring the cultural lessons on the critical role of basic education that emerged so profoundly in the economically poor and politically primitive Meiji Japan (Dreze and Sen 1995, 2002).

Cultural interrelations within a broad framework does indeed provide a useful focus for our understanding. It contrasts both with neglecting culture altogether (as some economic models do), and also with the privileging of culture in stationary and isolated terms (as is done in some social models of cultural determinism). We have to go well beyond both and integrate the role of culture with other aspects of our life.

Cultural Globalization

I turn now to what may appear to be a contrary consideration. It might be asked, in praising inter country interactions and the positive influence of learning from elsewhere, am I not overlooking the threat that global interrelations pose to integrity and survival of local culture? In a world that is so dominated by the "imperialism" of the culture of the western metropolis, surely the basic need is, it can be argued, to strengthen resistance, rather than to welcome global influence.

Let me first say that there is no contradiction here. Learning from elsewhere involves freedom and judgment, not being overwhelmed and dominated by outside influence without choice, without scope for one's volitional agency. The threat of being overwhelmed by the superior market power of an affluent West, which has asymmetric influence over nearly all the media, raises a different type of issue altogether. In particular, it does not contradict in any way the importance of learning from elsewhere.

But how should we think about global cultural invasion itself as a threat to local cultures? There are two issues of particular concern here. The first relates to the nature of

market culture in general, since that is part and parcel of economic globalization. Those who find the values and priorities of a market-related culture vulgar and impoverishing (many who take this view belong to the West itself) tend to find economic globalization to be objectionable at a very basic level.²³ The second issue concerns the asymmetry of power between the West and the other countries, and the possibility that this asymmetry may translate into destruction of local cultures - a loss that may culturally impoverish nonwestern societies. Given the constant cultural bombardment that tends to come from the western metropolis (through MTV to Kentucky Fried Chicken), there are genuine fears that native traditions may get drowned in that loud din.

Threats to older native cultures in the globalizing world of today are, to a considerable extent, inescapable. It is not easy to solve the problem by stopping globalization of trade and commerce, since the forces of economic exchange and division of labour are hard to resist in an interacting world. Globalization does, of course, raise other problems as well, and its distributional consequences have received much criticism recently. On the other hand, it is hard to deny that global trade and commerce can bring with it - as Adam Smith foresaw - greater economic prosperity for each nation. The challenging task is to get the benefits of globalization on a more shared basis. While that primarily economic question need not detain us here (which I have tried to discuss elsewhere, particularly in Sen 1999), there is a related question in the field of culture, to wit, how to increase the real options—the substantive freedoms—that people have, by providing support for cultural traditions that they may want to preserve. This cannot but be an important concern in any development effort that brings about radical changes in the ways of living of people.

Indeed, a natural response to the problem of asymmetry must take the form of strengthening the opportunities that local culture can have, to be able to hold its own against an overpowered invasion. If foreign imports dominate because of greater control over the media, surely one counter-acting policy must involve expanding the facilities that local culture gets, to present its own ware, both locally and beyond it. This is a positive response, rather than the temptation—a very negative temptation—to ban foreign influence.

Ultimately, for both the concerns, the deciding issue must be one of democracy. An overarching value must be the need for participatory decision making on the kind of society people want to live in, based on open discussion, with adequate opportunity for the expression of minority positions. We cannot both want democracy, on the one hand, and yet, on the other, rule out certain choices, on traditionalist grounds, because of their "foreignness" (irrespective of what people decide to choose, in an informed and reflected way). Democracy is not consistent with options of citizens being banished by political authorities, or by religious establishments, or by grand guardians of taste, no matter how unbecoming they find the new predilection to be. Local culture may indeed need positive assistance to compete in even terms, and support for minority tastes against foreign onslaught may also be a part of the enabling role of a democratic society, but the prohibition of cultural influences from abroad is not consistent with a commitment to democracy and liberty.

Related to this question there is also a more subtle issue that takes us beyond the immediate worry about bombardment of mass western Culture. This concerns the way we see ourselves in the world—a world that is asymmetrically dominated by western preeminence and power. Through a dialectic process, this can, in fact, lead to a powerful inclination to be

aggressively "local" in culture, as a kind of "brave" resistance to western dominance. In an important article, called "What Is a Muslim?," Akeel Bilgrami (1995) has argued that the confrontational relations often lead people to see themselves as "the other"—defining their identity as being emphatically different from that of western people. Something of this "otherness" can be seen in the emergence of various self-definitions that characterize cultural or political nationalism and religious assertiveness or even fundamentalism. While belligerently anti western, these developments are, in fact, deeply foreign-dependent—in a negative and contrary form. Indeed, seeing oneself as "the other" does less than justice to one's free and deliberative agency.²⁴ This problem too has to be dealt with in a way that is consistent with democratic values and practice, if that is taken to be a priority. Indeed, the "solution" to the problem that Bilgrami diagnoses cannot lie in "prohibiting" any particular outlook, but in public discussion that clarifies and illuminates the possibility of being alienated from ones own independent agency.

Finally, I should mention that one particular concern I have not yet discussed arises from the belief—often implicit—that each country or collectivity must stick to its "own culture," no matter how attracted people are to "foreign cultures." This fundamentalist position not only involves the need to reject importing McDonald s and beauty contests to the non- western world, but also the enjoyment there of Shakespeare or ballets or even cricket matches. Obviously enough, this highly conservative position must be in some tension with the role and acceptability of democratic decisions, and I need not repeat what I have already said about the conflict between democracy and the arbitrary privileging of any practice. But it also involves an additional philosophical issue about the labeling of cultures on which Rabindranath Tagore, the poet, had warned.

This concerns the issue whether one's culture is to be defined by the geographical origin of a practice, rather than by its manifest use and enjoyment, Tagore (1928) put his argument against regional labeling with great force:

Whatever we understand and enjoy in human products instantly becomes ours, wherever they might have their origin. I am proud of my humanity when I can acknowledge the poets and artists of other countries as my own. Let me feel with unalloyed gladness that all the great glories of man are mine.

The criteria of understanding and assessment are important, but—as Tagore rightly noted—the inert place of origin has no right to alienate us from what we enjoy and have reason to cherish. Culture, after all, is more than mere geography.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, I have tried to discuss, first of all, how—in many different ways—culture interacts with development. There are complex epistemic, ethical, and political issues involved in identifying the ways in which culture may or may not influence development. Some specific lines of connection have been identified, particularly related to the demands of assessment and policy.

Second, the acknowledgment of the importance of culture cannot be instantly translated

into ready-made theories of cultural causation. It is evidently too easy to jump from the frying pan of neglecting culture into the fire of crude cultural determinism. The latter has caused much harm in the past (and has even encouraged political tyranny and social discrimination), and it continues to be a source of confusion which can seriously mislead assessment and policy in the contemporary world.

Third, what is needed is not the privileging of culture as something that works on its own, but the integration of culture in a wider picture, in which culture, seen in a dynamic and interactive way, is one important influence among many others. Attempts at integration have to pay particular attention to heterogeneity of each broadly defined culture, the interdependence between different cultures, and the vibrant nature of cultural evolutions.

Fourth, there has been much focus, in this essay, on the positive contributions that cultural influences across borders can make. But I have also discussed the cultural provocation that global asymmetry of power generates. There are good arguments for not being overwhelmed by this asymmetry— either in the form of submissive supplication, nor in the dialectical and negative form of redefining oneself as "the other" (in contrast with "the West"), which makes one lose one's independent identity. Both these reactions can be contrasted with reliance on free and informed choice, aided by public discussion, critical scrutiny, and a participatory political environment.

There is no particular "compulsion" either to preserve departing life styles, or alternatively, to adopt the newest fashion from abroad, but there is a need for people to be able to take part, in these social decisions. This gives further reason for attaching importance to such elementary capabilities as reading and writing (through basic education), being well informed and well briefed (through a free media), and having realistic chances of participating freely (through elections, referendums and the general use of civil rights). There are institutional demands for cultural democracy.

A democratic commitment is consistent with assisting local cultures to compete in comparable terms, but does not encourage the arbitrary elimination of options on grounds of their foreign origin or a priori unacceptability. The ultimate test is the freedom of the citizens to exercise their free agency and choose in an informed and participatory way. If that foundational value has priority, then other concerns have to be integrated with its preeminence.

Notes

I draw, in this essay, on three earlier presentations on related themes, respectively, at a World Bank meeting on development in Tokyo on December 13, 2000, at the Pardee Center of Boston University on February 4, 2002, and at the University of Mumbai on February 26, 2002.

1. Douglas (1987), North (1990), and Blau (1993) provide interesting insights on how institutions think.

2. Douglas (1973/1982, 1992); Eliot (1948); Appadurai (1986); Inglehart (1990); Adorno (1991); Mosseto (1993); Greif (1994b); Appiah and Gates (1995); Jessor, Colby, and Shweder (1996); Klammer (1996); Landes (1998); Throsby (1999); Eagleton (2000); Platteau (2000); and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (1998, 2000) contain important illustrations of different aspects of these pervasive connections.

3. Cultural capabilities are among the major components of substantial freedoms; on the nature and use of the perspective of capabilities, see Alkire (2002a,c); Sen (1982, 1985a,b, 1999); Griffin and Knight (1990); Nussbaum (1993, 2000); Nussbaum and Sen (1993); Nussbaum and Glover (1995); Pattanaik (1998); Appadurai (2004); Arizpe (this volume); and Osmani (2001), among others.

4. There is a vast literature on the connections between economic rewards and cultural pursuits (Baumol and Bowen 1966; Peacock and Weir 1975; Blaug 1976; Towse 1993, 1997; Peacock and Rizzo 1994; Throsby 1994, 2001; Klammer 1996; Hutter and Rizzo 1997; Bowles 1998; Cowen 1998; Avrami, Mason, and de la Torre 2000; Caves 2000; Frey 2000).

5. See Boniface (1995); Herbert (1995); Hutter and Rizzo (1997); Avrami, Mason, and de la Torre (2000); and Throsby (2001) on the interconnection between the cultural and economic aspects of tourism, among other contributions.

6. The concept of social capital and its uses receive attention in UNESCO (1998, 2000); Dasgupta and Serageldin (2000); Blau (2001b); and Throsby (2001).

7. Often many different arguments can point in the same direction, in terms of needed action. For example, there has been only partial excavation of the ruins of the ancient Buddhist university of Nalanda in India, which had come to its end in the 12th century about the time when Oxford University was being founded (after having flourished for many hundreds of years, and having attracted scholars from abroad as well as within India — Hsuan Tsang from China in the seventh century was one of the most prominent alumni of Nalanda). Further investment in Nalanda's excavation, accessibility, and facilities will not only encourage tourism, and generate income, in one of the poorest parts of India, but can also help to generate a fuller understanding of the diversity of India's historical traditions.

8. There are, as a consequence, considerable difficulties in finding suitable indicators of

"cultural development" (Pattanaik 1998; Alkire 2002c).

9. Since I don't like chili, I have much practical experience of how hard it is to escape this foreign import in many parts of India. I also frequently encounter the comment that my culinary taste must have become corrupted by my spending a lot of time in the West. To this I have to -reply, "No, it is pre-colonial— what we Indians ate prior to western imperialism messed up our eating habits." There seems to be little memory left in India of its pre-Portuguese, prechili taste.

10. In *Why Ireland Starved*, Joel Mokyr (1983, 291) argues that "Ireland was considered by Britain as an alien and even hostile nation."

11. See Mokyr (1983, 291-92) for a balanced assessment of this line of diagnosis.

12. See Woodham-Smith (1962, 76).

13. Churchill also explained that his job in governing India was made difficult by the fact that Indians were "the beastliest people in the world, next to the Germans" (Roberts 1994, 213).

14. See, however, Goody's (1996) powerful critique of this reading of history

15. Anthony Giddens, introduction to Weber (1930, xvi). See also Weber (1951).

16. See Morishima (1982); Dore (1987); and Ikegami (1995), among other investigations of the cultural aspects of Japanese economic success.

17. Given the importance that is attached in Buddhism to the ability of people to read religious and philosophical discourses, there is even a *prima facie* motivational connection here that can be cogently examined and critically scrutinized. Indeed, one of Buddha's criticisms of Hinduism in his time was that the scriptures were in Sanskrit, which made them inaccessible to the common people of India.

18. See, for example; Cummings (1980), chapter 2.

19. See Passin (1965, 209-11); also Cummings (1980, 17),

20. Quoted in Kumon and Rosovsky (1992, 330).

21. The role of education in the economic development of East and Southeast Asia is extensively discussed in World Bank (1993).

22. See Hirschman (1977, 1982); Brittan and Hamlin (1995); Griffin (1996); Klammer

(1996); Appadurai (1996); Bowles (1998); Cowen (1998, 2002); Landes (1998); UNESCO (1998,2000); Arizpe (2000); Blau (2001); and Throsby (2001) for various assessments of market-oriented cultures, arguing in different directions.

23. On a related issue, in the context of Indian identity, see Sen (1997).

Cultural Embodiment and Histories: Towards Construction of Self

Gurpreet Mahajan

I

Shortly after independence, the people of India gave themselves a Constitution that protected the political and civil liberties of the citizens of India and guaranteed equality before the law. In a tradition bound hierarchical society this was perhaps the most important act of empowerment of the individual. Cutting across caste and gender differences, it granted citizenship to each individual and, by virtue of that endowment, resolved to treat each person as an equal member of the Indian polity. In other words, it privileged the category of citizenship over those of religion, caste and gender. It did not, of course, ignore the existence of other identities; indeed it allowed each individual to practise his/her own religion and advocated the neutrality of the state in all such matters. To the extent that the state was to have no religion, it was expected to be neutral in the disputes between contending notions of good. It was, however, allowed to regulate religious activity in the interest of protecting 'public order, morality and health', but as a general rule, religion was placed in the private domain of action, one over which the state was to have minimum possible control. Subsequently, in the year 1976, India was declared a sovereign secular state in which all religions would have an equal space to exist and grow.

The Constitution recognised the existence of community identities and the importance of these modes of organisation; consequently it did not enforce a common civil code. The framers of the Indian Constitution hoped that in due course the people of India would be able to evolve a common civil code but for the present they thought it best to accept the ways of life of different religious communities. The same protection was not however extended to the caste structure. To do away with the practice of untouchability, the Constitution granted equal social and political rights to all individuals. The notion of good that members of a particular caste might endorse did not act as a deterrent in this case. In fact, groups that had been oppressed for generations on account of their caste were provided reservations at various level. Through affirmative action of this kind, the framers of the Indian Constitution hoped that members of these castes would be able to participate as equals in the political life of the state.

Thus the Constitution embodied a complex but theoretically ambiguous notion of the individual-community relationship. It acknowledged, on the one hand, the significance of social identities in constituting the self and, on the other, it entrusted the state with the responsibility of changing the existing social fabric. The former acted as a restraining influence on the political agencies while the latter legitimised state intervention in the social arena. Gradually, in actual political practice, it was the latter that gained greater ascendancy. Stressing the transformative role of the state, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime minister of independent India, introduced a series of changes in the Hindu Personal Law. For a variety of historical reasons he did not temper with the Muslim Personal Law, but he nevertheless worked with the assumption that economic development and modern education would liberate the people from the yoke of tradition and orthodoxy. Since then, many have placed their faith in the process of modernisation, particularly in its ability to erode, or at least to weaken and displace, traditional community identities.

These expectations have not however been realised. Forty-five years after independence we find that religion and caste based community identities have not diminished. Social conflicts have increased and so have incidents of communal violence. Ethnic, regional and linguistic identities have begun to assert themselves and caste continues to be the most important variable in the

informal structures of communication that have developed around formal and institutionalised power. To the liberal and the radical forces this appears to be a consequence of the desecularisation of the state. Mobilisation of people along community lines and the mixing of politics with religion have jointly produced this predicament. A strident assertion of the neutrality of the state and the dissociation of religion from politics would, in their view, help to counter communalism and the forces of disintegration.

This analysis of our present predicament and the associated reading of tradition and cultural identities has been the subject of considerable debate in the recent past. The critics of the Nehruvian paradigm of development have offered alternative explanations of our contemporary experiences; but much more importantly, they have questioned the desirability of constructing a modern, secular, nation state.¹ Theoretically, this interrogation of the existing principles of political organisation begins with a conception of the individual that is significantly different from the one that informed the Nehruvian model. In fact it draws upon the notion of a culturally embodied self that found, at least, a weak expression in our Constitution. This competing conception of the self and the associated rejection of an abstract person, a universal individuality, merits close attention because it offers an alternative political vision: a way of organising our social and political life in which the community plays an important role. In the writings of these theorists itself, it points to a form of political organisation in which people participate in the political process as members of reasonably autonomous and self-defining communities. This paper reflects upon the notion of a culturally and socially embodied self and the political vision that emanates from it. It examines, in particular, the notion of community that informs this perspective and suggests that we dissociate the notion of an embodied self from the justification of communitarian existence. Implicitly, it hints at another conception of embodiment and historicity: one that might be more acceptable to our post-modern sensibility.

II

Liberalism conceives the individual as a freely choosing, autonomous self, engaged in the maximisation of his/her own utilities.

The only kind of social and political bond that can exist between such atomised persons is a contractual one, based on individual needs and interests, which can ensure the conditions necessary for the realisation of individually defined goals and ends. There are, in that sense, no shared ends that are collectively pursued in society. What political organisation provides, for such a society, is a 'procedural' framework in which individuals can pursue their separate desires, interests and conceptions of good life. Since ends and goals are individually defined, what people share in the political relationship is the attribute of citizenship; consequently, within liberalism, the individual in his/her capacity as a citizen becomes the subject of political and juridical discourse. Rights are conferred upon citizens, and individuals can make legitimate claims upon the state only as citizens.² In other words, the individual is constructed and embodied as a citizen; this is the only identity that is recognised politically.

The critics of the modern, secular, nation state question this conception of the self. Even though they rarely discuss the philosophical assumptions of liberalism, the manner in which they analyse the Indian society and explain our contemporary experiences, points quite unmistakably in that direction.³ Minimally, they suggest that the individual should be seen as a bearer of multiple identities: as a member of a family, caste, *varna*, tribe, village and state.⁴ Citizenship or membership of a state is obviously an important marker of individual identity in the contemporary world, but it does not exhaust or subsume membership of other groups and communities in society. Further, membership of cultural communities—based on caste (*varna* and *jati*), religion and tribe—constitutes the living fabric of Indian society: it shapes the social choices and political preferences of the people.⁵ But more importantly, it provides a shared system of values and a way of life: day to day activities, forms of dress and address are shaped by these identities. As these conceptions are nurtured in the family, caste and local community, they provide the initial framework of thought which the individuals carry with them almost all their life. Hence, they provide the fore-conceptions that mediate our engagement with reality. Indeed, they offer a conception of good that informs all aspects of our lives.⁶

In India these community identities have existed over a long period of time. Historically, they are prior to our identity as

political citizens of India.⁷ Further, the processes of modernisation have altered and modified these identities but not eroded them. The resilience and continued presence of these forms of identity is an indicator of the strength and importance of these modes of identification. Analysts of the Indian polity should recognise this ground reality: indeed, they should build on the 'lasting and conserving elements of this ancient land'.⁸ Thus, at one level, it is argued that the individual should be seen both as a member of a political community (that is, the Indian state) and as a member of cultural and non-political communities. However, at another level, the individual is defined in terms of her/his cultural identity: S/he is seen as a member of this or that jati, tribe or religion, and it is felt that these social and cultural identities should be given greater space in the public arena.

The need to open up spaces in civil society and entrust more responsibilities to communities is linked, in the ultimate analysis, to a critique of the functioning of the modern Indian state and an understanding of the modes of social and political organisation in traditional India. However, this statement follows quite logically from their reading of individual-community relationship. Beginning with the claim that Indians see themselves first and foremost as members of a caste, tribe, village and religion, they argue that these community identities constitute people's self-understanding and shape their social and political choices. But more importantly, these community identities can play an important role in the public arena, particularly in the formulation and implementation of state policy. In a hierarchical society like India where caste is the basis of stratification, and with it, an instrument of domination and exploitation, the category of caste can be used to identify the oppressed and the backward. The people thus identified can legitimately be provided special opportunities—reservations in educational institutions, jobs, civil services, etc.—to enable them to compete equally with other elites in the market.⁹

Moreover, state policies concerning health, family welfare, education and other development activities have been successful only when they have incorporated and used knowledge systems and instrumental mechanisms available at the local village level.¹⁰ These claims are linked to the belief that an effective development strategy must be sensitive to the particular needs of the people. It must be sensitive to the diverse needs of the different categories of

people. Treating the population as a single mass of undifferentiated people is neither realistic nor judicious. Since caste and religion are still the organising principles of the social life of the people of India, they can provide one way of differentiating between groups and identifying their needs, habits, inhibitions and constraints. Indeed, to break the existing hierarchies of power and authority at the local level, we can use the category of caste to ensure the participation of different categories of people in the decision-making process.¹¹

The centrality of the category of caste is, in the writings of other critics, displaced by the category of religion.¹² In both cases it is argued that the existence of these community identities is compatible with democratic modes of organisation. Caste has, for instance, been adapted and absorbed in the democratic process. In the present political system it has acquired a purpose and a function quite different from the one for which it was originally intended.¹³ Similarly, while analysing the category of religion, these theorists maintain that the absence or negation of religion in the public sphere is not essential for the effective functioning of democracy. Questioning the liberal claim that desecularisation of the state is responsible for communal violence, they argue that religion was central to the social and political life of the people in pre-colonial India, yet there were hardly any incidents of communal violence then. Some critics go a step further.¹⁴ They argue that communal violence is a contemporary phenomenon. Violent clashes between religious communities are steadily increasing with modernisation: earlier they were restricted to urban towns but now they are 'spreading outside the parameters of modern and semi-modern India'.¹⁵ Besides, the systematic violence that is orchestrated during these riots requires a degree of planning, political calculation and rational organisation, the resources for which are available today with the advent of modernisation.

The modern condition is responsible in yet another way. Industrial development displaces large sections of the population from their original surroundings, resulting in a deep sense of dislocation and alienation. At the same time it fails to provide an alternative set of values and, along with it, a sense of belonging to these people. To offset this deficiency they try to reclaim and assert their traditional identities more stridently. Thus the alienation generated in the process of modernisation provides the material for the

growth of orthodox religious forms.¹⁶ Besides, in a free market system where labour is available in surplus, traditional loyalties of caste, religion and region get reinforced as they provide the support structures necessary for withstanding the fluctuations of the market.¹⁷ Once again, the structures of modernity rather than the presence of religion creates the conditions of conflict and violence in society.

In more positive terms, it is argued that religion provides a system of values that binds social existence. Hence, the erasure of religion from the public sphere has meant the disintegration of individual and social life. In fact the instrumental use of religion that we witness these days is a consequence of the 'secularisation of religion'. The domination of instrumental rationality, which is an expression of modernity, permits the use of religion for the promotion of purely selfish and private means. The delegitimation of religion facilitates this. Since religion is no longer treated as a system of values that can order life and prescribe limits to individual action, it opens up space for the unconstrained pursuit of private ends.¹⁸

On other occasions it is argued that the space vacated by religion in the public sphere has been taken by the ideology of nationalism, which as a system of ideas is equally arbitrary and violent. After all, the wars fought in the name of the nation state have claimed more lives and caused greater destruction than any other event in the history of humankind.¹⁹ The fact that the magnitude and scale of destruction may be related to the nature of weapons used in contemporary warfare is of little significance because nationalism is, within this framework, seen as one aspect of the monster called modernity: science and technology, which have given us the instruments of mass annihilation, are its other faces. The advocates of this point of view actually question the project of enlightenment, particularly its belief in itself and its mistrust of tradition. Since the principle of secularism and the demand to relegate religion to the private sphere of life are attributes of this project, they are, as it were, condemned from the start. However, even when it is dissociated from the other contents of modernity, the principle of secularism—particularly the withdrawal of religion from the public sphere—is criticised for encouraging the instrumental use of religion.

Thus the continued presence of religion in the public sphere is justified on two grounds. First, it is argued that religion *per se* is

not responsible for the kind of hostility and hatred that we witness among members of different communities today. Second, and more importantly, it is argued that 'communal violence' is a contemporary phenomenon embodying a system of rationality that is characteristic of modernity. This analysis is further buttressed by the claim that the principle of tolerance, which defines a liberal democratic framework, is an attribute of all lived and practised religions.²⁰ Continuous interaction with members of other communities in the course of everyday life, generates a degree of tolerance and diversity in which religious boundaries become fuzzy as members of one community participate in the religious and cultural practices of the other. In contemporary India, despite the increasing incidents of communal violence, we find Hindus visiting 'gurudwaras' and rubbing shoulders with the Muslim pilgrims at the Chishti Dargah in Ajmer.

Space is created within religious traditions in yet another way. The exigencies of historical situations and the binding force of human relationships frequently require more accommodative behaviour; it calls for adjustments in which religious norms are often revised and reconstituted.²¹ As such lived religions express a degree of diversity and variance that is not always found in the original edict: they are, in other words, '... non-monolithic and operationally plural.'²² It is further argued that Hinduism—the religion of the majority of the people in India—is nothing more than a way of life. Since it is not a text-based religion it displays a high degree of diversity and tolerance.²³

III

Three conclusions follow from this. First, religion is not a closed and orthodox system of ideas that militates against the very nature of democratic organisation. Second, religions—particularly those that have existed over long periods of time and continue to be practised—speak to us in many voices. Their multivocality, which expresses the diversity of historical experience, allows for a degree of internal critique. Third, India's past was traditionally open-ended. It expressed and embodied inter-religious tolerance and allowed diverse cultural communities to live and survive in neighbourliness. All three statements legitimise religion, and by

dissociating it from superstition and dogma, justify the presence of religion in the public domain. In fact they prepare the ground for demanding greater space for these communities in our public life.

The theorists who actually favour more space for traditional communities point to the urgent need to curb the power of the Indian state and to strengthen the institutions of civil society. The Indian state is, in their view, becoming steadily more violent, undemocratic and unresponsive to the needs of the people: it is using its power to crush popular movements for a more just and equitable order. Further, they feel that the institutional ensemble of the state is incapable to regulating and peacefully controlling many sectors of our social life.²⁴ Analysing particular incidents of communal violence, the critics point out that the state's handling of social issues has fuelled social tensions. Police insensitivity has, in particular, aroused communal passions. In any case, recognising the limitations of police intervention—both in averting violent conflicts between communities and providing security to the members of the affected community—they argue that matters of routine social interaction between religious communities, and other actions that affect the day-to-day life of the people of an area, could be negotiated and resolved by members of different communities. For instance, leaders of the Hindu and Muslim communities in a particular area could determine (or else help the administrative authorities to determine) the size, route and security arrangements for particular religious processions or functions. The issues that might legitimately be left to the communities is obviously debatable, but the essential prescription of unburdening the state remains.

In institutional and organisational terms this theoretical claim translates into the demand for a loose confederation of different associations and natural communities: perhaps a multi-layered and loosely knit system of power in which loyalty is owed to *kula* (family), *jati*, *varna*, village, region and, in the last instance, state.²⁵ Although the precise relationship between different communities at different levels remains in most cases untheorised, the model of a decentralised polity is universally acclaimed. And in every instance it is supported by a critique of the nation state and the ideology of nationalism. The belief that societies should be organised around a state that provides a centralised structure of power and authority is, it is argued, a modern concept,²⁶ one that is instrumental in

imposing a homogenised and alien structure on natural and culturally defined communities that are the repository of diverse ways of life, tolerance and syncreticism of the Indian civilisation.

It is perhaps necessary to remind ourselves that the arguments that have been presented here, in the form of a single narrative, are statements that come from different sites and theoretical framework. The differences amongst the critics are manifest in the definition of concepts, explanation of the present predicament and the choice of the privileged community. Some favour the category of caste, others speak of religious community. A few, however, see the village as the basis of shared perceptions and expectations. Similarly, some critics point to excessive centralisation and state control while others hold the condition of modernity responsible for our present predicament. The former emphasise the need to strengthen the intermediary, traditional institutions of society, the latter value a non-instrumental mode of rationality and wish to restore a sense of belonging and rootedness. Both of them, however, give primacy to the community. Community (defined in terms of *jati*/caste/religion/tribe/village) becomes, on the one hand, the most important unity in a decentralised polity because that is the level and medium through which people can be involved in the social and political process; and on the other, it expresses a form of rationality that offers an alternative to the instrumental and utilitarian ethic that characterises a modern individualising society. In each case it is treated as a valued good: the condition of our historically specific existence and an antidote to the ills of modernity.

In a society where the political arena is continuously invaded and occupied by traditional loyalties of caste and religion, where the individual is frequently defined by these social identities, this analysis makes immediate sense. It provides, in the first instance, a conception of the self that is more sensitive to our historical reality. But much more significantly, it cautions us against the use of categories from the political discourse of liberalism in the West to our culturally distinct social reality. Emphasising the heterogeneity of cultures, it induces respect for tradition and legitimises indigenous modes of rationality. On the whole it offers a new way of relating ourselves to our past and making sense of our present; a way in which we are no longer burdened with the impossible task of forgetting our past or mistrusting the voices that are embedded in local and cultural traditions.

IV

Compared to the advocates of Nehruvian liberalism and rational modernism, the critics of the modern, secular, nation state offer a more adequate conception of the self and a new, more illuminating reading of our historical experience. However, certain aspects of their analyses, particularly their construction of the historical past and understanding of the individual-community relationship, are deeply disturbing: they raise theoretical and political problems that need to be analysed systematically.

The 'critics' displace the abstract individual of liberal discourse with a historically determinate subject, possessing distinctive cultural attributes and community linkages. By placing the individual in a tradition (which s/he inherits as a member of a particular caste, religion, tribe, village, etc.), they historicise subjectivity, yet paradoxically enough, they provide an essentialist and trans-historical reading of that tradition. They equate religion with a non-instrumental rationality and a system of values that order individual and social life. Similarly, they see community existence as the 'other' of a society that is composed of atomised individuals and marked by conflictual relationships. In each case the entity is defined not by any of its historical attributes but by its opposition to a concrete Other. Thus while speaking of religion, these theorists do not refer to any particular religion, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam or Christianity, nor do they refer to the practices of any particular religious community. As essentialist reading of religion, tradition and community allows them to overlook the specific historical practices that give substance to the traditions that we have inherited as members of this or that community. While the advocates of community centred existence are not unaware of the oppressive practices that have historically characterised some of these communities, there is no theoretical space in their framework for a critical assessment of these practices.

In place of a critical reappropriation of tradition, the writings of these theorists justify the totality of our inherited practices and ways of living; indeed they end up justifying tradition *per se*. They do this partially by imbuing it with values that are cherished by the modern consciousness. Tolerance of difference and respect for diversity, which are perhaps two of the most desired modern liberal values, are transferred to another historical time: they are

seen as the defining attributes of traditional forms of social and political organisation. This reversal of categories rehabilitates tradition; it makes it appear more acceptable to the modern consciousness and the contemporary Indian. However, reading the past from the value grid of the present, the critics of the modern, secular nation state never really engage with the past. Instead of identifying a system of values through which traditional life was organised, they assure us that the values that are precious to contemporary liberals were better embodied in our pre-modern existence.

The inadequacies of their historical reading are only supplemented by the silence on the nature of existing community practices and the structures of power embedded in them. But the most serious problems in their analysis relate to the understanding of social embodiment, religious practice and traditional life. While defining the self in terms of its social and cultural attributes, these theorists recognise that individuals are bearers of multiple identities: they are simultaneously members of a family, *jati*, village, region and religion. However, their description of these identities as 'oceanic circles' and their endorsement of each of these identities reinforces the view that individuals participate in the political process as bearers of these many identities simultaneously. The harmonious co-existence of these identities in one and the same person suggests that these identities complement each other and operate with supportive value frames and conceptions of good. This reading of multiple identities fails to recognise the conflict between identities. It neglects the fact that each identity involves a different network of inclusions and exclusions. In each case the self and the other are constructed differently. When we see ourselves as bearers of a particular identity, we foreground a specific interest that cannot be simply displaced by another. There is, in other words, a politics of cultural diversity, and understanding it requires a more differentiated reading of cultural and social identities.

The critics of the modern, secular, nation state use the notion of an embodied self to interrogate the liberal claim that social identities which give individuals their determinate characteristics and personality are not relevant in the political domain. Referring to the problems associated with the distinction between the private and the public domain and the secular principle of neutrality, they argue that identities that constitute the self cannot be effaced at

will in specific domains of action. Moreover, in a society where interpersonal relationships are, to a considerable extent, shaped by community identities, the state has to negotiate with members of different communities at various levels. It cannot, in other words, dissociate itself from them completely. Besides, the principle of secularism has, in most cases, been counterproductive. Historical experience, they argue, shows that the attempts of the state to regulate and redefine community practices have elicited strong reactions; they have only helped strengthen orthodox and fundamentalist forces in society. On the basis of these and other related arguments, these theorists argue that traditional communities should be allowed to regulate their own life with minimum interference from the state. This alternative prescription of political behaviour that follows from their analysis of historical experience is supported and given credibility by the belief that traditional communities are open and tolerant: they allow the existence and expression of difference, and possess internal structures and modes of critique. Both these claims and the conclusions drawn from them are deeply problematical. In the first instance, these arguments equate tolerance with the existence of difference and diversity. Consequently, they see the existence of diverse practices among different communities as a sign of the tolerance of our culture and religious tradition. The fact that the members of each community are closely guided by the inherited practices of that community, that the different practices of these communities privilege certain identities and systematically suppress others, that they frequently define social roles in a similar way, are aspects that are easily ignored. The ability of an individual to distance his/herself from the community practices and to redefine his/her relationship to these is never, therefore, a serious consideration within this framework. As such, it is the existence of differences across communities rather than the availability of space within the community for the articulation of difference that defines this reading of tolerance.

Two things need to be emphasised in this context. First, the existence of difference over space and region does not diminish the oppressive nature of communitarian existence. Second, acknowledging the existence of cultural diversity is one way of giving respect and authentic human existence to the other. But, as a principle, its theoretical value lies in its ability to serve a critical

interest. By exposing ourselves to different ways of living and thinking that are embodied in diverse cultures, we become aware of the finitude of our existence and come to recognise the possibilities of other ways of living and organising ourselves. Exposure to other can, in this sense, serve a critical function: it can create the conditions in which we can critically appropriate our inheritances. The mere existence of difference across space and time is not, therefore, sufficient for an 'authentic' existence: it does not itself create the conditions for change, critical distance or open dialogue.

This does not, however, imply that traditions are monolithic entities, frozen in time. It points instead to another historical reality. Under the present conditions, when the process of individuation has brought to the fore new identities, and gender discourse has redefined social roles in a way that had virtually no place in traditional community structures, it is difficult to envisage an internal critique leading to the redefinition of community practices. In the struggle for redefinition, however, voices that were embedded in tradition and lost over time, may be retrieved and reconstructed, but the critical impulse for such an exercise is likely to come from the changing pattern of material conditions of life and exposure to other ways of thinking about ourselves.

It is difficult to pin our hopes on traditional communities for another reason. As the critics of the modern nation state point out, in industrialising societies like India, the leadership of traditional communities—based on religion, caste or kinship—has passed into the hands of orthodox practitioners. The prevalent path of modernisation has created a large number of urban poor who have been displaced from their original surroundings in which their life had any meaning. Living under conditions of extreme alienation, these people try to give meaning to their lives by recreating old traditional practices and lending support to an orthodox and fundamentalist expression of that tradition and religious order. Now, if this is the form in which community identities manifest themselves in contemporary India, then we need to be extremely cautious about privileging traditional forms of organisation. Judging by the analysis offered by these theorists, it is also difficult to envisage how traditional forms of organisation, particularly religion, could be reconstructed in its 'essential' and true form in the present circumstances.

The 'critics' rightly argue that religion should not be bracketed

as the 'other' of that which is rational and scientific. It should also not be judged by its present form because the manner in which it is being revived, constructed and used cannot be delinked from the process of modernisation. It is the latter assertion that must however alert us against reorganising social life in a way that would give greater power to the leaders of traditional communities. Besides, judging by past experience there is little reason to assume that these communities will be able to regulate social life and resolve conflicts. Leaders of religious communities have, on most occasions, been unable to resolve inter-community conflicts among themselves. Similarly, representatives of religious communities forming district level peace committees, to regulate religious processions and other related activities in the area, have met with little success.²⁷ Consequently, in our attempt to unburden the state and strengthen civil society, we would be better advised to go beyond the organisational framework provided by traditional communities.

V

The problems associated with the analysis offered by these theorists are only in part related to the way in which traditional communities have functioned and continue to function. They arise, much more fundamentally, from the way the individual and the community are understood within this framework. Since traditional forms of community existence—based on caste, religion or tribe—are given priority vis-à-vis an individualist society with a utilitarian ethic, it is the commonality of perceptions and the collective nature of experience that are foregrounded in their writings. The individual is, as a consequence, pushed to the background. Indeed the individual is systematically neglected in their analysis. This neglect is evidenced even in their reading of the Western experience. Thus, secularism is associated with the separation of religion and politics, the delegitimation of religion, and the extension of state's control over sectors of cultural life. What is excluded is the accompanying process through which knowledge, patterns of behaviour and institutional arrangements that were once grounded in divine power are transformed into phenomena of 'purely human creation'.²⁸ Similarly in the narrative of modernity, what is ignored is the discourse on human rights and the institutions of representative

democracy that carry forward the project of secularisation. In other words, what is emphasised is the desecralised conception of the world and the instrumental nature of the emerging rationality, and what is conveniently forgotten is the place of the individual in the project of emancipation.

Working perhaps with the model of Hobbes' philosophy, the 'critics' assume that by making the individual the proprietor of his/her own powers, we would necessarily construct an atomised society in which each individual, pursuing his/her own interests, is continuously in conflict with others. It is well worth remembering that conflict emerged in the Hobbesian framework due to the scarcity of resources and the individual's 'incessant desire for power that ceaseth only in death.' Conflict is, in other words, the consequence of a perfectly competitive society in which individual desires and wants are unilaterally translated as the desire for 'power'. In actual practice, however, competition is neither complete nor endless. Associations emerge within the market that sustain group interests. In any case, what is more significant is that conflict is not a simple and direct consequence of the individual's attempt to define his/her life, interests and desires.

Three conclusions follow from the foregoing discussion. First, an atomised society emerges only when individuals define themselves as rational maximisers of their utilities. Consequently, to construct a society imbued with the spirit of commonness and sociability, we needed to displace this utilitarian, need-based ethics. Diminishing the space for individual self definition and reflection is neither necessary nor desirable. Second, in a society like India, where communities exercise a considerable degree of authority over the individual, the space for self definition cannot create moral and social anarchy of the kind that is lamented by the 'communitarians' in the West. And third, instead of choosing between the particularity of an atomised society and the unreflective unity of community existence, we need a notion in which the particular and the universal are embodied and synthesised. For Hegel, the notion of individuality represented such a unity. We need to retrieve this unity in our conception of the individual and posit it against the abstract individualism of liberal thought.

When we reflect upon the specific character of universality and particularity that characterises individuality, we necessarily move beyond the notion of a disembodied self, disengaged from all past

the starting point of social and political theory, our historicity demands that we start with the Heideggerian conception of Understanding. Problems arise when the modernist desire to forget the past, to break free from traditions and all remnants of 'dogma and superstition', is displaced by an equally romantic desire to retrieve our tradition and to privilege subcultures, traditional community practices and modes of social organisation. As inheritors of the legacies of modernity, though not of its seminal myths, we need to begin with a conception of individuality that takes cognisance of our historical particularity and makes that the basis of moral and political life.

Notes

1. While the critics of the Nehruvian paradigm are many, the political form of the modern, secular, nation state is questioned primarily by A. Nandy, T.N. Madan, V.R. Mehta, R. Kothari, D.L. Sheth, B. Wariavwalla, V. Das, V. Shiva and C. Alvares. Despite the differences between them, their writings collectively provide a critique of the experience of modernity and make a forceful plea for the use of indigenous categories of social and political organisation. Philosophically, they challenge some of the assumptions of liberalism and acknowledge, in its place, the positive role of social and cultural identities and the value of traditional community existence. While making these arguments they operate with an understanding of Indian tradition, Hinduism, traditional communities and community identities that is shared by a much larger group of social scientists. As such, the ideas they represent draw a theoretical justification from a much larger body of social science knowledge. Keeping in mind this wider intellectual discourse, the paper tries to construct the arguments and the theoretical perspective that informs this political vision. Using the *logical construct* as an analytical tool, it reflects upon those forms of political organisation that are, explicitly or implicitly, privileged in these critiques.
2. Within the framework of liberalism, rights also prescribe the limits of state action; nevertheless, the state—as legitimate political authority—is regarded as the guarantor and custodian of the inalienable rights of men. And the civil society provides the conditions under which these rights can be enjoyed by the members of the polity.
3. The most notable exception being V.R. Mehta who presents his case as a critique of the liberal individualist paradigm. However, most of the other theorists also share the belief that a liberal society based on contract and a utilitarian ethic makes human existence expendable; consequently, to move

practices and community linkages. We will begin instead with an individual whose personality expresses the universality of a cultural formation and its way of life. However, while speaking of this 'radically situated' and culturally embedded individual, we need to remember that embeddedness can be conceptualised in at least two ways. We can, like Winch, think of it as 'rule following', or else, like Heidegger, identify it with structures of pre-understanding. In case of the former, we assume that the existence of a community involves the operation of a specific set of rules, and participation in the life of that community requires an application of those rules. In other words, we believe that the actions of individuals are governed by rules that are defined and collectively upheld by the community of which s/he is a member. Since rules have a definite structure and content, it is meaningful and important to speak of situations where rules have been followed and others where they have been violated. After all there are, or can be, rules about rule application and rule following. Thus, when we associate social life and community existence with rule following, we minimise the space for legitimate deviation from the accepted norm. On the other hand, when we follow the Heideggerian example and transform the transcendental age into an historical subject by placing him/her in a tradition, we suggest that tradition, or a particular set of inherited practices, provides the fore-structure of understanding: it constitutes the pre-judgements with which we approach the world. However, these pre-judgements or prejudices are only the fore-conceptions with which we approach the world. Our whole life is not always lived with these prejudices: indeed many of them are revised and reconstituted as we go through our life's experiences. In this framework, a determinate individuality carries its past at every moment of its present existence; it cannot sever its link with it; yet, its actions are not entirely determined by that past. An authentic existence demands both the recognition of historical embeddedness and a critical reflection upon everything that is handed down to the individual. Tradition gives us our personality but it does not foreclose our options: it does not determine our actions completely, nor does it make our choices for us. Armed with new intellectual resources and placed in different circumstances, the individual can, and often does, revise and reconstitute the inherited practices.

Consequently, when we think of a culturally embodied self as

- away from this utilitarian, instrumentalist ethic, we need to construct a society based on natural and/or local communities.
4. See V.R. Mehta, *Ideology, Modernisation and Politics in India* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1983), p. 142; and S. Sabherwal, *India: The Roots of Crisis* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 19. In the writings of other theorists, references are frequently made to 'primary loyalties', 'social and cultural identities' and 'ethnic identities'.
 5. See R. Kumar, 'The Past and Present: An Indian Dialogue', *Daedalus*, Fall (1989), p. 45; S.K. Mitra, 'Desecularising the State: Religion and Politics in India after Independence', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, October (1991), pp. 755-77.
 6. For the people of South Asia, their religion establishes their place in society and bestows meaning on their life, argues T.N. Madan in 'Secularism in its Place', *Journal of Asian Studies*, November (1987), p. 749.
 7. In the words of R. Kothari, 'the essential unity of India has not been political but cultural'. Further, 'India is perhaps the only great historical civilization that maintained its cultural integration without identifying itself with a particular political centre', in *State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1988), pp. 155-57. Also see his *Politics and the People: In Search of a Humane India* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1989), vol. 2, pp. 480-81.
 8. R. Kothari, 'The Indian Enterprise Today', *Daedalus*, Fall (1989), p. 65.
 9. To some extent this thinking informed the initial reservation policy embodied in the Constitution. In the more recent past it has been used to support the recommendations of the Mandal Commission for the extension of reservation for the members of 'Other Backward Castes'. In fact, Kothari maintains that caste is playing a 'secular historical role' in contemporary India. See his 'Caste and Politics: The Great Secular Upsurge', *Times of India*, 28 September 1990.
 10. This kind of argument is usually offered by environmentalists and advocates of sustainable development. Pointing to the problems of a state controlled development policy and the violence to man and nature perpetuated by modern technology, through the green and white revolutions, they suggest that a better and more equitable system would be one that draws upon the local systems of knowledge and information. See V. Shiva, 'The Violence of Reductionist Science', *Alternatives*, April (1987), pp. 243-61; and C. Alvares, 'Science, Colonialism and Violence: A Luddite View', in A. Nandy, ed., *Science, Hegemony and Violence* (Tokyo and Delhi: The U.N. University and Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 68-112.
 11. Informed by this logic, the panchayati raj institutions provide representation to the lower castes in a separate category, to ensure their participation in the political process. In the field of education too, community based structures are being used to identify target groups and their specific needs. Informal education and the New Literacy Mission, it is argued, can be successful only when such forms of identification are used to differentiate between the needs and requirements of different groups of people.
 12. The displacement of caste by religion makes a crucial difference in our judgement of the various political forces in contemporary India. However, it does not make a significant difference to the reading of our shared Indian tradition.

- Since it places the same value on our inheritances, it allows a theoretical move from the notion of embeddedness to communitarian existence.
13. Two related arguments are made by Kothari. First, castes function as a part of the caste system only when they 'behave "segmentally" and according to a system of hierarchy and "closed stratification" When they operate as political entities they belong to the political system', in his edited collection, *Caste in Indian Politics* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970), p. 6; second, 'by being different things at different times/points in social interactions, it provides for immense flexibility and produces tension management and assimilative capabilities', in his *Politics in India* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970), p. 231.
 14. There are, we are told, ' . . . no fundamentalists or revivalists in traditional society', Madan, 'Secularism', *JAS*, p. 749.
 15. A. Nandy, 'Secularism', *Seminar*, June 1992, p. 29.
 16. The fundamentalist revival of religion in Iran and other countries of Asia has frequently been understood in these terms. In India, the revival of traditional rituals and practices, such as sati, has been explained in this way. See A. Nandy, 'The Sociology of Sati', *Indian Express*, 5 October 1989.
 17. See D. Chakrabarty, 'Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal's Jute Mill-hands in the 1890s', in V. Das, ed., *Mirrors of Violence* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 158-64.
 18. A. Nandy, 'An Anti-Secularist Manifesto', *Seminar*, October (1985), pp. 22-24.
 19. A. Nandy, 'The Sociology of Sati', *Express*.
 20. Making a distinction between religion as ideology and religion as faith, Nandy argues that the former works with the concept 'of a well-bounded, mutually exclusive religious identities', while the latter shares in the diversity of every day life. A. Nandy, 'The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance', in Das, ed., *Mirrors*, pp. 69-73.
 21. V. Das, 'National Honour and Practical Kinship: Of Abducted Women and Unwanted Children', paper presented at JNU Gender Studies Forum, 18 September 1992.
 22. Nandy, 'This Politics of Secularism', in Das, ed., *Mirrors*, p. 70.
 23. In this argument, the attribute of tolerance that was previously associated with all practised religions is seen as the special attribute of Hinduism. The latter is, by this logic, placed in a special category, and occasionally the syncreticism of the 'great Indian tradition' is collapsed to the tolerance of Hinduism.
 24. D.L. Sheth, 'State and the Movements', paper presented at The Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, August-September 1992; R. Kothari, *Rethinking Development: In Search of Humane Alternatives* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1988), pp. 190-200.
 25. Mehta, *Modernisation and Politics*, pp. 130-31; B. Wariavwalla, 'In Search of National Identities', paper presented at The Indian Institute of Advanced Study, August-September 1992; and A. Nandy, 'The Political Culture of the Indian State', *Daedalus*, Fall (1989), pp. 13-14.
 26. Kothari, *Politics and the People*, pp. 481-82.
 27. This conclusion is reinforced by some empirical studies. See, for instance, M. Dagga, 'A Case Study of Communal Riots in Jaipur', Report for the Project 'Securities and Violence' (mimeo).
 28. See, U. Baxi, 'The "Struggle" for the Redefinition of Secularism in India: Some Preliminary Reflections', p. 5 (mimeo).

The Arts: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Music and the Dance*

The Spirit of Indian Art

- By A. L. Basham

Nearly all the artistic remains of ancient India are of a religious nature, or where at least made for religious purposes. Secular art certainly existed, for literature shows that kings dwelt in sumptuous palaces, decorated with lovely wall paintings and sculpture, though all these have vanished. Much has been said and written about Indian art since, some forty years ago, European taste began to doubt the established canons of the 19th century and looked to Asia and Africa for fresh aesthetic experience. Since then most authorities on the subject, Indian and European alike have stressed the religious and mystical aspect of Indian art. While admitting the realism and earthiness of the earliest sculpture, most critics have read the truths of Vedanta or Buddhism into the artistic remains of our period, and have interpreted them as expressions of deep religious experience, sermons in stone on the oneness of all things in the Universal Spirit.

One student at least disagrees with this interpretation. There are indeed a few remains which seem imbued with an intensity of religious feeling rare in the art of the world, but it is the full and active life of the times which is chiefly reflected in the art of ancient India, at first directly, as at Bharhut, Sanchi and Amaravati, then with a gentle idealism, as at Ajanta, and finally in the multitude of figures, divine and human, carved on the many temples of the Middle Ages. In all these phases there is a horror vacui and an intense vitality, which remained ours rather of this world than the next, and suggest to us the warm bustle of the Indian City and the turbulent pollution of the Indian forest.

Gothic architecture and sculpture are vertical. Spire and arch point upward, and as the style develops the spire becomes taller and the arch more pointed. The Christs, saints and angels of the Middle Ages in Europe are often disproportionately tall, and their tallness is accentuated by long garments reaching to the ankles. Their poses are generally restful, and they rarely smile. Medieval European art was truly religious; its conventions seem to have been deliberately designed to lead the worshipper's thoughts away from the world of flesh to the things of the spirit. Much of it was the work of pious monks, or of men with deep religious vocations.

The tendency of Indian art is diametrically opposite to that of medieval Europe. The temple towers, though tall, are solidly based on earth. The ideal type is not abnormally tall, but rather short and stocky. Gods and demigods alike are young and handsome; their bodies are rounded and well-nourished, often by European standards rather effeminate. Occasionally they are depicted as grim or wrathful, but generally they smile and sorrow is rarely portrayed. With the exception of the

* Extracted from : The Wonder that was India : By A. L. Basham

type of the dancing Siva the sacred icon is always firmly grounded, either seated or with both feet flat on the ground. We need hardly mention that all-Indian temple sculpture. Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina alike, made full use of the female form as a decorative motif, always scantily dressed, and nearly always in accordance with Indian standards of beauty.

Asceticism and self-denial in various forms are praised in much Indian religious literature. But the ascetics who appear in sculpture are usually well fed and cheerful. As an example we may cite the colossal rock-cut medieval image of the Jaina saint Gommatesvara at Sravana Belgola in Mysore. He stands bolt upright in the posture of meditation known as Kayotsarga, with feet firm on the earth, and arms held downwards but not touching the body, and he smiles faintly. The artist must have tried to express the soul almost set free from the trammels of matter, and about to leave for its final resting-place of everlasting bliss at the top of the universe. Whatever the intentions of the artist, however, Gommatesvara is still an ordinary young man of his time, full of calm vitality. The saint is said to have stood for so long in meditation that creepers twined round his motionless legs, and these are shown in the sculpture; but though intended to portray his sanctity, they do but emphasize that he is a creature of the earth whom the earth pulls back.

Ancient India's religious art differs strikingly from her religious literature. The latter is the work of men with vocations, Brahmans, monks and ascetics. The former came chiefly from the hands of secular craftsmen, who, though they worked according to priestly instructions and increasingly rigid iconographical rules, loved the world they knew with an intensity which is usually to be seen behind the religious forms in which they expressed themselves. In our opinion the usual inspiration of Indian art is not so much a ceaseless quest for the Absolute as a delight in the world as the artist found it, a sensual vitality, and a feeling of growth and movement as regular and organic as the growth of living things upon earth.

Of the visual arts of ancient and medieval India much architecture and sculpture and a little painting have survived. As most of the existing sculpture was intended to be ancillary to architecture we deal with the latter first.

The utilitarian brick buildings of the Harappa Culture, strong and competent though they were, had apparently little aesthetic merit, and will not be mentioned here. With the exception of the walls of Rajagira (p.198), which also have no artistic value, we have no significant architectural remains between the Harappa period and that of the Mauryas. This was due to the fact that few if any buildings were made of stone during this time.

Megasthenes mentions that the palace of Chandragupta Maurya, though very large and luxurious, was built of carved and gilded wood, and the earliest stone buildings to have survived were evidently modeled on wooden originals. We must not assume, from the complete lack of material remains, that Indian building in the Mauryan period, or even before, was mean or primitive. The Mauryan monolithic

columns prove that the craftsmen of those days had a thorough mastery of working in stone, and if the great cities of Mauryan times were built of wood we must attribute this chiefly to the comparative scarceness of stone in the Gangetic Plain and the abundance of timber where it is now scarce. There is no evidence of a cultural advance in the Middle Ages, when building in stone became common, but foreign contacts, but also to the gradual disappearance of timber forests from the more populous and civilized regions of India.

The wonderful Mauryan columns with their finely carved capitals fall rather under the head of sculpture than of architecture, for most of those, which survive, had no architecture purpose. Fragments of similar columns, found at Patna, supported thereof of a place, which had been reasonably identified as that of Ashoka, the remains of the Patna pillared has are so fragmentary that the plan of the building cannot be accurately reconstructed, but it was evidently a large one. At this time, however, stone buildings must still have been very rare. All the Mauryan pillars and other products of Mauryan stonemasons come from the same quarry, at Chunar, not far from Banaras, and all bear the stamp of the same school. They are the work of craftsmen who had learnt much from Persia, and perhaps a little from Greece, but had given their output distinctive Indian characteristics. Their workshops were probably maintained by the Mauryan kings, and vanished with the dynasty. Working in stone had then to make new beginning in India.

THE STUPA

The Stupa began as an earthen burial mound, which was revered by the local population, and we have seen that the cult stupas was taken up by Buddhism, and that Asoka raised stupas in the Buddha's honour all over India. Only one stupa, in Negal, survives in the form in which the great emperor left it, but excavations of existing stupas have shown the character of the earlier ones. They were large hemispherical domes, containing a central chamber, in which the relics of the Buddha were placed in a small casket, often beautifully carved in crystal. The core of the stupa was of urburnt brick, and the outer face of burnt brick, covered with a thick layer of paster, the stupa was crowned by an umbrella of wood or stone, and was surrounded by a wooden fence enclosing a path for the ceremonial clockwise circumambulation (pradaksina), which was the chief form of reverence paid to the relics within it.¹

In the period between the Mauryas and the Guptas much wealth and energy were spent on Buddhist architecture, and the older stupas were greatly enlarged and beautified. Of these three are specially noteworthy-those at Bharhut in Madhya Bharat, Sanchi in the old Bhopal state, and Amaravati in the lower Kistna Valley.

¹ It has been suggested that the stupa, like the later Hindu temple, was thought of as microcosm of the universe. There are mesopotamian precedents for this belief, and the passion for cosmic symbolism, evident in India from Vedic times, certainly led to the making of the analogy at least in respect of the temple. But, though many authorities would disagree with us, we do not believe that cosmic symbolism played any great part in the thought of the ancient Indian architect.

The Bharhut stupa perhaps in its present form dating from the middle of the 2nd century B.C., is important chiefly for its sculpture, and the stupa itself has now vanished. That at Sanchi, on the other hand, is one of the most striking architectural remains of ancient India.

In the 2nd century B.C. the old Sanchi stupa was enlarged to twice its original size, becoming a hemisphere of about 120 feet in diameter. It was then faced with well-cut masonry laid in regular courses, and besides the lower path on ground level, an upper terraced path some 16 feet from the ground was added. The old wooden railings were replaced by stone ones 9 feet high, tenoned and mortised in imitation of carpentry. Finally, towards the end of the 1st century B. C., four glorious gateways (torana) were added at the four cardinal points. Lesser stupas and monastic buildings surrounded the great stupa.

The Sanchi gateways are perhaps more noteworthy for their carved ornamentation than their architecture. Each consists of two square columns, above which are three curved architraves supported by animals or dwarfs, the whole reaching some 34 feet above ground-level. The construction of these gateways, from technical point of view, is primitive, and it has been suggested their design is based on the log or bamboo portcullis of the ancient Indian village. The finish, on the other hand, is remarkably good, and the carvings are among the most fresh and vigorous products of the Indian sculptor.

In respect of size few Indian stupas greatly exceeded the Sanchi, but in Ceylong the stupa reached tremendous proportions. The Abhayagiri Dagaba at Anuradhapura, the capital of the early kings of Ceylon, was 327 feet in diameter, and larger than some of the pyramids of Egypt. It reached its present size, after a succession of enlargements, in the 2nd century A.D.

In India stupa architecture became more and more ornate. The Stupa of Amaravati, which in its final form was completed c.200 A.D., was larger than that of Sanchi, and its two promenades were adorned with carved panels (some of which can be seen British Museum) telling the story of the life of the Buddha. Meanwhile in Northern India stupas grew taller in proportion to their bases. They were often set on square platforms, which in Burma and Indonesia were developed into stepped pyramids, the largest of which is the enormous stupa of Borobudur, in Java, built in the 8th century A. D. Pinnacles became higher, and developed towards the spring forms of the present-day temples of Burma and Siam.

Of later Indian stupas the two most famous are those of Samath and Nalanda. The tall stupa of Samath, near Banaras, the scene of the Buddha's first sermon, of which now little more than the inner core remains, was once a most imposing structure of beautifully patterned brickwork with a high cylindrical upper dome rising from a lower hemispherical one, and large images of the Buddha set in gable ends at the cardinal points. In its final form it dates from the Gupta period.

The stupa at Nalanda, seven times successively enlarged in this present ruined state gives the impression of a brick pyramid with steps leading up to its terraces. It was originally a tall stupa raised on a high base, with a smaller stupa at each corner, but the monument underwent so many alterations in Gupta and Pala times that it is now difficult for the untrained eye to recognize its original form at any one stage of its development.

Around the great stupas were lesser ones, often containing the ashes of monks famous for their piety and learning, and a whole complex of buildings – monasteries, shrine-rooms, preaching halls and resthouses for pilgrims. At the greater Buddhist sites such as Nalanda the groups of monastic buildings were often surrounded by fortress-like walls, in their present partial dilapidation these heavy domes sometimes seem a little forbidding. Originally the lime washed or plastered stupa shone brilliantly white in the tropical sunlight, its pinnacle, now generally broken, rising like a golden spear from the ceremonial stone umbrella on top of the dome. Then it must have given a different impression. The great Ruvanvali Dagaba at Anuradhapura in Ceylon, which in recent years has been restored and is once more used in Buddhist worship, rising white in the distance out of the plain, shows the stupa at its best, as a worthy emblem of a great religion.

CAVE TEMPLES

Of the centuries before the Gupta period the chief architectural remains, other than stupas and their surrounding gateways and railings, are artificial caves, excavated for religious purposes. Early specimens show a slavish imitation of carpentry, which proves conclusively that the art of building in stone was still in its infancy. Thus two of the caves of Barabar Hill, near Gaya, dedicated by Asoka to Ajivika monks, are in the form of a plain rectangular outer hall, at one end of which is an inner chamber with a curved wall and over-hanging eaves. The caves were evidently substituted for a standardized religious meeting place consisting of a round thatched hut standing in a courtyard, and their designer could not transcend the pattern to which he had been used. Similar dependence on wooden models is evident in many other features of design until the Gupta period.

The caves of the Barabar and Nagarjuni Hills are quite unadorned, with the exception of one at Nagarjuni, near Barabar, which has a comparatively simple carved entrance, added during or soon after the Mauryan period. The inner walls of all the caves are finely polished, no doubt by workmen of the school which was responsible for the polish of the Asokan columns.

Later cave temples and monasteries are to be found in many parts of India, but it was in the Western Deccan, under the Satavahana Empire and its successors, that the largest and most famous artificial caves were excavated. The oldest Deccan cave, at Bhaja, near Poona, consists of a deep apsidal hall, cut in solid rock, with a row of plain octagonal pillars near the walls, which support curved ribs

carved to represent the barrel vaulting of a wooden building. At the further end of the hall is a small stupa, also cut from solid rock, and the outside of the cave has a facade, carved like a gable, with smaller ornamental gables on either side. Beside this cave, which was a meeting hall for Buddhist monks and lay worshippers, is a second cave consisting of a broad cutting into the rock, leading to five cells, which were the dwellings of the monks,

From these beginnings the cave temples developed in size and splendour. The finest single example is the great caitya hall at Karli, probably made about the beginning of the Christian era. This is cut 124 feet deep into the rock, and is of the same general pattern as that at Bhaja and many other caves of the Western Deccan, but much developed in size and splendour. The columns are no longer plain and austere, but by a process which can be traced through earlier stages, they have become heavy and ornate. Each is set on a square stepped plinth, and rises from a bulbous base, which is carved to represent a large pot with base and rim; this is another survival of wooden construction, for the octagonal wooden pillars of earlier days were bedded in large earthenware pots to protect them from ants and other insects. Each pillar carries a complicated group of horses and elephants with riders to support the roof, which is carved in imitation of the timber rafters of barrel vaulting. The caitya or shrine at the end of the halls is much enlarged in comparison with those of other caves.

The simple facades of the earlier caves were developed into elaborately carved verandas, usually with a large window, the full size of the gable-end, which let light into the hall. The Karli cave has three fine entrances, and a frieze of relief sculpture on the lower levels, with small carved gable-ends above.

With the caitya halls the associated rock-cut monasteries or sangharamas also developed in size and splendour as a cave monastery became too small for its inhabitants a new cave was cut nearby and so the complex of caves grew over the centuries. The most famous of these cave groups is that of Ajanta, in the north-west corner of Hyderabad. Here no less than twenty-seven caves, some going 100 feet deep into the rock, were excavated in the horseshoe curve of a hillside, not far from the great trade route leading from the North to the Deccan. The earliest caves date from the 2nd century B. C., while others are as late as the 7th century A. D. The splendid sculpture and lovely paintings with which they are adorned make them one of the most glorious monuments of India's past.

Perhaps even more impressive are the later cave temples of Ellora, near Aurangabad, some thirty miles from Ajanta. Here are no less than thirty-four caves, constructed from the 5th to the 8th centuries A. D., most of them Hindu but some Buddhist and Jain. The crowning achievement of Ellora is the great Kailasanatha Temple, excavated on the instructions of the Rastrakuta emperor Krishna (C.A.D. 756-773). With this the concept of the cave temple was transcended, for the king was not satisfied with a mere hollow in the rock. The entire rock face was cut away and a splendid temple carved like a statue from the

hillside, complete with shrine- room, hall, gateway, votive pillars, lesser shrines and cloisters, the whole adorned with divine figures and scenes large and small of a grace and strength rarely seen again in Indian art. The ground plan of Kailasanatha is of about the same size as the Parthenon, and it is half as high again. The labour necessary to construct it, however, was less than that which would be required to build a comparable temple of masonry, for transport created no problem, and the process of construction, beginning at the top of the cliff and working down to the base, avoided the need of scaffolding. But no considerations of this kind can disparage the glory of Kailasanatha, "the most stupendous single work of art executed in India".

Kailasanatha is the earliest temple hewn from solid rock. There are to be found at Mamallapuram, on the sea coast some thirty miles south of Madras, where seventeen temples, none very large in size, were carved from outcropping hillocks of granite under the patronage of 7th century Pallava kings. The most famous of these, the "Seven Pagodas", still show the influence of wood construction, and are of a distinctive style, possibly looking back to Dravidian prototypes.

The latest cave-temples of importance are those of Elephanta, a beautiful little island off Bombay. These, in the same style as those of Ellora, are famous for their sculpture, especially for the great Trimurti figure of Siva. After these no important caves were excavated. Indians had long known the art of building in stone. The Kailasanatha Temple carved in exact imitation of masonry, showed the dissatisfaction with the older cave form. The great period of medieval temple building had begun.

TEMPLES

The earliest free-standing religious building of which traces remain a small round hall, probably originally containing a Buddhist stupa, at Bairat near Jaipur; this dates from the 3rd century B.C., and was made of brick and wood; little but the foundations now exist, and the form had no future.

The next landmark in temple architecture is the temple generally known, from the modern name of the site, as that of Jandial, excavated from one of the mounds which covered the city of Takasila. This, one of the important buildings of the Greek city, contained a square inner sanctuary, a meeting hall and a courtyard, and its outer and inner entrances were each flanked by two large pillars of orthodox Ionian pattern. The Jandial temple was probably Zoroastrian, and had no direct successors, but the influence of Western architecture is clearly to be seen in Kashmir, where columns of Hellenic type were used throughout the medieval period, in conjunction with distinctive pyramidal roofs and arches surmounted by pointed gables, which give the Kashmir style an almost Gothic appearance. Most famous Kashmir's early temples is the Temple of the Sun at Martand, dating from the 8th century. There are no remains of free-standing Hindu temples erected before the Gupta period, though by this time they must long have been built in

wood, clay and brick. From the Gupta period, however, several examples survive, chiefly in Western India, all showing the same general pattern. Pillars were usually ornate, with heavy bell-shaped capitals surmounted by animal motifs, and the entrances were often carved with mythological scenes and figures. All the Gupta temples were small, and most had flat roofs. Their masonry was held together without mortar, and was far larger and thicker than was necessary for the comparatively small buildings. Evidently their builders had not yet fully mastered their technique, and were still thinking in terms of the cave. The finest Gupta temple, that of Deogarh near Jhansi, probably of the 6th century, marks a great advance. Here iron dowels were used to hold the masonry together, and a small tower rose above the sanctum. The portal veranda, was continued all round the building, making a covered walk.

The standard type of the Hindu temple, which has persisted from the 6th century to the present day, was not fundamentally different from that of the ancient Greeks. The heart of the temple was a small dark shrine-room (*garbhagriha*), containing the chief icon. This opened on a hall for worshippers (*mandapa*), originally a separate building, but usually joined to the shrine-room by a vestibule (*antarala*). The hall was approached by a porch (*ardhamandapa*). The shrine-room was generally surmounted by a tower, while lesser towers rose from other parts of the building. The whole was set in a rectangular courtyard, which might contain lesser shrines, and was often placed on a raised platform.

The medieval period in India was, like the Middle Ages in Europe, an age of faith. With better techniques of stone construction new temples sprang up everywhere to replace earlier wooden buildings, and kings and chiefs vied with one another in their foundation. Strict canons of design in both architecture and sculpture were laid down in textbooks (*silpasastra*), some of which survive. The technique of architecture was not far advanced, despite the great achievements of the period. Though arches occur in the cave temples and in Kashmir, the art of making a true arch, dome or vault, seems to have been ignored, although corbelling—the building up of an arch or dome by overlapping courses of brick or masonry—was widely practised, and produced work of great beauty. Mortar was known, but rarely used, for the style of arch-less and domeless architecture employed made it virtually unnecessary.

The temple was ornately decorated, often even to the dark shrine-rooms lighted only by flickering oil-lamps. Despite this ornateness the apprenticeship of his tradition in rock architecture gave the architect a strong sense of mass. Heavy cornices, strong pillars, wide in proportion to their height, and the broad base of the *Sikhara*, or tower, give to Indian temple architecture a feeling of strength and solidity, only in part counteracted by the delicately ornate friezes and the many figures in high or low relief which often fill the whole surface of the temple wall.

Considering the size of the land, Indian temple architecture is remarkably uniform, but authorities distinguish two chief styles and numerous schools. The Northern or

Indo-Aryan style prefers a with rounded top and curvilinear outline, while the tower of the Southern or Dravidian style is usually in the shape of a rectangular truncated pyramid. The stages of stylistic development are clearer in the South than in the North, where many ancient temples were destroyed by the Muslim invaders. We therefore consider the styles of the Peninsular first.

Temple building gained much from the patronage of the Pallava and Chalukya kings in the 6th-8th centuries. Important early temples of the former dynasty are to be found at Mamallapuram, already referred to, and Kanci, while the Chalukyas left temple remains at their capital Badami, and the nearby site of Aihole, both in Hyderabad. Both styles show the gradual emancipation of the architect from the techniques of carpentry and cave architecture. The apogee of the Pallava style was reached in the Shore Temple at Mamallapuram and the Kailasanatha Temple of Kanci, built early in the 8th century. The latter has a pyramidal tower formed of two courses of small barrel vaults, surmounted by a solid cupola suggesting a Buddhist stupa.

The stupa of the Pallavas was developed further under the Cola dynasty (10th-12th centuries), the finest products of which are the great temple of Siva at Tanjore, built by Rajaraja the Great (985-1014), and the temple built by his successor, Rajendra I, at his new capital of Gangaikondacolapuram, near Kumbakonam. The former was probably the largest temple built in India up to that time, the comparatively modest tower of the Pallava style was replaced by a great pyramid, rising from a tall upright base and crowned with a domed final, the whole being nearly 200 feet high. This set the style of Dravidian *sikhara*, which has continued with some variation down to the present day. Both these temples contain elaborate pillared and beautiful decoration.

In the next phase of Dravidian architecture the emphasis shifted the tower above the chief-shrine to the entrance gateway of the surrounding wall. Though there are a few records of the desecration of temples by hostile sectarians or invaders, it is difficult to find a practical reason for the growing custom of surrounding South Indian temples with strong and high walls, unless this was done in imitation of the palaces of kings, with which the temples had much in common. From the 12th century onwards it became usual to fortify the temple, often with three square concentric walls, with gates on the four sides. The gates were surmounted by watchtowers or gatehouses, and these developed into soaring towers (*gopuram*), generally much taller than the modest *sikhara* over the central shrine. The entrance tower was usually in the form of an oblong pyramid, with its broadest side parallel to the wall. The new style is often called oblong pyramid, with its broadest side parallel to the wall. The new style is often called Pandyan, from the name of the dynasty which supplanted the Colas in the Tamil country, and the kings of which were responsible for building walls and gateway towers round many existing shrines. The style introduced more elaborate ornamentation, and the use of animal forms in pilasters and columns, including the rampant horses and leogryphs which give a distinctive character to late Dravidian architecture.

The culmination of the Pandyan style lies in the mighty temple complexes of Madurai, Srirangam, and elsewhere, which are strictly outside our period; belonging in their present form to the 17th century. The great temple of Madurai is the most famous and beautiful of these, but the largest is the Vaisnavite temple of Srirangam, which is contained in an outer wall measuring 2,475 by 2,880 feet, and has six inner walls, all with gopurams, surrounding a shrine of comparatively modest proportions. These later towers were covered with sculptured figures.

While these developments were taking place in the Tamil country, other styles developed in the Deccan, under the Calukyas, Rastrakutas and Hoysalas. The earliest Calukyan temples closely resemble the Guptan in style. By the 8th century they had developed individual features, including the wide overhanging caves which became characteristic of the medieval temples of the Central Deccan. The later Calukyas and Hoysalas (11th -14th centuries) developed a more elaborate style. Their temples were no longer built on a rectangular plan, but were polygonal or stellate, raised on a tall solid platform of the same shape as the building. These temples give a strong feeling of flatness, for platforms and walls alike are covered with rather narrow carved friezes of elephants, horsemen, geese, monsters (yali), and scenes of mythology and legend. The grotesque mask (kirtimukha)² became very common as a decorative feature, and turned columns, often ornately carved, were widely used. The largest and most famous temples of this style, at Halebidu (Dorasamudra, the Hoysala capital) and Belur, have no towers, and it is thought that they were not completed. Some smaller temples of the same period have towers, notably the charming temple of Somnathpur, which has three low dome-like shikharas, their breadth emphasized by parallel mouldings. Its profusion of pillars, and its abhorrence not only of blank spaces but even of plane surfaces and straight lines, tend to give this style an impression of wedding-cake prettiness, despite the solid proportions of its masonry and the brilliance of its sculptured decoration.

The school which flourished under the Vijayanagara Empire, and reached its apogee in the 16th century, shows both Pandyan and Hoysala features. The florid carving of the Hoysalas was developed with even greater exuberance, and new elements appeared in temple complex. As well as the main shrine every important temple in South India was provided with a shrine for the amman, the god's chief wife, which was often nearly as large as the main shrine itself, and a marriage-hall (kalyanamandapam), wherein the icons of and goddess were ceremonially united on festival days. Another feature of the Vijayanagara style is the profusion of strong yet delicate carving which adorns the pillared halls, the many columns of which are so decorated that they become sculptures in their own right. Prancing horses, vigorous and energetic, leap from the stone, with leopards and other

² The Kirtimukha is found in other South Indian schools as a decorative motif, especially in the makara-torana, a gateway with a large kirtimukha made above the lintel connected by foliate designs to two makaras or sea monsters at the base of the doorposts. These motifs were exported to South-East Asia and became regular features of Indonesian and Cambodian architecture.

fantastic monsters. For brilliancy of decorative imagination the Vijayanagara style of architecture was never surpassed in Hindu India. Its finest production is undoubtedly the Vitthala Temple at Hampi, the old Vijayanagara.

In the chief cities of Northern India almost all traces of the architecture of the Hindu period have vanished. Even in holy Banaras all the great and famous temples are comparatively recent. One important exception, however, is the Buddhist temple at Gaya the main tower of which is probably as early as, the 6th century. This is a large pyramid of brickwork, set on a high plinth; it is adorned with parallel courses of "caitya, window" pattern is surmounted by a lofty pinnacle which was originally a small stupa. Similar towers existed in other Buddhist monastic establishments, but have long since vanished. The Gaya tower suggests rather the Southern than the Northern style of sikhara, but other temples of the period either have no towers or have small curvilinear ones which are evidently the prototypes of the later Northern sikhara. Medieval North Indian architecture is best illustrated by three schools—those of Orissa, Bundelkhand, and Gujarat and South Rajasthan. There were other local developments, as well as the distinctive style of Kashmir which we have already noted, but these three are certainly the most important, and their products are the best preserved.

The Orissan school flourished from the 10th to the 13th centuries, and its chief monuments lie in and around the towns of Bhubanesar and Puri. The finest Orissan temple is the Lingaraja at Bhubanesar, which shows the North Indian sikhara in its final form—a tower which begins to curve inwards at about one third of its height, with rounded top crowned by a flat stone disc (amalaka) and a final (kalasa). The upward movement of this graceful curving tower is emphasized by deep vertical inlets, but its solidity and firm basis on earth are very evident. The Lingaraja, like most Orissan temples, is built as a series of four halls—a hall of offerings, a dancing hall an assembly hall and a sanctuary.³ The sanctuary is crowned by the great tower, but the other three elements of the temple, leading one by one to the shrine, are also roofed with characteristic towers of smaller size, carrying the eye to the main sikhara. The whole temple enclosure of the Lingaraja is filled with smaller shrines, built on the pattern of the great one.

The Orissan architects were lavish with their exterior decoration, and their sculptors produced works of great merit, but the interiors of their temples are unadorned. In the larger temples the corbeled roofs were often partly supported by iron girders; a striking technical innovation.

Among the most important Orissan temples are the Temple of Visnu-Jagannatha at Puri, still one of the most famous shrines of India, and the "Black Pagoda" of Konark, built in the 13th Century. The latter, a temple of Surya, sun-god, was formerly one of the largest and most splendid temples on India, much larger than those of Bhubanesar. The tower, over 200 feet high, has long since fallen, but the

³Often referred to by the modern vernacular names, bhog mandir, nat mandir, jagmohan, an deul respectively.

great assembly-hall remains. Unlike the other temples of this region that of Konark had the two smaller outer halls completely separate from the main structure, and assembly-hall and tower were built on an imposing platform, round which were carved twelve decorated wheels, 10 feet in diameter. The entrance is reached by a broad flight of steps, flanked on either by prancing horses, the whole representing the chariot in which sun-god rides across the heavens. The court of the temple was rated with large free-standing sculptures of great strength and beauty. The exceptionally frank eroticism of many of the Konarak sculptures has given the "Black Pagoda" a rather infamous reputation. Maithuna figures, of couples closely embracing actually in coitu, are common enough as decorative features of many Indian temples, but those of Konarak are exceptionally vivid. Many suggestions have been made as to the true significance of these figures; it has been suggested that they merely served the mundane purpose of advertising the charms of the devadasis, or temple prostitutes, or that they were intended to represent the world of the flesh, contrast to the bare and austere interior, which symbolized the things of the spirit; probably they were connected, in the minds of their designers, with the sexual mysticism which played so great a part in medieval Indian religious thought. No doubt the temple of Konarak was a centre of a flourishing tantric cult.

Under the Candella kings of Bundelkhand a great school of architecture flourished in the 10th and 11th centuries, the chief work of which is a beautiful group of temples at Khajuraho, about 100 miles South-East of Jhansi. These temples are built on a rather different plan from those of Orissa, and are not very large the finest, a Saivite temple known as Kandariya-Mahadeo, was built about A.D. 1000, and not more than 100 feet high. The standard type of Khajuraho temple contains a shrine-room or sanctuary, an assembly-hall, and an entrance portico. Whereas in the Orissan temple these elements are conceived rather as separate entities joined together by vestibules, the Khajuraho architects treated them as a whole, and though each part has its own roof they are not structurally separate. The Khajuraho sikhara, like those of most Northern temples, is curvilinear, but differs from the type of Orissa. It is curved for its whole length, and its upward thrust is accentuated by miniature sikharas emerging from the central tower. The crowning discs of these projections break the upward movement, and remind the observer that the divine is to be found on earth as well as in heaven. The effect of the whole, despite its symmetry, is one of organic and natural growth. The tower, and indeed the whole temple, seems intimately at one with the earth, suggesting an enormous ant-hill, or a high peak surrounded by lesser mountains. Though expressed in the most baroque of styles, the Kandariya-Mahadeo is a striking instance of a feature common in much Indian art, a feeling of unity with nature.

The halls and porticoes of the Khajuraho temples are also crowned with smaller towers, which rise progressively to lead the eye up to the main tower, and thus intensify the impression of a mountain range. While the Orissan roof is pyramidal in pattern. The Khajuraho builders is broken by pillared window openings, which relieve the monotony of the ornately carved stone. A further distinctive feature of

the style was the introduction of small transepts to the assembly hall, giving the whole a ground plan not unlike that of a Gothic cathedral.

Like all other schools of architecture, that of Khajuraho made much of carving. Here, in contrast to Orissa, the temples were adorned with sculpture both outside and in, and the halls have beautifully carved domical ceilings. The style of Khajuraho sculpture lacks the solidity and vigour of the best of Orissa, but the wonderful friezes of statuary contain figures of a graceful vitality, warmer and more immediately attractive than those of the Orissan temples.

In Rajasthan and Gujarat are many medieval temples, some of much architectural merit. Here we can only mention the greatest of these Western schools, that which rose under the patronage of the Caulukya or Solanki kings of Gujarat, and flourished from the 11th the 13th centuries. This kingdom was wealthy from the seaborne trade with the Arabs and Persians, and much of the treasure of kings, ministers and merchants alike was expended on beautiful Jaina and Hindu temples.

The most famous buildings of this school are the lovely Jaina shrines of Mount Abu, the style of which is not very different fundamentally from that of Khajuraho. The temples were built on high platforms and usually consisted of a shrine and hall only, without an entrance portico. The *sikhara* over the shrine, like those of Khajuraho, was adorned with a large number of miniature towers, and the ceilings were in the form of corbelled domes. Perhaps through the influence of Muslim architectural styles, these ceilings were carved so as to give the impression of a true dome, the steps of the corbelling being skilfully concealed by the sculptor, and the flat crossbeams, supported on pillars, often being adorned with large brackets meeting at the centre, which gave an arch-like effect, though the true arch was never employed. The most outstanding feature of this style was its minute and lovely decorativeness. The shrines of Mount Abu, made of cool white marble, are covered with the most delicate and ornate carving, especially in the interiors: it is, however, rather flaccid and repetitive. In comparison with Bhubaneswar, Konarak and Khajuraho the rich decoration of Mount Abu has a flavour of cold lifelessness.

Remains of pre-Muslim secular buildings are few. In the Middle Ages kings and chiefs certainly built stone palaces, but of these only the base of Vijayanagara throne-room, and some remains in Ceylon, have survived. Several cities of Rajasthan and Gujarat have finely carved gateways from the medieval period. But, though secular architecture was no doubt highly developed, it is clear that India's architects and masons devoted their greatest energies to temple building. Working according to strict traditions, but showing much ingenuity and originality within the main standardized pattern, they erected monuments of fantastic beauty with the simplest technical equipment. Many patient hands reared the *sikharas* above the plain, and capped them with great slabs of stone, raised on enormous ramps of earth, like the higher courses of the pyramids of Egypt. Whether or not the architects and craftsmen were conscious of the symbolism, the temple was looked

on by some as a microcosm of the world, as the open-air sacrifice had been in earlier days. In sculpture, and often in painting also, all the gods were depicted on its walls, every aspect of divine and human existence symbolized. Like Hindu civilization itself, the temple was at once voluptuous and austere, rooted in earth, but aspiring to heaven.

SCULPTURE

In architecture there is no real trace of relationship between the brick houses of Harappa and the stone temples of Hindu India, and the art of building in stone seems to have been learnt slowly from the time of Mauryas onwards. The earliest sculpture of historical times, on the other hand, shows a generic likeness to that of Harappa, which we have already described. From the end of the Indus cities to the rise of the Mauryas over a millennium elapsed, with no surviving work of art to fill it. Somewhere in North India the art of sculpture, no doubt in perishable materials, was certainly kept alive. The patronage of the Mauryan emperors, the influx of western influence, and growing material prosperity, led to its revival, and to the making of stone figures and reliefs which have survived to this day.

The capitals of Asoka's columns, some of which were perhaps made before his reign, are the earliest important sculptures after those of the Indus cities. They are not characteristic of Indian sculpture, though they contain many native features. The famous lions of the Sarnath column and the less famous but more beautiful bull of the column of Rampurva are the work of realistic sculptors, owing something to Iranian and Hellenist tradition. Yet, if we did not know that the possibility of Western influence existed, we might suggest that the animal sculptures of the columns were those of a school directly descended from the engravers of the Indus seals, which also show a realistic treatment very unusual for so early a civilization. The abaci of the capitals perhaps show native influence more clearly than the crowning figures and animals in lively postures, wheels, representing both the Buddha and the Mauryan World-emperor, and floral and foliate designs in which typical motifs appear side by side with some borrowed from the West. Other than the pillars there are few remains of the Mauryan school, with its high polish and fine finish. One beautiful figure, the "Didarganj Yakshi", bears the distinctive brilliant polish of the school, but the treatment of the figure suggests that it is post-Mauryan. The yakshi bears a auri, or ceremonial yak's tail fly-whisk with which kings and gods were fanned; this shows that the figure was made as the attendant on another figure or a object, which has now vanished.

A number of figures of yaksas, somewhat larger than life-size, are the only other important free sculptures of the centuries immediately before Christ. They are strong, bull-necked and heavy, and, though not technically perfect, have an elemental solidity rarely found in later sculpture. The treatment of the ample abdomens of these figures has been compared with that of the abdomen of the Harappa torso and given further evidence of the survival of tradition over the long intervening period.

The most important sculptural remains of the post-Mauryan are the carvings on the rails and gateways of the great Buddhist sites at Bharhut, Gaya and Sanchi. There is no absolute certainty about the dating of these remains, but the sculpture of Bharhut is in a less highly developed style than that of Gaya and Sanchi, and is probably the earliest, while the gateways of Sanchi, carved with great sureness and skill, are probably the latest of the three. The series Bharhut-Gaya-Sanchi is to some extent confirmed by epigraphic evidence, and we may date Bharhut c. 150 B.C. and Sanchi about the end of the 1st century B.C., with Gaya somewhere between the two. The criteria are not, however, absolutely certain, for it is possible that the backward and advanced schools were approximately contemporary.

At Bharhut the upright posts of the stupa railings are carved with yaksas and yakshis, beautifully finished and very decorative, like all the best Indian sculpture, but archaic and uncertain in treatment. Their flatness suggests that the artists were trained in working of ivory, and were laboriously learning to translate their skill into a different medium. The medallions of the crosspieces, mostly depicting scenes from Jataka stories, have a similar archaic flavour.

The Gaya railing, enclosing not a stupa but the sacred path where the Buddha walked in meditation after he had obtained enlightenment, shows an advance on Bharhut. The figures are deeper, more vital, more rounded, and the sculptors had by this time evidently gained greater mastery of their technique. Figures are no longer always-carved flat on the stone, but begin to appear in three-quarter poses. Notable at Gaya are the medallions containing human heads, which have such realism that they may well be portraits.

The crowning achievement of early North Indian sculpture is undoubtedly Sanchi. Here a smaller stupa (Stupa II) is adorned with carvings of very archaic character, according to some authorities older than those of Bharhut. The railings of the main stupa are quite unadorned, but, in sharp contrast, the great gateways are crved with a multitude of figures and reliefs. From top to bottom on all sides the massive square uprights and triple architraves are alive with the life of the times. Yaksis smile as they lean in easy graceful poses,⁴ or serve as brackets to the architrave's which are supported by massive elephants or cheerfully grinning dwarfs. The flat surfaces of the uprights and architrave's are covered with panels depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha or from Jataka stories. Cities are besieged, riders on elephants horses pass in procession, men and women worship sacred shrines, elephants roam the jungle; lions, peacocks, yaksis, nagas, mythical animals and ornate floral designs fill the whole. Some of the motifs are evidently of Mesopotamian or Persian inspiration, but the whole is typically Indian in its complexity of pattern, its cheerful busy realism, and its exuberance.

⁴ The trihanga, a pose in dancing and dramatics with one leg bent and the body slightly turned at the hips, was favourite with the sculptor from the earliest times. It contrasts sharply with the heretic poses of most ancient art other than that of the Greeks, and given an impression of life and vitality.

The carvings of the Sanchi gateways were not carried out according to any preconceived scheme. The sculptors were not commissioned the monastery, but by private patrons, who wished to gain merit beautifying the stupa, and they carved what their patrons told them the way they thought best. Superficially the result was lacking in formal unity, but was endowed with a unity transcending rule and pattern, the unity of a prosperous culture, pious in devotion to its shrines, and delighting in the world it lived in and knew. The visitor, standing on the hill of Sanchi on a sunny winter day, when the wild peacocks walk among the ruins and the great plain shimmers in the hazy distance, gets the overriding impression that this is the work a happy people at one with itself.

Technically the carvings are of high excellence. The sculptors have now fully mastered their material. Their treatment, while not of course, realistic in the nineteenth-century sense, has transcended the rather stiff formalism of Bharhut, and is free and alive. The sculpture of Sanchi everywhere gives a sense of certainty; the artists knew what they had to depict, and clearly saw in their mind's eye how to do so.

At Bharhut, Gaya and Sanchi, and indeed in all the Buddhist sculpture of this period, the Buddha himself is never shown, but symbolized by such emblems as a wheel, an empty throne, a pair of footprints, a pipal tree. The obvious reason for this iconographical peculiarity is that he was so venerated that it seemed sacrilegious to portray him, but we have no literary or other evidence to confirm this. The aversion to depicting the Buddha may have been to the fact that, since he had passed quite out of the universe, it thought misleading to show him in human form. In any case the familiar Buddha image of later times is not to be found at these three early Buddhist sites. The schools of Gandhara (the lower Kabul Valley and the upper Indus, around Peshawar) and Mathura, both of which flourished under the Kusana kings, vie for the honour of having produced the first images of the Buddha. Most Indian authorities now believe that the Buddha image originated at Mathura; most earlier Europeans supported Gandhara, but some recent experts less certain.

The school of Mathura probably began at the end of the 1st century B.C., though some authorities would date it later. Working for centuries in the whittle-spotted red sandstone of the locality, it produced works which were carried far and wide, and had much influence later sculpture. Some of the school's inspiration was Jaina, and at early period the Mathura craftsmen were making votive plaques depicting the cross-legged naked figure of a Tirthankara in meditation, which may have inspired the Buddhists to depict their own teacher. Perhaps the most striking remains of the Mathura school are the yakshis from the railings of a stupa, which was probably Jaina. These richly jewelled ladies, their figures exaggeratedly broad of hip and slender of waist, stand in pert attitudes reminiscent of the Indus dancing-girl, and their gay and frank sensuality in a context of piety and renunciation gives another frank sensuality gives example of the remarkable

antinomy of the ancient Indian outlook on life, which found nothing incongruous in such a juxtaposition.

Rather outside the main range of Mathura art are the Kusana royal-statues, most of which were found at the nearby village of Mat, where the kings no doubt had a winter residence, with a chapel in the memory of former monarchs was revered. The figures have nearly all been broken by succeeding rulers, and that of the great Kaniska, the most striking of the statues, unfortunately lacks its head. Wearing the dress of Central Asia, a long coat and quilted boots, and grasping in one hand a sword and in the other its sheath, the king stands with legs apart, in an attitude of authority. This statue may be criticized technically as showing no sense of depth, being virtually in two dimensions. The sculptor was evidently working on a theme to which he was not used, but he succeeded in producing a work of much power, suggesting the hieratic royal statues of Egypt.

The early Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the Mathura school are happy fleshy figures with little spirituality about them, but later they developed in grace and religious feeling. Though the Mathura school owed much to earlier Indian tradition, it also borrowed from the North-West, and adopted more than one Greco-Roman motif. Through Mathura the style generally known as Gupta developed, and produced some of the greatest Indian religious sculpture.

The school of Gandhara was evidently influenced by the art of the Roman Empire, and some of its craftsmen may have been Westerners. Though often called Greco-Buddhist, the Greek kingdoms of Bactria and N-W. India had long vanished when this school emerged. It is not to the Greco-Bactrian heirs of Alexander, but to the trade with the West, encouraged by the rising prosperity of Rome and the eastwards march of her legions, that we must attribute this syncretistic school. The Greeks left only a few lovely silver articles, beautiful coins, and one or two other objects, perhaps imported from the West. It was Kaniska and his successors and their wealthy subjects who gave to the school of Gandhara the encouragement and support through which it flourished. The new devotional Buddhism demanded iconic worship, and figures of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas were produced in large numbers, as well as small votive plaques depicting scenes from the Buddha's life or Jataka stories.

The Mathura sculptors drew inspiration for their Buddha images from the burly yaksa figures of the earlier centuries on the one hand and from the meditating Jaina Tirthankara on the other. The Gandhara sculptors had other models in the gods of the Greco-Roman World. Often their inspiration seems almost wholly Western, and it is hard not to believe that some of the Gandhara masters were foreigners from Syria or Alexandria. The school has depreciated in recent years. When all art was judged by classical norms it was thought to be the finest school of Indian art, which once and once only produced work of grace and realism. Now the sculpture of Gandhara is sometimes described as a mere imitation of an imitation, the weak copy of a great art in decline. Neither judgement is fair in an

Indian context the style of Gandhara has a rather inspired flavour, but it is not without originality. The Buddhas of Gandhara, though perhaps lacking in the spirituality of those of the Gupta period, are gently, graceful and compassionate, while some of the plaques are vivid and energetic. The School continued after the greater Kusanas, though with less prosperous times it produced few works in stone, but many in plaster or stucco. Its influence was felt far beyond the bounds of India, and can be traced even in China.

While these schools were developing in the North others appeared in the Peninsula. Here, in the Bhaja cave and at Udayagiri in Orissa, very ancient sculpture is to be found, possibly no later than that of Bharhut. The great Buddhist cave temples of the Western Deccan contain much sculpture of great merit, perhaps the finest of which are the numerous figures of donors, often carved in high relief on the cave walls. These are frequently in couples, their arms, on one another's shoulders, and seem to be idealized portraits of the wealthy patrons of the Buddhist caves. Such couples are also to be found in early terracottas, and no doubt their originals believed that by placing their effigies in shrines they would obtain both material and spiritual benefits. It may be that these are the forerunners of the maithuna couples of the medieval temples, but the spirit behind the early dampati pairs seems very different, for these figures have no overt sexual significance. The man usually looks not at his wife but outwards into the hall, while the woman glances downwards, and, quite unlike the bold yaksis of the North, holds her body diffidently, almost timidly, as if rather embarrassed at being stared at in public. We believe that these figures represent the ideals of ancient Indian married life, and are no more esoteric than the family memorial brasses in many English churches.

The region between the lower valleys of the Kishna and Godavari became an important centre of Buddhism at least as early as the 2nd century B.C., and some very ancient sculpture in low relief, intended to adorn the sides of stupas, is to be found there. This already shows the characteristic elongation of the mature style of Amaravati. In the late Satavahana period (2nd-3rd century A.D.) the great stupa of Amaravati was adorned with limestone reliefs depicting scenes of the Buddha's life and surrounded with free-standing Buddha figures. The relief medallions are certainly among the greatest works of Indian art. Beautifully balanced in composition to fit the circular frames, they convey an intense vitality and sense of rapid movement, quite unexpected in the context of the grave and calm religion they illustrate. The slender, long-legged figures are portrayed in vigorous action, often rising almost to frenzy, as in the famous medallion showing a host of ecstatic demigods carrying the Buddha's begging-bowl to heaven. The Amaravati school had great influence. Its products were carried to Ceylon and South-East Asia and had a marked effect on local styles, while its influence on later South Indian sculpture is also very evident.

Meanwhile in the North the Saka and Kusana invaders had in part retreated and in part merged with the indigenous population, to make way for the great Gupta

Empire. From the point of view of art the Gupta Period is generally taken to include at least the 4th-6th centuries and the first half of the 7th. The plastic remains of this age are comparatively few, but enough survive to show the achievement of the time. If the schools of Bharhut, Sanchi and Mathura are marked by a sensual earthiness, and that of Amaravati by vital, excited movement, the Gupta sculpture suggests serenity, security and certainty. It was at this time that India produced some of her most truly religious art, especially in the lovely Buddhas of Samath. Most famous of these is the icon of the Buddha "turning of Wheel of the Law", or preaching his first sermon, which, more than any other Indian sculpture, seems to convey the true message of Buddhism. Surrounded by a large and ornate halo, flanked by two small demigods, the Master sits majestically, his body slender and rounded, plastically so simplified that no trace of muscular contour can be seen, his delicate fingers forming the dharmacakra mudra, which indicates that he is preaching. His face is, as usual, that of a young man, with delicately modelled lips; his half-closed eyes and slight smile tell more graphically and vividly than any of the rather dry Buddhist scriptures his fundamental message, and emphasize not its first part, that the world is full of sorrow, death and decay, but that it is possible to transcend these evils, and reach a state where age and grief no longer affect the mind, and where earthly pleasure is transmuted into serene inner joy.

This great masterpiece, however, illustrates only one aspect of Gupta art. In the region of Gwalior and Jhansi an excellent school of Hindu sculptors existed, and the carvings of the temple of Deogarti, depicting Hindu gods and mythological scenes, show the beginnings of the early medieval style. The splendid figure of the sun-god Surya from Gwalior illustrates another aspect of the outlook of the times. Broad and sturdy, cheerfully smiling, the god looks straight ahead at his worshippers, his right hand raised in blessing-the god of a good-natured, happy people. Equally significant of the spirit of the Gupta Period, if less perfect in execution, is the charming relief of a dancer, accompanied by girl-musicians, found at Pawaya, near Gwalior. Another famous Gupta sculpture is the "Sanchi Torso",⁵ the delicately but vigorously modelled body of a Bodhisattva, its smooth contours emphasized by the minutely carved Jewelled collar and belt and the scarf of antelope skin hanging over the left shoulder.

Perhaps the most immediately impressive of all Gupta sculpture; the Great Boar, carved in relief at the entrance of a cave at Udaya-giri, near Bhilsa. The body of the god Visnu, who became a mighty boar to rescue the earth from the cosmic ocean conveys the impression of a great primeval power working or good against the forces of chaos and destruction, and bears a message of hope, strength and assurance. The greatness of the god in comparison with his creation is brought out by the tiny female figure of the personified earth, clinging to his tusk. The deep feeling which inspired the carving of this figure makes it perhaps the only theriomorphic image in the world's art which conveys a truly religious message to modern man.

⁵ Said by some to be an exceptional Pala Production.

Sculptures of the medieval period are so numerous that they cannot be discussed here in detail. By this time iconographical canons were fixed. Every god had his special attributes, which were regularly portrayed in his image; the proportions of body, limbs and features were laid down, and were adhered to with increasing rigidity; but the Indian sculptor succeeded in producing remarkable variety in his now almost hieratic art.

Under the Pala Sena kings of Bihar and Bengal (8th-12th centuries) both Buddhists and Hindus made fine icons, many in the local black stone. The special characteristic of Pala art is its fine finish; its figures are much decorated and well polished, and often seem rather made of metal than of stone.

The sculpture of Orissa was greater than that of the Palas. The carvings of the temples of Bhubanesar and Konarak show a deep sensuous appreciation of the human form and an expressiveness which gives them a characteristic beauty of their own. The finest Orissan sculptures are those in the courtyard of the Temple of the Sun at Konarak, where the forceful horses and the mighty elephant crushing a malefactor in his trunk show a strength of treatment and a feeling for animal form rare in the world's art, and reminiscent of the animal sculpture and ceramics of the T'ang dynasty of China.

The Khajuraho temples are covered with figures of divinities and pairs of lovers of wonderful delicacy and grace, and in many other parts of North India many works of beauty survive, although few can vie with those of Orissa.

In the Deccan individual schools of sculpture appeared. The temples of Aihole and Badami contain fine work of the 5th century onwards, which shows the influence of the Gupta style, with a tendency to elongation perhaps inherited from Amaravati. More important are the sculptures of Mamallapuram, adorning the wonderful complex of rock-temples made by the Pallava kings of Kanci. Most striking of these sculptures is the great relief of the descent of the Ganges, covering a rock face over 80 feet long and nearly 30 feet high. A natural cleft in the rock has been utilized to represent the Sacred River, who is watched on either side by gods, demigods, ascetics and elephants, as she descends from the head of Siva, and who has sinuous snake-spirits (nagas) swimming in her waters. The artists who designed this splendid relief had a sardonic sense of humour, for among the worshipping ascetics they carved the crafty cat, who performed penance in order to lure the mice to their doom. Mamallapuram contains other fine relief sculpture, including an idealized portrait of the versatile king Mahendravarman and his queens, and a number of free-standing animal figures, which are remarkable for their simple strength.

The influence of the Pallava School of sculpture was felt in Ceylon, and also in the Western Deccan. Here the Buddhist carvings of the Ajanta caves, though important, are dwarfed in significance by the wonderful mural paintings. The carvings of the later Ellora caves, on the other hand, especially those of the

Kailasanatha Temple, are among the finest sculptures of India. They are chiefly in the form of deep reliefs, giving the effect of free-standing sculpture, and illustrate scenes of mythology. The whole series of reliefs is characterized by balanced design, and a graceful energy akin to that of Amaravati. Of the same school, but a century or two later, are the cave sculptures of Elephanta. The rock temple of Siva contains a fine series of deep reliefs, all of which are dwarfed in significance by the colossal Trimurti, which is perhaps the best known of all Ancient Indian sculptures. The three-headed bust of Siva, calm with the calmness of eternity, is so impressive and so religiously inspired that it needs little comment. The serene god is perhaps the highest plastic expression of the Hindu concept of divinity.

After Mamallapuram and Elephanta much stone sculpture was produced in the Peninsula, but though often of great merit it lacked the depth and beauty of the work of the earlier schools. The splendid bronzes of the Colas and their successors are the most outstanding products of the Dravidian artists of the later Middle Ages.

TERRACOTTAS

While the rich delighted in figures of stone, metal or ivory, poorer folk contented themselves with small images and plaques of clay, no doubt originally painted in bright colours. Nearly every archaeological site in India, from Harappa onwards, has produced many of these terracotta objects. Most are religious. Crude clay figures of goddesses—apparently early forms of Durga, worshipped by the lower classes before her inclusion in the orthodox pantheon—are common, and recall the similar but even cruder mother goddess figurines of Harappa. Other objects little if any religious significance, though they may have been charms or votive offerings; figures of mother and child, a type rare in sculpture, suggest offerings made by childless women, while the numerous figures of a man and a woman, standing in modest poses reminiscent of the donors of the cave temple sculpture, many have been charms for a happy marriage. While many terracottas are crude, others are of fine workmanship and real beauty. Some faces are well characterized and divine heads are sometimes beautifully modelled. The terracotta plaques often much charm.

Most of the terracottas so far found date from the Mauryan to the Gupta period, but the art of modelling in terracotta must have existed earlier, and certainly continued later, for the Buddhist sites of Bihar have yielded many medieval votive plaques of no great artistic interest.

METAL SCULPTURE AND ENGRAVING

Several works of art in metal, very Hellenistic in style, have been found in the North-West, dating from the early centuries of the Christian era. Some of these are quite un-Indian, and may have been improved, or produced by foreign craftsmen, for instance the lovely little en and jewelled reliquary casket from Bimaran. Further afield, in Soviet Central Asia and Northern Afghanistan, have been found beautiful

silver cups and other objects, ornamented with motifs usually Hellenistic in inspiration and technique, but showing clear evidence of Indian contacts, Soviet archaeologists believe that these are the products of the Greek kingdom of Bactria, and date from the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C. Thus they are in no way connected with the Gandhara sculpture of the early centuries of the Christian era, Wholly Indian in style, and dating from pre-Gupta times, is the copper vase from Kulu, on the borders of Kashmir, engraved with a gay procession

From the Gupta period a number of bronze and copper figures have survived, mostly Buddhist. The most impressive of these is the "Sultanganj Buddha", some 7 1/2 feet high, now in Birmingham Museum - a graceful figure, dressed in a diaphanous cloak. Like most of the work of the period it conveys a feeling of aliveness, not by attention to realistic detail and proportion, but by the sense of movement in the slightly tilted body, the delicate fingers, lightly clasping the corners of the robe, and the face, impassively symmetrical yet with a vitality imparted by the delicate moulding of its features.

The use of bronze images in worship seems to have been specially prevalent among Buddhists. The Sultanganj Buddha was found in Bihar one of the great centres of Buddhism, where one of the two great medieval schools of metal sculpture arose, under the patronage of the Pala kings. Pala bronzes are so numerous that there is no doubt that they were mass-produced. They were exported to South-East Asia, where they are still found, and to Nepal and Tibet. Where they provide prototypes from indigenous schools, these images are characterized chiefly by delicacy of design and ornamental detail, and deep religious inspiration is usually lacking. The earliest Nepal bronzes, which go back to our period, are less ornate in design, but are gilded and set with semi-precious stones, and give an impression of great brilliance and smoothness.

Other parts of India also produced metal icons, but many of those which have survived have no great artistic value. The Tamils still prefer metal to stone for the images used in temple and domestic worship, and it was in South India, especially in the kingdom of the Colas, that the greatest Indian works of art in metal were made, by a school of bronze-casters which has not been excelled in the world. South Indian bronzes vary in size, but many of the finest specimens are very large and heavy, their pedestals fitted with lugs for carrying in procession. The best specimens of South Indian metal work are of great grace and simplicity, for, though the statues have much ornamentation, this, as in most of the best Indian sculpture, is relieved by areas of bare smooth flesh. Physical features and the contours of face and limb are simplified and idealized, the proportions are rigidly fixed by canons laid down in iconographical textbooks, and every attribute of the deity portrayed is determined by convention. It is surprising that, bound as they were by these rigid rules, the Tamil craftsmen succeeded in producing works of such great beauty and often of considerable individuality. As well as images of the gods and goddesses the Tamil school produced many figures representing the saints of devotional theism, and portrait figures of kings and queens, who, in

theory, were themselves divine, and whose images were often placed in temples among the lesser divinities surrounding the chief god.

Of the latter class the finest figures are the life-size 16th century statues of King Krsna a Deva Raya and two of his chief queens, which still stand in a temple at Tirumalai. The faces of the queens seem quite conventional, though very beautiful, but that of the great king himself is almost certainly intended to give some idea of his actual appearance. Their hands pressed together in the gesture called anjali, to mark their homage and respect to the gods, their large eyes half closed, these three dignified figures seem to represent all that was good and noble in the old Hindu ideals of kingship, and, looking at them, we can understand why the king made so deep an impression on the Portuguese envoys.

The greatest and most triumphant achievements of Tamil bronze casting are undoubtedly the dancing Sivas, of which there are many examples dating from the 11th century onwards. It was as "Lord of the Dance" (Nataraja) that the Tamil masters specially delighted in portraying the god—a graceful young man, his four arms delicately posed, often with a flame in the open palm of one hand and a halo of flames encircling him, one foot firm on the back of a demon, and the other raised in a posture well known in the Indian dance. Thus the god appears as the very essence of vital, ordered movement, eternal youth, and ethereal light. This is not the European conception of the highest godhead, but, once the religious background is understood, even the European can recognize in the finest specimens of the dancing Siva a true religious inspiration, a wholly successful effort at depicting in plastic terms divine truth beauty and joy.

An important school of-bronze casting existed in Ceylon, and produced works similar in style to those of South India. The finest metal product of Ceylon is undoubtedly the lovely large figure of a goddess, generally relived to be that of a Buddhist Tara, but perhaps Parvati, the wife of Siva. This lovely and delicate casting, now in the British Museum, can hold its own with the greatest products of the South Indian bronzesmith.

Nearly all Indian bronzes were made by the "cire perdue" process. The figure was first designed in wax, which was covered with coating of clay. The whole was then heated, so that the wax melted away, leaving a mould to be filled with molten metal. Larger standing figures, such as the Sultanganj Buddha, which weighs near a ton, were often made in two parts which were then welded together.

PAINTING

Literary references alone would prove that painting was a very highly developed art in ancient India. Palaces and the homes of the rich were adorned with beautiful murals, and smaller paintings were made on prepared boards. Not only were there professional artists, but many men and women of the educated classes could ably handle a brush.

Though now all in very bad condition the surviving remains of ancient Indian painting are sufficient to show its achievement. They consist almost entirely of murals in certain of the cave temples. No doubt most temples were painted in some way, and the statuary was brightly coloured, as it often is in Hindu temples today, and here and there more elaborate schemes of mural decoration were carried out. A few caves in outlying places contain rough painted sketches of no special merit, often primitive in style, and believed by many authorities to be prehistoric. Some of the artificial caves dedicated to religious purposes, however, give us samples of the work of highly developed schools of painting, and few would dispute that the murals greatest surviving paintings of any ancient civilization.

The cave paintings of Ajanta are often referred to as frescos, but this term is incorrect, for a fresco is painted while the plaster is still damp, and the murals of Ajanta were made after it had set. The walls were first covered with a coating of clay or cowdung bound together with straw or hair, and then finished with white gypsum. Considering the climate the surface has stood well, but in many places it has flaked away, and even since they were first copied in the last century the condition of the paintings has deteriorated. The pigments, on the other hand, are still remarkably fresh; in their original state the paintings must have been of great brilliance, and their colours are even now clear and well contrasted. The artists worked in the dim caves by light reflected from outside by metal mirrors.

The paintings in Cave X have been shown with fair certainty to date from before the beginning of the Christian era, while those of Caves I and XVI are from perhaps as much as six centuries later. The earlier paintings are more sharply outlined and the later show more careful modelling, but there is no good evidence of a progressively developing style, as in contemporary sculpture, and the differences may be accounted for by the personal styles of the craftsmen who supervised the work in the respective caves. The Murals chiefly depict scenes from the life of the Buddha and the Jatakas. No frame divides one scene from the next, but they blend one into the other, the minor figures and the pattern skillfully leading the eye to the central figures of each scene. There is no perspective, but an illusion of depth is given by placing the background figures somewhat above those in the foreground. The effect of this convention is rather like that of a photograph taken with a telescopic camera, and makes the figures stand out from the flat wall as though coming to meet the observer.

Though painted for religious purposes the murals of Ajanta bear rather a secular than a religious message. Here, even more vividly than at Sanchi, we see the whole life of ancient India in panorama. Here are princes in their palaces, ladies in their harems, coolies with loads slung over their shoulders, beggars, peasants and ascetics, together with all the many beasts and birds and flowers of India, in fact the whole life of the times, perpetuated on the dim walls of the caves by the loving hands of many craftsmen. Everything is gracefully and masterfully drawn and delicately modelled.

Among the many masterpieces of Ajanta we must mention the figure of a handsome young man, his body bent slightly in the pose called tribhanga, loved by Indian sculptors and artists, with jewelled crown on his head, and a white lotus in his right hand. His smooth features betray gentle sorrow, and his eyes look downward compassionately, as if at something far below him. Around him are apsaras, or heavenly damsels, and divine minstrel, all much smaller than the central figure, who is the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara Padmapani, the Lord who Looks Down in Compassion. Here, once more, a work of deep religious feel in appears among the cheerfully sensuous scenes of everyday life. The Bodhisattva, for all his jewels and his smooth youthfulness, has share the sorrows of the world; his gentle eyes have seen countless ages of pain, and his delicately formed lips have spoken words of consolation to countless sufferers. The artist of the Bodhisattva has conveyed his message-the universe is not indifferent to the sorrows and strivings of its creatures.

Religious feeling of a different type is found in the painting I the glorified Buddha, begging his daily bread from a woman child believed to represent his wife Yasodhara and his son Rahula. The lovely portrayal of the two minor figures is scarcely noticed against the majesty of the Master, whose calm features and robed body convey, like the Sarnath Buddha, the serenity of self-transcendence.

A few other paintings are to be found elsewhere. Those on the walls of the veranda of a cave at Bagh, some hundred miles to the North of Ajanta, depict a procession of elephants, perhaps more, impressive in composition than anything Ajanta has to offer and, a lovely scene of a dancer and women musicians. Traces of paintings in the Ajanta style are to found in other Deccan caves, notably at Badami and Ellora. Further south, in the Tamil country, a Jaina cave at a place called Sitannvasal has yielded a fine, though much decayed, mural.

Some of the best-preserved paintings of these schools are to found in Ceylon. In the centre of the island a great rock, Sigiriya the "Lion Mountain", rises sharply for 600 feet above the surrounding plain. Here, at the end of the 5th century, the parricide king Kasyapa I built a palace and a fortress. Kasyapa, evidently a megalomaniac, was so convinced of his own divinity that he tried to identify his rock-fortress with heaven, and had demigods and heavenly beings painted on the bare walls of the rock, to show his subjects that he transcended them all. Nearly all these paintings have vanished under the hot sun and driving monsoon rain, but half way up the rock face, preserved by an overhanging ledge, are the figures of twenty one apsaras immersed from their hips downwards in banks of cloud.⁶ These charming ladies, toying with flowers in languid poses, are so freshly preserved that one can hardly believe that they were painted 1,500 years ago.

⁶ Until recently these figures were thought to be portraits of Kasyapa's queens and concubines, and some of the faces seem to show individual character. Some authorities might still support the older theory, but the context of the paintings leaves little doubt that the above interpretation is correct.

The surviving traces of medieval Hindu painting, at Tanjore, Vijayanagara, Polonnaruwa in Ceylon, and elsewhere, indicate that there was some technical decline after the 8th century. Outlines become sharper, and the delicate modelling of the earlier period is lacking, but the achievement is still considerable. Scarcely anything survives from this period in good enough preservation to make a satisfactory reproduction, but what can still be seen shows that the tradition of mural painting continued down to the Muslim invasion.

After the spread of Islamic influence the Indian painter turned his attention mainly to miniatures and book illustration, deriving much inspiration from Persian models. Literary evidence shows that miniature painting existed long before the coming of the Muslims, however, and a few examples have survived from the 11th and 12th centuries from Bihar, Bengal and Nepal. These little pictures show great delicacy and skill, but they lack the comparative realism of Ajanta, and the figures are almost unmodelled. They are the products of a formalized Buddhism, the religious inspiration of which was languishing, and which was largely detached from contact with everyday life. Unlike the Ajanta murals, they are probably the work of monks, and not of secular craftsmen.

The dry sands of Central Asia have preserved paintings which, though not strictly Indian, owe much to Indian inspiration. The earliest of these surround a colossal rock-cut Buddha at Bamiyan in Afghanistan and are older than most of the paintings at Ajanta. The many murals and paintings on boards found at sites in Chinese Turkistan and other parts of Central Asia are mostly somewhat later, and show greater deviation from Indian models, though their debt to India is quite evident. They date from a period when the trade route to China was wide open, and give proof of the debt which Chinese art, despite its very individual character, owes to India.

MINOR ARTS

The excavations at Taksasila and other sites of the North-West have revealed fine jewellery, with semi-precious stones set in gold filigree, much in the manner of the Indian jewellery of the present day. The Bimaran Casket, and a few other objects in gold and silver are delicately worked, as are the crystal relic caskets found in Buddhist sites in many parts of India. Engraved intaglio gems from the North-Western sites are usually of no great artistic merit, and nearly all these small objects of art show the influence of western models, while some may well have been imported.

Though little survives, much beautiful work was done in ivory. Guilds of ivory carvers are mentioned in inscriptions and their profession was evidently a well-patronized and honourable one of surviving ivory work the most interesting if not the most beautiful specimen is a small statuette of a goddess, found at Herculaneum, no doubt imported with spices and fine textiles via Egypt. More

beautiful are the ivory plaques, originally fastened to the lids and sides of boxes, found at the Kusana site of Begram, some fifty miles west of Kabul. Though discovered in the region most open to Western influence, the designs of these plaques are purely Indian in inspiration, and they were either imported from India proper or made by craftsmen who had learnt their trade from Indian masters. The figures are outlined with deep-cut lines, and although only lightly modelled, give a wonderful impression of depth. Their delicacy and grace are unexcelled in any work of art of ancient India. The art of ivory carving has continued down to the present day both in India and Ceylon, but it has never again produced works as lovely as these.

Since they delighted in minute detail and gave great care to the finish of their productions it is surprising that the Indians did not develop their coinage artistically. Ancient Indian coins are generally crude and ugly. Only under the Gupta emperors did they approach the status of works of art, and even the Gupta gold coins are but work of art of the second order. They have originality and charm, however. Thus Chandra Gupta I lovingly gazes at his chief queen Kumaradevi; Samudra Gupta, enthroned, performs on the harp; Chandra Gupta II slays a rhinoceros; and Kumara Gupta I rides on splendid elephant. After this, however, the standard of coin production deteriorated rapidly, and medieval kings who patronized great artists and craftsmen were satisfied with coins of the crudest type.

Exceptional are the lovely large silver coins minted by the Greek kings of Bactria, which bear some of the finest numismatic portraits in the world; but the inspiration of these coins is purely Hellenistic, and they were no doubt designed by Greek craftsmen. It is unlikely that they circulated widely in India, where the Greek kings issued cruder bilingual coins, in a style followed by the later Sakas and Kusanas.

MUSIC

There is some evidence to show that the Aryans knew the heptatonic scale, and the instructions for intoning the hymns of the Sama Veda show that the style of liturgical singing in Vedic times was rather like that of medieval plain chant, and has been preserved fairly accurately by the brahmins down to the present day. Between this and the early centuries of the Christian era we have little knowledge of the progress of Indian music, but in the latter period an anonymous writer composed a textbook on drama, music and dancing, which, according to the custom of the time, he attributed to the ancient sage Bharata, and which has survived to this day. The Bharata Natyasastra is our earliest Indian authority on these three arts, and shows that by this time India had a fully developed system of music which differed little from that of present-day Indian "classical" music. Anyone who has heard a performance on the vina by a good South Indian musician has probably heard music much as it was played over a thousand years ago. For this reason, and because of the highly technical nature of the subject, we treat ancient Indian music briefly.

The basic scale is heptatonic, its seven notes⁷ corresponding approximately to those of the European major scale. They may be elaborated with half-tones or quarter-tones (sruti). There are twenty-two quarter-tones in the octave, which occur in the following order:

Sa ri ga ma pa dha ni sa

From this diagram it will be seen that the notes sa, ma and pa (approximately the European do, fa and so) may have as many, three degrees of sharpness. The quarter-tones of Indian music are chiefly noticeable in ornamentation, when they are used with striking effect, but they also occur to some extent in melody, so that the untutored Westerner may well think that the singer or musician is out of tune.

As well as the scale based on the note sa, corresponding to the European major, other scales may be based on other notes of the seven, thus resembling the modes of ecclesiastical music.

Besides the grama, which we have translated "scale", there are other basic classifications of tune-types, chief of which is the raga. A raga is a series of five or more notes, upon which a melody is based. Over thirty ragas are mentioned in the Bharata Natyasastra, and the total has since grown considerably until now hundreds have been enumerated. According to orthodox theory there are six basic ragas, the others being raginis, personified as the wives of the masculine ragas. The six original ragas are variously given, the oldest list, that of Bharata, being as follows:

Bhairava: C, Db E, F, G, Ab B, C.
Kaulika: C, Eb, F, Ab, Bb, C.
Hindola: C, E, F*, A, B, C.
Dipaka: C, Db, E, F*, A, B, C.
Sriraga: C, Db, E, F*, G, Ab, B, C.
Megha: C, D, F, G, A, C.

The ragas are classified according to the time of day or night for which they are most appropriate. Thus, of the examples above, Bhairava is suitable for performance at dawn, Megha in the morning, Dipak and Sriraga in the afternoon, and Kausika and Hindola at night. Bhairava is associated with awe and fear, Kausika with joy and laughter, Hindola, Dipaka and Sriraga with love, and Megha with peace and calm. It is interesting that the raga most closely corresponding to the European major scale, Pancama, is associated with the night and love in the Indian system.

There is no harmony in Indian music, and the melody, which usually proceeds by conjunct intervals (i.e. adjacent notes on the keyboard), never suggests a

⁷Called Sadjā, rsabha, gandhara, madhyama, dhaivata and nisada, nowadays generally abbreviated to sa, ri, ga, ma, pa. Dha and ni.

harmonic basis, as do many European melodies. The tune is sustained by a drone note and by drumming. The subtle and complex cross rhythms of Indian music take the place of harmony and counterpoint in the ear of the trained listener. Like the ancient Greeks the Indians delighted and still delight in unusual times, such as 5/4 and 7/4. The tala, or rhythmic figure is, after the raga, the most important element of Indian music. Bharata recognizes twenty-two talas, and since then many more have been introduced.

The Indian musician was, and still is, an improviser. While a simple melody could be recorded in alphabetic notation India never devised a true musical notation and the music of her ancient masters has vanished forever. As at the present day, every performance was virtually a new composition. The musician would choose his raga and tala and, often starting from a well-known melody, would elaborate his theme in the form of free variations, working up to a climax of complex and rapid ornamentation.

The chief musical instrument was the vina, usually loosely translated "lute". The term was originally applied to the bow-harp often with ten strings, of a type very similar to the small harp used in ancient Egypt and the early civilizations of the Middle East. By the end of the Gupta period this instrument had begun to go out of fashion, and its place was largely taken by a lute with a pear-shaped body, played either with the fingers or with a plectrum. This in turn was superseded in the 8th century by the early form of the modern vina, with long finger-board and small round body, often made of a dried gourd. Bowed instrument may have been known, but seem to have been little used in polite circles until the coming of the Muslims. Flutes and reed instruments of various kinds were widely played, but instruments of the trumpet type were rarely used except as signals. Of these the most mentioned was the conch, the shell of a large mollusc, blown through its sawn-off point before battle, as an invocation to a deity, and on important occasions generally; its sound was very auspicious. Percussion instruments were numerous and varied. The smaller drums, played in pairs with the fingers as at present, were looked on as almost essential for any musical performance. Larger drums were used for state occasions, and there was a wide range of cymbals, gongs and bells.

The evidence of Bharata shows that, as at the present day, the Indian of two thousand years ago preferred the throaty, rather nasal type of singing, which comes more naturally than that which Europe has learnt to appreciate. The singing voice was often treated as a musical instrument, the vocalist performing long impromptu variation on a simple melody, sung to a single phrase, often an invocation to a deity.

In the late medieval period music became largely the preserve of professionals, who, though much in demand by the well-to-do people who employed them, were of low caste.... This was not the case in India's greatest days, when a knowledge of music was looked on as an essential attribute of a gentleman. "The man who

knows nothing of literature, music or art," runs an ancient Indian proverb, "is nothing but a beast without the beast's tail and horns".

Like music, Indian dancing has changed little with the centuries, and the best modern Indian dancers, such as Uday Shankar and Ram Gopal, still dance according to the rules of the Bharata Natyasastra. Dancing (nrtya) was closely connected with acting (natya); in fact both are forms of the same word, the latter being a Prakritism, and gesture, the dance chiefly music and gesture. As in most other civilizations there is little doubt that the Indian drama, which we consider in the following chapter, developed from ritual miming song and dance.

Indian dancing is not merely a thing of legs and arms alone, but of the whole body. Every movement of the little finger or the eye-brow is significant, and must be fully controlled. The poses and gestures are classified in detail, even as early as the Bharata Natyasastra, which mentions thirteen poses of the head, thirty-six of the eyes, nine of the neck, thirty-seven of the hand, and ten postures of the body. Later texts classify many more poses and gestures, every one of which depicts a specific emotion or object. With so many possible combinations the dancer can tell a whole story, easily comprehensible to the observer who knows the convention.

The most striking feature of the Indian dance is undoubtedly the hand-gesture (mudra). By a beautiful and complicated code, the hand alone is capable of portraying not only a wide range of emotions, but gods, animals, men, natural scenery, actions and so on. Some hundreds of mudras are classified in later textbooks, and they are used not only in the dance, but, as we have seen, in religious worship and iconography.

This highly developed dance style demanded years of training, and was probably always chiefly performed by professionals, though there are references in literature to princes and their ladies dancing in their palaces. Ancient India was rich in folk-dances, which were performed at festivals. In later years only low caste people would think of dancing in public, but there seems to have been no social taboo on the art in ancient times, except perhaps for practising brahmans.

INDIAN PAINTING

The earliest Indian paintings were the rock paintings of pre-historic times, the petroglyphs as found in places like Bhimbetka, and some of them are older than 5500 BC. Such works continued and after several millennia, in the 7th century, carved pillars of Ellora, Maharashtra state present a fine example of Indian paintings, and the colors, mostly various shades of red and orange, were derived from minerals. Thereafter, frescoes of Ajanta and Ellora Caves appeared. India's Buddhist literature is replete with examples of texts which describe that palaces of kings and aristocratic class were embellished with paintings, but they have largely not survived. But, it is believed that some form of art painting was practiced during that time.

Indian paintings provide an aesthetic continuum that extends from the early civilization to the present day. From being essentially religious in purpose in the beginning, Indian painting has evolved over the years to become a fusion of various cultures and traditions. The Indian painting was exposed to Greco-Roman as well as Iranian and Chinese influences. Cave paintings in different parts of India bear testimony to these influences and a continuous evolution of new idioms is evident.

Sadanga of Indian painting

Around 1st century BC the *Sadanga* or Six Limbs of Indian Painting, were evolved, a series of canons laying down the main principles of the art. Vatsyayana, who lived during the third century A.D., enumerates these in his Kamasutra having extracted them from still more ancient works.

These 'Six Limbs' have been translated as follows:

1. *Rupabhedha* The knowledge of appearances.
2. *Pramanam* Correct perception, measure and structure.
3. *Bhava* Action of feelings on forms.
4. *Lavanya Yojanam* Infusion of grace, artistic representation.
5. *Sadrisyam* Similitude.
6. *Varnikabhanga* Artistic manner of using the brush and colours.

The subsequent development of painting by the Buddhists indicates that these 'Six Limbs' were put into practice by Indian artists, and are the basic principles on which their art was founded.

Genres of Indian painting

Indian Paintings can be broadly classified as the murals and miniatures. Murals are huge works executed on the walls of solid structures, as in the Ajanta Caves and the Kailashnath temple. Miniature paintings are executed on a very small scale on perishable material such as paper and cloth. The Palas of Bengal were the pioneers of miniature painting in India. The art of miniature painting reached its glory during the Mughal period. The tradition of miniature paintings was carried forward by the painters of different Rajasthani schools of painting like the Bundi, Kishangarh, Jaipur, Marwar and Mewar. The Ragamala paintings also belong to this school.

Murals

Early examples of murals are found in the caves of Ajanta and Bagh. Fragments of mural paintings are also found in the contemporary Pitalkhora Caves. Early evidences of the tradition of mural paintings in southern India are found in the sites of Badami and Sittanavasal. Evidences of mural paintings are also found in the Kailasnatha temple in Ellora.

Miniature painting

The pattern of large scale wall painting which had dominated the scene, witnessed the advent of miniature paintings during the 11th & 12th centuries. This new style figured first in the form of illustrations etched on palm-leaf manuscripts. The contents of these manuscripts included literature on Buddhism & Jainism. In eastern India, the principal centres of artistic and intellectual activities of the Buddhist religion were Nalanda, Odantapuri, Vikramshila and Somarpura situated in the Pala kingdom (Bengal & Bihar).

Eastern Indian painting

In eastern India miniature painting developed in 10th century. These miniatures, depicting Buddhist divinities and scenes from the life of Buddha were painted on the leaves (about 2.25 by 3 inches) of the palm-leaf manuscripts as well as their wooden covers. Most common Buddhist illustrated manuscripts include the texts *Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita*, *Pancharaksa*, *Karandavyuha* and *Kalachakrayanatantra*. The earliest extant miniatures are found in a manuscript of the *Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita* dated in the sixth regnal year of Mahipala (c. 993), presently in the possession of The Asiatic Society, Kolkata. This style disappeared from India in the late 12th century.

Western Indian painting

In western India between the 10th to 12th century miniature painting developed. These small paintings were part of manuscripts written at the time and illustrate the subjects of the manuscripts. These miniatures are found in some Jaina manuscripts and are of 2 to 4 inches in size. Earliest Jaina illustrated palm-leaf manuscripts include the texts *Ogha-niryukti* and *Dasavaikalika-tika*. Another surviving example of early illustrated Jaina palm-leaf manuscript is the *Savaga-padikkamana-sutta-cunni* written by Pandit Ramachandra (13th century).

It was in the 14th century, that paper replaced the palm leaf. Most common Jaina illustrated paper manuscripts include the *Kalpasutra* of Bhadrabahu and the *Kalakacharyakatha*.^[2] The Jaina style of paintings attained a high degree of development by the late 15th and 16th century. In the 16th century, a number of Hindu illustrated manuscripts appeared in western India, which included the texts, the *Gitagovinda* of Jayadeva and the *Bhagavata Purana*.

Malwa, Deccan and Jaunpur schools of painting

A new trend in manuscript illustration was set by a manuscript of the *Nimatnama* painted at Mandu, during the reign of Nasir Shah (1500 - 1510). This represent a synthesis of the indigenous and the Persian style, though it was the latter which dominated the Mandu manuscripts. There was another style of painting known as Lodi Khuladar that flourished in the Sultanate's dominion of North India extending from Delhi to Jaunpur.

The miniature painting style, which flourished initially in the Bahmani court and later in the courts of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golkonda is popularly known as the Deccan school of Painting. One of the earliest surviving paintings are found as the illustrations of a manuscript *Tarifi-Hussain Shahi* (c.1565), which is now in Bharata Itihasa Samshodhaka Mandala, Pune. About 400 miniature paintings are found in the manuscript of *Nujum-ul-Ulum* (Stars of Science) (1570), kept in Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.

Mughal Painting

Mughal painting is a particular style of Indian painting, generally confined to illustrations on the book and done in miniatures, and which emerged, developed and took shape during the period of the Mughal Empire 16th -19th centuries).

Mughal paintings were a unique blend of Indian, Persian and Islamic styles. Because the Mughal kings wanted visual records of their deeds as hunters and conquerors, their artists accompanied them on military expeditions or missions of state, or recorded their prowess as animal slayers, or depicted them in the great dynastic ceremonies of marriages.

Akbar's reign (1556-1605) ushered a new era in Indian miniature painting. After he had consolidated his political power, he built a new capital at Fatehpur Sikri where he collected artists from India and Persia. He was the first monarch who established in India an atelier under the supervision of two Persian master artists, Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdus Samad. Earlier, both of them had served under the patronage of Humayun in Kabul and accompanied him to India when he regained his throne in 1555. More than a hundred painters were employed, most of whom were Hindus from Gujarat, Gwalior and Kashmir, who gave a birth to a new school of painting, popularly known as the Mughal School of miniature Paintings.

One of the first productions of that school of miniature painting was the *Hamzanama* series, which according to the court historian, Badayuni, was started in 1567 and completed in 1582. The *Hamzanama*, stories of Amir Hamza, an uncle of the Prophet, were illustrated by Mir Sayyid Ali. The paintings of the *Hamzanama* are of large size, 20 x 27" and were painted on cloth. They are in the Persian safavi style. Brilliant red, blue and green colours predominate; the pink, eroded rocks and the vegetation, planes and blossoming plum and peach trees are reminiscent of Persia. However, Indian tones appear in later work, when Indian artists were employed.

After him, Jahangir encouraged artists to paint portraits and durbār scenes. His most talented portrait painters were Ustad Mansur, Abul Hasan and Bishandas. Shah Jahan (1627-1658) continued the patronage of painting. Some of the famous artists of the period were Mohammad Faqirullah Khan, Mir Hashim, Muhammad Nadir, Bichitr, Chitarman, Anupchhatar, Manohar and Honhar. Aurangzeb had little taste for fine arts. Due to lack of patronage, artists migrated to Hyderabad in the Deccan and to the Hindu states of Rajasthan in search of new patrons.

Rajput painting

Rajput painting, a style of Indian painting, evolved and flourished, during the 18th century, in the royal courts of Rajputana, India. Each Rajput kingdom evolved a distinct style, but with certain common features. Rajput paintings depict a number of themes, events of epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Krishna's life, beautiful landscapes, and humans. Miniatures were the preferred medium of Rajput painting, but several manuscripts also contain Rajput

paintings, and paintings were even done on the walls of palaces, inner chambers of the forts, havelis, particularly the havelis of Shekhawati.

The colours extracted from certain minerals, plant sources, conch shells, and were even derived by processing precious stones, gold and silver were used. The preparation of desired colours was a lengthy process, sometimes taking weeks. Brushes used were very fine.

Mysore painting

Mysore painting is an important form of classical South Indian painting that originated in the town of Mysore in Karnataka. These paintings are known for their elegance, muted colours, and attention to detail. The themes for most of these paintings are Hindu Gods and Goddesses and scenes from Hindu mythology. In modern times, these paintings have become a much sought after souvenir during festive occasions in South India.

The process of making a Mysore painting involves many stages. The first stage involves the making of the preliminary sketch of the image on the base. The base consists of cartridge paper pasted on a wooden base. A paste made of Zinc oxide and Arabic gum is made called "gesso paste". With the help of a thin brush all the jewellery and parts of throne or the arch which have some relief are painted over to give a slightly raised effect of carving. This is allowed to dry. On this thin gold foil is pasted. The rest of the drawing is then painted using watercolours. Only muted colours are used.

Tanjore painting

Tanjore painting is an important form of classical South Indian painting native to the town of Tanjore in Tamil Nadu. The art form dates back to the early 9th century, a period dominated by the Chola rulers, who encouraged art and literature. These paintings are known for their elegance, rich colours, and attention to detail. The themes for most of these paintings are Hindu Gods and Goddesses and scenes from Hindu mythology. In modern times, these paintings have become a much sought after souvenir during festive occasions in South India.

The process of making a Tanjore painting involves many stages. The first stage involves the making of the preliminary sketch of the image on the base. The base consists of a cloth pasted over a wooden base. Then chalk powder or zinc oxide is mixed with water-soluble adhesive and applied on the base. To make the base smoother, a mild abrasive is sometimes used. After the drawing is made, decoration of the jewellery and the apparels in the image is done with semi-precious stones. Laces or threads are also used to decorate the jewellery. On top of this, the gold foils are pasted. Finally, dyes are used to add colours to the figures in the paintings.

Madhubani painting

Madhubani painting is a style of uttradi mutt painting, practiced in the Mithila region of Bihar state, India. The origins of Madhubani painting are shrouded in antiquity, and a tradition states that this style of painting originated at the time of the Ramayana, when King Janak commissioned artists to do paintings at the time of marriage of his daughter, Sita, with Sri Rama who is considered to be an incarnation of the Hindu god lord Vishnu.

Bengal school

The Bengal School of Art was an influential style of art that flourished in India during the British Raj in the early 20th century. It was associated with Indian nationalism, but was also promoted and supported by many British arts administrators.

The Bengal school arose as an avant garde and nationalist movement reacting against the academic art styles previously promoted in India, both by Indian artists such as Ravi Varma and in British art schools. Following the widespread influence of Indian spiritual ideas in the West, the British art teacher Ernest Binfield Havel attempted to reform the teaching methods at the Calcutta School of Art by encouraging students to imitate Mughal miniatures. This caused immense controversy, leading to a strike by students and complaints from the local press, including from nationalists who considered it to be a retrogressive move. Havel was supported by the artist Abanindranath Tagore, a nephew of the poet Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore painted a number of works influenced by Mughal art, a style that he and Havel believed to be expressive of India's distinct spiritual qualities, as opposed to the "materialism" of the West. Tagore's best-known painting, *Bharat Mata* (Mother India), depicted a young woman, portrayed with four arms in the manner of Hindu deities, holding objects symbolic of India's national aspirations. Tagore later attempted to develop links with Japanese artists as part of an aspiration to construct a pan-Asianist model of art. The Bengal school's influence in India declined with the spread of modernist ideas in the 1920s.

Modern Indian Painting

During the colonial era, Western influences started to make an impact on Indian art. Some artists developed a style that used Western ideas of composition, perspective and realism to illustrate Indian themes. Others, like Jamini Roy, consciously drew inspiration from folk art.

By the time of Independence in 1947, several schools of art in India provided access to modern techniques and ideas. Galleries were established to showcase these artists. Modern Indian art typically shows the influence of Western styles, but is often inspired by Indian themes and images. Major artists are beginning to gain international recognition, initially among the Indian diaspora, but also among non-Indian audiences.

The Progressive Artist's Group, established shortly after India became independent in 1947, was intended to establish new ways of expressing India in the post-colonial era. The founders were six eminent artists - K. H. Ara, S. K. Bakre, H. A. Gade, M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza and F. N. Souza. Though the group was dissolved in 1956, it was profoundly influential in changing the idiom of Indian art. Almost all India's major artists in the 1950s were associated with the group.

Indian Classical Dances

- By Shovana Narayan

India is rich not just in terms of theatre traditions, but within the field of classical dance too, where it boasts of eight distinct forms. All eight classical dance forms trace their roots to the *Natyashastra*. As most of them are solo ('ekapatra') in nature, the utilization of various categories of 'angika', 'vacika', 'aharya' and 'sattvika' abhinaya is clearly evident. The application of 'mandalas', 'caris', 'gatis', 'hastas' is clearly seen in the domain of classical dance as also is the understanding of categorizations of 'nayaks' and 'nayikas' in terms of 'uttama', 'madhyama' or 'adhama'. Rasas, bhavas and sancharis from the basis of textual interpretations. The 'ashtanavika' forms a full item in the repertoire of all classical dance forms.

Apparent too is the similarity in the method of flowering of their repertoire. Being spiritual in nature, all forms have opening benedictions followed by the introduction of movements of the limbs to rhythmic accompaniment, progressing from simple patterns to complicated ones that culminate in the enactment of various stories from mythology.

For all classical dance forms, temples were the places of origin. The system flourished due to the patronage given by the rulers and society at large. However, owing to the exploitation of women practitioners, the art forms degenerated and so did the status of dancers in all parts of India. In certain areas, because of political changes, social customs underwent a sea change and all the dance forms took a back seat, surfacing only when a local ruler or a feudal lord displayed a personal interest in patronising the art form. In some areas there were no visible political and social upheavals and the place remained untouched by Muslim rule; a large number of dancers performed in the temples and also in the courts and were patronized by the local ruler besides the priests and society at large. As a result of the social renaissance that has been going on over the last two centuries, the twentieth century also witnessed a cultural renaissance. Not only did the dance forms and their practitioners regain their earlier status and glory, many innovations and inter-regional and cross-cultural influences too were seen, resulting in further development within the various forms.

All four categories of musical instruments are utilized by all dance forms, with music following the style of the region, namely Hindustani or Carnatic. A vocalist is a must in all dance forms for dancers of all styles rely heavily on interpretation of lyrics that are sung. Even in terms of 'aharya' or ornamentation, the precepts of the *Natyashastra* are clearly visible.

Stories from the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, verses from the Upanishads and tales from the Puranas form the central theme of all dance representations.

These are furthered by pieces based on the works of local saints and poets of the area.

North, West and Central India

Kathak

Kathak is the only classical dance form of the entire Indo-Gangetic belt. It is rooted in brahminical Hinduism; so much so that even today, the hereditary Kathaks of the region are Brahmins belonging to families of temple priests.

Kathak, as the name suggests, is derived from the word 'katha' (story) or 'kathakar' (storyteller). It traces its origin to the Brahmin priests in temples who, in a state of rhapsody, broke out in dance, making use of gesticulations and mime to embellish their sermons. Thus, 'Kathak' was born. Kathaks, as a group of priests, who enacted stories from Hindu epics and mythology, have been mentioned in two of the verses from *Mahabharata*.

*kathakascapare rajan sramanasca vanaukash/
divyakhyani ye capi pathanti madliuram dvijah//*

(verse 1.206.2-4, *Adiparva*)

The 'pathaka' stream of Kathaks who conduct rituals and give sermons, consider themselves higher than the 'dharaka' stream as the latter have taken to dance as a profession.

Kathak was prevalent among women too. References to talented and skilled women dancers such as Vasihali's Amrapali (also known as Ambapali), Magadha's Salvati and Padmavati, all contemporaries of Lord Buddha (6th Century BC) followed by Ghosha from Pataliputra a few centuries later, indicate the exalted state of dance among women of the Indo-Gangetic region. Sylvain Levi, Schlaginweit and Arthur Berriedale Keith have made references to Kathaks while commenting upon bas-reliefs of Sanchi and other sculptures. Prehistoric cave paintings and figures and figurines of the pre-Christian era point towards the 'natural vertical stance' of the dancers, as seen in Kathak. Even sculptures from the Maurya period (3rd BC) like that of the 'pirouetting nati' and the 'nati with a damaru' or the sculptures of 10th century AD of the Gangetic belt show remarkable similarities to Kathak postures and costumes, including the 'lehenga-choli' (3rd century BC Pataliputra, 5th century AD Bikaner) as well as the 'kurta-pyjama' (3rd BC, Pataliputra and 5th century AD, Sanchi, Bharhut, Deogarh).

There are references to women temple dancers called 'kalavangti' and 'bhagtan' in the Sun temple at Multan as well as in a few temples of Benaras and Rajasthan. Kalhan's *Rajatarangini* and the comments of Abul Fazl form some of the major sources.

The medieval period saw the introduction of the 'purdah' and therefore the withdrawal of women from public life. Kathak confined itself to temples only to emerge when royal patrons required it to do so. Predominant among the patrons were Jodhabai, Hindu Rajput wife of Emperor Akbar and later the Nawab of Oudh (Awadh). Besides the royal courts of Jaipur, Jodhpur, Raigarh and Benaras also provided patronage to Kathaks for quite a few of them were on the payrolls of their 'gunijan khana'. Women who danced in Mughal courts were usually courtesans ('tawaifs') who had learnt a few Kathak nuances from Kathak gurus; however, the true Kathaks continued to be traditional Brahmin Kathaks for they were the inheritors of the hereditary art. References to Kathaks in court mentioned these Brahmins. The census figures of William Crookes (1891), James Prinsep (1825) and Buchanan (1814) of small regions of eastern Uttar Pradesh indicate a large number of Kathaks.

The 'Raas-Leela' tradition of the 'rasadharis' of Vrindavan and the 'bhaktiyas', the 'nrityakalis' and the 'jhumariyas' of various regions of Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh, which had their birth during the 'Bhakti Movement' (religious renaissance) sometime in the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries, are based on the Kathak tradition. The first production of, 'Raas-Leela' was staged in Vrindavan by Vithalnath, son of Vallabhacharya, on the encouragement of Swami Haridas. Thus the choreographers of this first production were Narayana Bhatt and Ghamand Deva, two Kathaks from neighbouring Alwar. Herein, young boys before attaining puberty, dress up as Radha-Krishna and dance pieces based on mythological tales. This was as a result of the Bhakti Movement that swept the Indo-Gangetic belt in the wake of establishment of Muslim rule. The rise of Vaishnavism as a consequence of the Bhakti Movement, witnessed growth not only in literature and poetry but also in the development of dance in the area.

Kathak Prakashji Mishra, grandfather of Maharaj Bindadin, moved from Hariya in Allahabad district into the court of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daulah and provided the first formal introduction of Kathak in a Muslim court. His son Thakur Prasad became the guru and mentor of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah in the art of Kathak. The Nawab ruled for a short period, from 1847 to 1856, yet he laid the foundation for the patronization of Kathak and the formalization and stylization of the art. Thus the seeds of the Lucknow gharana were sown. The Jaipur Gharana, another prominent Kathak gharana, has more than one lineage in Rajasthan. It also boasts several Kathak stalwarts. The Benaras and the Raigarh gharanas are the other well-known schools of Kathak.

The dilemma facing a Brahmin Kathak used to dancing before the idol of a Hindu deity, when asked to perform before an idol-hating Muslim ruler, was resolved by placing an inoffensive 'tulasi' garland symbolic of Lord Krishna or a 'rudraksha' garland symbolic of Lord Shiva and dancing before it.

Mythological tales revolving around Hindu deities and the works of poets of the Bhakti Movement and of later periods ('ritikal') form the central pillar of all 'abhinaya' pieces. Dancers of the Lucknow gharana lay emphasis on the poetic works of Bindadin Maharaj.

A Kathak meditates through his dance and his practice of 'jnana mudra' is reflected in Kathak's basic pose. The attitude that dance is but a medium between the Almighty and the people has resulted in another characteristic pose of Kathak. A Kathak believes in 'life'. Therefore the basic stance is 'samabhanga'. As man goes through all 'bhangis' and 'mandalas' in real life as movements in transition and not as frozen postures, so does a Kathak. Sculptures from the 3rd century BC to 5th century AD are largely in 'samabhanga', position with hardly any 'tribhangi' (body position that employs exaggerated hip deflection) or the 'ardhamandali' (half sitting posture with out-turned knees). But these positions are evident in the sculptures of 5th century AD to 12th century AD, after which the paintings show a coexistence of all three positions. The influence on Lucknow Gharana of the flavour of Awadh culture saw delicacy in movements as well as in positioning of body and legs.

A Kathak performance usually sees the opening benediction to the Lord, being followed by a pure rhythmic piece where celebration of rhythm is witnessed. The mood, nature and range of the tala are brought out in this section as the dancer 'dances the tala' rather than 'dancing to a tala'. This is followed by, 'gat nikas', an item that mirrors the gaits as classified in the *Natyashastra*, indicating deep knowledge of the treatise. Following it is the 'gat bhava' in which a story is enacted utilizing hand gestures and the entire range of mimetic dramatic 'abhinaya' capabilities, for it is performed without the familiar accompanying song. These stories are taken from Hindu mythology. Next follow 'abhinaya' sequences with song accompaniment. These could be thumris that revolve around Radha-Krishna tales or 'ashta-nayika' or bhajans (devotional songs). The finale is usually performed with the 'tarana' that culminates in breathtaking footwork.

A few characteristic features of Kathak are dazzling pirouettes and intricate footwork as well as the recitation of rhythmic syllables by the Kathak himself before dancing them. The latter is a legacy of the origin of the Kathak form itself where narration preceded enactment. One notable feature is the 'ghunghuroo' donned by the Kathak for he follows the precepts of the ancient treatise that requires a dancer to wear at least 100 to 200 'kinkinis' (ankle bells) around each ankle that are strung together on a string. Such a practice is attributed to the dance of the 'Kathaks' as temple priests inside the sanctum sanctorum.

*susvarasca surupasca suksma nakstradevatah /
kinkinyah kamsyaracifa ekaikangulikamtaram //
badhniyannilasutrena granthibhisca dricdham punaih //
satadvayam satam vapi padyomapjagarini //*

The tabla forms the main percussion accompaniment. It has replaced the traditional 'pakhawaj', the latter occupying a secondary position in a performance. Musicians include the vocalist, the sitar player and the flautist. As regards costume, the Kathak has the choice of the lehenga-choli or the 'kurta-pyjama' in other words, the angarkha-churidar.

South India

(1) Bharatanatyam

The dance that developed in the regions of Tamilnadu, Andhra and Karnataka was known as Dasiattam, that signified 'Dance of the Servants of God'. Deriving its name from the dance of the devadasis, the name was changed to 'Bharatanatyam' sometime in the mid-thirties of the twentieth century. The devadasis were women who had been dedicated to the temples. The verses from *Padma Purana* and *Bhavishya Purana* indicate the patronage of rulers in dedicating women to serve in temples. Their service included fanning idols of deities, carrying the sacred lamp, 'kumbarati', in a procession while some were also required to sing and dance before the Gods.

However the tradition of dance was not new. The second century AD Tamil work, *Silappadikaram*, revolves around the story of a dancer ('natya ganika'). Though such references indicate the existence only of women dancers, words such as 'kootar' in early Tamil works are pointers to male dancers who performed chiefly on social occasions. That male dancers were discouraged emerges from the southern treatise, *Natanathi Vadya Ranjanam*. One of the chief reasons for encouraging women dancers was the fact that as they were considered married to God, they were therefore believed to be harbingers of luck for they could never be widowed.

The Chola rulers of tenth century AD to fourteenth century AD especially Rajaraja-I provided the much-needed patronage for the growth and development of the form. Temples with nata mandirs sprung up. Sculptures in various temples such as the Brihadeswara temple at Tanjavur, Gangaikonda-choliswaram temple at Cholapuram, Meenakshi temple at Madurai and the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram bear evidence of this. Knowledge of the *Natyashastra* is evident from the effort made in capturing the 108 'karanas' as temple sculpture on the 'gopurams' (canopies or domes) at the gateways of Chidambaram. The rulers of the Vijayanagara Empire followed suit in providing patronage. In the days of yore, Queen Santala danced in the pillared halls of Halebid and Belur nine hundred years ago. The Bhagavata Mela Natakams also played a predominant role in the development of the dance form.

The interest of the Deccani Sultans saw to the further flowering of 'dasiattam'. This period saw the introduction of items such as the 'salamu' and 'tillana'. Of the two, 'salamu' has been discarded in the last five decades as a result of the process of purification that had started in the thirties of the last century.

As a result of its performance in courts and on social occasions, dasiattam also came to be known as 'sadirattam'. Such devadasis were sometimes referred to as 'rajadasis' or 'alankaradasis'. Unfortunately, the devadasis came to be exploited, as rulers, noblemen and temple priests took advantage of them. Their association with temple prostitution saw a decline in their status and dignity and was responsible for their marginalization in society. It was perhaps this situation that led to the re-christening of their dance form as one of the first steps taken when the process of reform and restoration commenced. The new name Bharatanatyam was derived from the then recent discovery of the theatrical treatise, Bharata's *Natyashastra*. This proved to be a brilliant psychological measure. E. Krishna Iyer, Rukmini Devi Arundale and other enlightened members of society dedicated themselves to the task of formalization of the dance form. Prior to the efforts of E. Krishna Iyer, the task of redefining the content and formalization of the repertoire of 'dasiattam' had been started by the four Tanjore brothers known as the 'Tanjore Quartet'. They were Chinnaiah, Ponniah, Vadivelu and Shivanandan. To Rukmini Arundale goes the credit of being the first Brahmin lady dancer hailing from a noble and enlightened family background.

However what was important was the nurturing of the fine arts in the hands of all these dedicated persons through the ages. Much has been written about their talent, wealth, customs and training by several foreign travellers and writers such as Methwold, Domingo Paes, a Portuguese diplomat to the court of the Vijayanagar Empire, Fernao Nuniz and Abbe Dubois.

Bharatanatyam perceives the body in terms of triangles. The opening, 'samabhanga' (linear) position quickly descends into the familiar 'ardhamandali' or the 'araimandali' (half-sitting position with outstretched knees) imparting the imagery of triangles. The hand movements are linear in nature and the mood of the dancer is grave and serene. As the right side is considered to represent 'tandava' and the left side 'lasya', all movements on the right are required to be mirrored on the left.

The literary content of Bharatanatyam has been provided by the Nayanmars (Shaivites), devotees of Lord Shiva and by the Alvars, devotees of Lord Krishna. The saint-poets of the later medieval period and of the early modern period of Indian history further enriched the literary repertoire. All these works laid the foundations of the present repertoire of the dance form.

A Bharatanatyam recital begins with an 'Alarippu' derived from the Telugu word 'alarimpu' (to decorate with flowers). This is an offering to the Lord through pure dance and is danced to the recitation of the 'sollu-kattu' or rhythmic syllables as it

unfolds some of the basic movements of the dance form from the familiar 'araimandali' position where the feet are placed slightly apart and the knees are bent outwards. The 'alarippu', generally short, ends with a crisp, 'tirmana'. The next item 'Jatiswaram' is again a pure dance sequence involving rhythmic patterns, 'adavus' that are accompanied by a melodic structure. 'Sabdham' is an expressional piece interpreting the text in adoration of the deity that ends in a 'charanam', earlier known as a 'salamu'. 'Sabdham' is a prelude to 'Varnam' that usually consists of four parts. The 'Varnam' tests the interpretative and rhythmic skill of the dancer and is the focal point of a dancer's recital.

A purely expressional piece, 'Padam', follows next. This is usually a seven-line lyrical song on the theme of love. Here the 'pallavi' or the theme line is repeated many times as the dancer emotes the 'sanchari bhavas' (series of pictures or conceptions to elaborate the main theme). Other expressional items include the 'Javali' (expressional piece dealing with anger and frustration of a person in love) and the 'kirtana' (emphasis on devotional text). Most of the items are usually performed at medium tempo. For the finale, a brilliant abstract pure dance based on rhythm and melody known as 'tillana' is performed. Sculptured poses and footwork are its hallmarks. The performance ends with a short 'sloka', a concluding prayer to the Lord.

The mridangam provides the basic rhythm while sometimes a ghatam may be used in addition. The 'nattuvanan' is the conductor who recites rhythmic patterns, often wielding a pair of cymbals that strike out beats ('talams') and rhythmic patterns. The singer provides the much-needed songs for interpretation. Other accompanists include the flautist and violinist. The accompanying music follows the Carnatic style of rendering. About 30 ankle bells are worn around each ankle.

The costume is rich and is a modern-stitched adaptation of the sari worn between the legs. The dancer is heavily bejewelled while the hair is usually / worn in a long braid decked with flowers. A belt of 30 to 40 ankle bells is tied around each ankle.

(2) Kuchipudi

Andhra was home to various dance traditions. The existence of dance dramas around legends pertaining to Lord Shiva, known as 'Shiva Lila Natyam', was known in earlier times. 'Brahma Melas' were performed around tenth century AD that included various religious dance dramas. Ritualistic dances corresponded to the Aradhana mitya described in the treatise *Nrittaratnavali* by Jayapa Senani (thirteenth century) of Warangal, Bahunatakas and Brahmanamelas. The rise of Vaishnavism saw the evolution of Bhagavata Mela. In 1675, impressed with the performance of 'Parijatapaharana' by Kuchelapuram Brahmins, the Nawab of Golconda, Abdul Hassan Tahnisha, of Islamic faith, became a patron of this Hindu art form. He encouraged and fostered its growth by granting the surrounding areas of the village Kuchipudi to the dancers, with the stipulation that the practice should carry on.

With the deterioration of the then prevailing system of dance by devadasis, concerned Brahmin gurus and experts assembled at Village Kuchipudi and formed groups that came to be known as 'Brahmana Melas'. Over a period of time, the practitioners of this art came to be known as 'bhagvatulus', well versed in dance, scholarship and music. Predominant among the 'bhagvatulus' was Bhakta Siddhendra Yogi whose verses became themes for enactment of various dance dramas in the style of dance that developed in this village.

These dance dramas culminated in a dance form, Kuchipudi that derived its name from the village that formed the fulcrum in the annals of dance tradition of the area.

In its development, there was an unceasing interaction of the 'bhagvatulus' with the 'devadasis' and the 'raja nartakis' (court dancers), the latter being influenced by the Yakshagana tradition. Keeping the tradition of presentation as laid down in ancient treatises, 'daruvus' or 'darus' that introduced each character of the dance drama, were followed by pure dance interludes that were accompanied by the recitation of rhythmic patterns called 'sollakath'. Thereafter, the performance saw the expressional delineation of the 'sabdams' (verses) that were dramatic lyrics based on a theme and rendered in the 'pathya' musical style in the Carnatic system of music. In this manner, the full scope of utilization of the four branches of 'abhinaya' ('angika', 'vacika', 'aharya' and 'sattvika') was visible. Traditionally, the conductor or 'sutradhar' conducted the entire play.

Even though there are similarities between Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam in terms of body positions and the employment of 'ardhamandali' or the half-sitting position with outstretched knees, it is the mood of delineation that distinguishes the two styles. While Bharatanatyam is performed in a grave and sombre manner, Kuchipudi is light and effervescent, bringing with it the fresh spontaneous aura of village life.

An evening's performance today begins with an invocatory number that is followed by a number of interpretative pieces such as padams, varnams, sabdams and slokams, similar to what has been stated for Bharatanatyam. Some of the favourite items in the Kuchipudi repertoire are legacies of the Kuchipudi dance-drama tradition. These include the Bhama Kalapam, Tirtha Narayan Yati's Krishna Lila Tarangini, padams written by Kshetrappa of Muvvu, Kritis of Thyagaraja, Gola Kalapam of Ramaiah Shastri, and of course verses from Jayadeva's Gitagovinda.

The final piece de resistance is the 'Tarangam', an item that is melodic and rhythmic in character. This item is performed at a fast tempo, punctuated by statuesque poses, and finally showcases the dexterity of the dancer, who executes complicated rhythmic patterns while balancing on the edge of a brass plate. Sometimes an ornate brass pot is also balanced on the head while dancing.

Traditionally a male dance form, it was customary to find the roles of female characters of the story being performed by men. The cross-gender histrionics associated with this gave the dance its uniqueness in terms of 'abhinaya' renderings. However, women have entered the domain and have become the new torchbearers of the tradition.

The traditional costume of a Kuchipudi male dancer was a 'dhoti' for male characters and a 'sari' for female characters; but today, female dancers use a costume similar to that employed by their sex in Bharatanatyam, namely loose flared stitched pants with a pleated fan in the front. It however has one subtle difference. Unlike the Bharatanatyam costume, this 'dhoti'-like Kuchipudi costume has a 'laangh' or a folded pleat at the divided portion at the back of the costume.

A Kuchipudi performance is usually accompanied by a mridangam (percussion) player, singer, a nattuvanar or conductor wielding cymbals, a violinist and / or a stringed or wind instrument player. The compositions, follow the Carnatic style of music prevalent in southern India.

(3) Kathakali

Whether it was owing to the Aryans who had gradually filtered down to the coastal region of Kerala or the Bengali Brahmins who settled along the south-west coast of India to escape Muslim persecution, the fact remains that there was a marriage of pre-Aryan and Aryan dances. The worship of nature, of the benevolent Earth Mother Bhagavati and the propitiation of the spirits of the ancestors are still to be seen in themes of folk dance theatres of the region such as Teyyam, Mutiyettu and Tiryattam. The Aryan influence of story telling was seen in the recitation known as Chakyar-koothu, by the Chakyars who claimed descent from the 'sutras' of the *Mahabharata*. This tradition is mentioned in the second century literary work, *Silappadikaram* (Epic of the Anklet). Chakyar-koothu culminated in the development of Koodiyattam. This new dance drama received patronage from most of the rulers, notable being the Perumal dynasty. Accompanying a Chakyar recitation was a drummer belonging to the Nambiar caste. The performers of Koodiyattam could be both men and women.

All these developments laid the foundations for the emergence of Kathakali, the classical dance form of Kerala.

Kathakali, actually means "story-play" for it is, derived from the words 'katha' (story) and 'kali' (play -as in playing a game). This dance form is a synthesis of pre-Aryan and Aryan arts and traditions within the framework of the Sanskrit theatre. The position of the knees and of the soles of the feet that is employed in Kathakali seem to be derived from 'kalar', the martial art of the Nayars. This position was an extension of the combat position for it served to absorb the shock of landing. By this time, there was a waning need for self-preservation and the extended practice of 'kalaris' had become increasingly a matter of stylization and

entertainment. It was nonetheless the Nayar warrior clan that kept the knowledge of kalari and Kathakali alive.

The origin of Kathakali is attributed to the Zamorin of Calicut in the 17th century for his having designed Krishnattam plays and to the Raja of Kottarakara who designed the Ramanattam plays. In 1650, the Zamorin of Calicut, inspired by a vision of Lord Krishna, authored a play around Lord Krishna titled 'Krishnapadi' that later came to be known as Krishnattam.

The refusal of the Zamorin of Calicut to allow the staging of his play in neighbouring Kottarakara, led to the designing of Ramanattam, plays woven around Lord Rama, by the Raja of Kottarakara. The ruler of Kottayam, Tampuran, later added other themes to the repertoire such as themes from the *Mahabharata*, the *Shiva Purana*, and the *Bhagavata Purana*. Because of the expanding repertoire, the name was changed to the more comprehensive term 'Kathakali'. All these plays were written in the Malayalam language, a language that was understood by the common man unlike the Sanskrit recitation by the Chakyars, and were performed over eight nights.

Performing in the open under the canopy of the starlit night, the light from the shining brass oil lamps gives the character of the dance play a supernatural look. This is highlighted by the elaborate costumes, facial make up and headgear that are so characteristic of this dance style. In terms of the colour of the base make-up and costume inclusive of headgear ('mudi') and beard ('tadi') and the characterization of the characters, all precepts of *Natyashastra* are followed to the fullest. The colours are important for they lend a meaning. Green suggests a godlike character; red, a demonic character and yellow, a wondrous character. Some characters are seen sporting a ridge-like white beard, made of 'cutti' or rice paste and lime and looking like layers of paper that is glued to the 'face'. Realistic make up is used to suggest female characters or the common man.

The costume of Kathakali is as unique as its make-up. The dancers wear full skirts that are multi-layered, reaching just below the knees while the top is a full-sleeved, high-necked jacket with jewellery covering the entire front up to the waist. The skirts are normally white and have a striped border while the colour of the jacket depends on the character being depicted. Only the skirts of demonic characters are either black or dark coloured.

The basic position adopted by dancers is the 'ardhamandali' or the 'ukkara' (half-sitting) position. The feet are placed apart with outer soles touching the ground, with the toes curled, in a position known as the 'mandalasthana'. The dancer usually moves in rectangles and squares with clear extensions of the leg. In no other dance is the classification of the glances as visible as in Kathakali. It emphasizes 'netra-abhinaya' for here not only should the eye be able to remain open and unblinking for incredibly long periods without blinking, albeit should also be possible for the dancer to interpret passages through the eyes alone.

Being a highly stylized form, Kathakali is heavy in dramatics. Drumbeats herald the staging of the dance drama which usually lasts the entire night. At the start of the dance play, a wick lamp is lit and the curtain removed to reveal the supernatural character. Slowly, various characters of the story appear. Traditionally, only male dancers enact all roles, whether that of male or female characters.

The invocatory dance, 'todayam' is followed by the 'puruppadu', 'Manjutara' from the Gitagovinda is now sung after which the play unfolds as each character is delineated with detailed interpretation of the text. This is interspersed with short bursts of rhythmic patterns, 'kalasams'. Rhythmic sequences also include the 'adakkam' or 'tomakaram'. The play ends with the last verse ('sloka') when the curtain is slowly re-introduced as the dancers dance their way out.

It is another version of Sanskrit Drama that comes alive in a Kathakali presentation.

The musical instruments accompanying a Kathakali performance are three kinds of drums called the 'chenda', 'maddallam' and 'edakka', large cymbals and the metal gong struck by the vocalist. The 'sopana' style of music of the Carnatic musical system is predominantly used.

(4) Mohiniattam

Mohiniattam literally means the Dance of the Enchantress (Mohini). It is believed that this was the dance performed by Lord Vishnu who had taken on the form of the enchantress Mohini in order to kill the demon Bhasmasura, who had been granted the boon of invincibility by Lord Shiva. Not surprisingly, this dance of Kerala is performed only by women.

Mohiniattam has been traced to Nangyar Koothu of second century AD that was the female presentation of the Chakyars' dance. The existence of 'lasya anga' or the graceful female dance, Nangyar Koothu, is gleaned from the literary work *Silappadikaram*. According to other scholars, the dance was supposed to have been created in the middle of the eighteenth century in the court of Maharaja Swati Tirunal of Travancore, Kerala.

Though it neighbours Tamilnadu, Kerala's distinct cultural identity had evolved by the eighth century AD. Thus, it is not surprising to find the 'lasya anga' of Mohiniattam to be distinct from that found in the temples of neighbouring Tamilnadu. Kerala's swaying palm trees and winding backwaters seems to have inspired the development and growth of Mohiniattam, reflecting the sensuous beauty and captivating grace of the women of the area.

The tenth century Chollur inscriptions bear out the presence of women temple dancers in such references as 'Nangyar Tali' wherein 'Nangyar' refers to a 'woman' and 'Tali' stands for temple. The Tripunithura and the Suchindram temples likewise bear this out. Literature of the Manipravala era (14th century AD) dwells upon the celebrated and exalted status of the courtesan, Unnaichi or Cherukarakutthatti, who was also an accomplished dancer. 'Vyavaharamala' by Narayana Namboodiri (16th century AD), mention payments that had been made to such dancers. Similarly, other literary works such as 'Goshayatra' and the 'Balarama Bharatam' by Kunchan Nambiar, contain references to the dances performed by women that were essentially 'lasya' in nature.

The art form received great patronage from the Raja of Travancore some four centuries ago. This was furthered by Maharaja Swati Tirunal in the eighteenth century. The Maharaja is accredited with its popularisation and further development in terms of text and musical compositions. The next major landmark came with the efforts of Vallathol and the establishment of the Kerala Kalamandalam.

Even though Mohiniattam makes extensive use of the 'araimandali' namely the half-sitting position, here the feet are kept apart. This helps in imparting a certain characteristic sway in the movements that follow. The movements of the torso, hands and limbs are curving, giving it its distinctive languid quality. While moving, there is elaborate use of the serpentine gait along with langorous dips and swaying of the body, adding to its sensuous charm. The dance is performed in slow or medium tempo.

One of its characteristic features is its deceptive simplicity and the apparent 'internalization' of movements as each movement unfolds from the centre of the body as it traverses to the periphery. In terms of technique, it seems to be inspired by 'Kalaripayattu', the martial art form of the area whereas for 'abhinaya' (expression), it seems to draw inspiration from Koodiyattam. But the eye movements are subtle.

As in all other dance forms, the opening invocation is to Lord Ganesha and this is followed by the 'mukhachalam' and 'cholakettus' that signify unfolding of rhythmic patterns. These are followed by 'abhinaya' sequences displayed through 'padams' and 'ashtapadis', testing the subtlety of the dancer's histrionic skills. Maharaja Swati Tirunal's poems form the most popular text for the 'padams' in a Mohiniattam repertoire. Jayadeva's works form an important part of this dance's repertoire. 'Tharattu', also known as 'Omanatingal', is an 'abhinaya' item based on verses written and composed by Iryamman Thampi as a lullaby to his nephew, Swati Tirunal. It is a recent addition to the repertoire.

The finale item of Mohiniattam is 'Jeeva' which is the ultimate intensification of the dancer's spiritual experience. At times 'Touratrika', with elements of 'gitam' (melody), 'vadyam' (rhythm) and 'nrityam' (dance) is danced thereafter.

The 'tala' structure followed in Mohiniattam is complex and belongs to a genre of its own. The accompanying music, 'sopana', even though belonging to the family of Carnatic system, is unique to the area. In keeping with the literal meaning of the word 'sopana' ('step') there is a slow and deliberate elaboration of dance movement and vocabulary as well as music at every step.

In terms of costume, inspired by the 'kasava mundu' or the gold bordered, saronglike attire, the dancers are always dressed in ivory silk costume with gold brocade borders. The front sports a wide pleated fan resembling a large palm leaf with pleated ribs. Gold ornaments add to the gorgeous lustre of the costume. The hair is tied in a bun tilted on one side of the crown and is bedecked with flowers. Ankle bells numbering about 25 to 30 adorn the ankles.

The percussion accompanying a Mohiniattam performance is usually on the 'edakka', 'maddallam', 'mridangam' and the cymbals. Of these, the 'edakka' has pride of place as it is capable of emitting all the seven notes of the musical scale. The other musicians making up the orchestra are the vocalist, the veena player and the flautist.

East India

Odissi

Orissa in the eastern region of India abounds in temples, a tradition that can be seen in its heritage. Frescoes and friezes such as those seen in the sculptures of the Ranigumpha caves, indicate the existence of a thriving temple art including dance that was known as the Odhra Magadhi style of art. This living dance tradition of the area has been kept alive by the Maharis (devadasis) and the Gotipuas (dance of the male dancers dressed up as girls). From the time of the Bhakti movement, the lyrics of the poet Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda* Jayadeva became the main repertoire of Odissi dancers.

The institution of 'maharis' received great patronage from rulers such as Chodaganga Deva in the eleventh century and latter-day rulers such as King Kapilendra Deva. The latter is accredited with the building of the Nata Mandir in the Jagannath Temple at Puri for enabling devotional dancing by the 'maharis'. He is also stated to have defined the duties of the 'maharis' that included dancing twice a day as part of the ritual. Those who danced in the Nata Mandir during God's meal times ('bhoj') came to be known as 'bahari maharis', 'baharjanis' or 'bahari-gauni maharis', while those who danced in the inner shrine when the deity was adorned in the morning and in the evening, were known as the 'bhitari maharis' or 'bhitarjani' or 'bhitari-gauni maharis'. The duties of 'maharis' included dancing in the chariot procession of the idols.

Usually the male offspring of these 'maharis', before reaching the age of puberty, dressed themselves as women and imitated the dance of the 'maharis'. It was

therefore rich in exaggerated movement of the torso and acrobatic feats. These young male dancers came to be known as 'gotipuas'. Owing to the suppleness of their young bodies and their imitation of a woman's gait the dance of the 'gotipuas' had a unique elfin quality. On attaining puberty, they had to leave the temples and continue with their art outside, either as performers or teachers.

The institution of 'maharis' saw disrepute and decline owing to its abuse by society. The post-Independence period saw its rejuvenation. In this effort, the name of the dance form was changed to Odissi. The costume was standardized and the repertoire was expanded to include many more items. Most of the changes incorporated were inspired by similar changes that had been adopted by Bharatanatyam.

Even though the *Natyashastra*, the *Abhinaya Darpana* and the *Abhinaya Chandrika* all form sources of inspiration for Odissi, it is the *Abhinaya Chandrika* that forms its real backbone. The significant feature of the dance form is its extensive use of the 'tribhanga' position where the body is broken into three deflections emphasizing the 'lasya' (graceful) tenor of the dance form. The 'samabhanga' position of the dancer quickly descends into the 'chowka' position where the feet are placed apart in 'ardhamandali' position or the half-sitting position. The 'bhasa' (alternating movement of the torso from left to right to maintain the image of 'tribhanga'), the 'burha' or 'borrho' (quick movement with small leaps and quick foot contacts), 'gothi' (foot contacts on heels) and 'cari' (weaving 's' patterns of) are some identifying features of Odissi.

Beginning with a 'bhumi pranam' (prayer to mother earth), Lord Ganesha is propitiated through 'bighnaraja puja'. This is followed by a rhythmical melodic piece, 'batu nritya' that is followed by 'swara pallabis' or 'swara-pallavis'. Thereafter a series of interpretative items are performed, known as 'gita-abhinaya' or 'sa-abhinaya'. Compositions and verses from the *Gitagovinda*, written by the twelfth century poet, Jayadeva, form the central pillar of interpretative texts. Verses of other poets such as Banmali Das, Surya Baldev Rath, Upendra Bhanj and others also form part of the repertoire. For the finale, the 'tarajan' and the 'moksha' are performed and these topped by a closing, 'sloka' or verse in thanksgiving.

The present-day costume has been inspired by the newly developed costume of Bharatanatyam. However, in terms of material, the Orissa 'patta' or 'patola' sari is used. Only silver ornaments are worn by the dancers.

Musical accompaniment includes the percussion drum known as 'mardala' or 'pakhawaja', vocals, the sitar, violin or other stringed instrument, flute and cymbals. The guru or the 'mardala' player usually delivers the recitation of rhythmic syllables. On her ankles, the dancer sports ankle bells, about 30 to 40 in number, plaited on a string. The style of music is 'raga'-based and forms a bridge between the Hindustani and Carnatic music systems.

Northeast India

(1) Manipuri

Manipuri dances incorporate within their fold three distinct dance streams, all mirroring the development of culture and the trajectory of faith. These are pre-Vaishnav dances such as Jagoi, Lai Haroba, Khamba Thoibi; Vaishnav dances such as the various Raas dances; and the martial dances. Thus the very name Manipur or the Jewelled City also refers to the cultural gems of that area.

An early copper plate inscription shows King Khowai Tampak as a great patron of the arts who has been credited with the introduction of the drum and the cymbals as dance. He as also some of his successors patronized the institution of 'loisangs' or art guilds by heading these guilds. These 'loisangs', established by King Khowai Tampak, became the highest committees of experts on various aspects of Manipuri dancing. Among the various 'loisangs', the one devoted to dance was known as 'Palaloisang'. It had an important role to play in recognizing an artiste and continues till date as most of the present-day gurus are found to be members of the Palaloisang.

(a) Pre-Vaishnav Dances

The legend of Shiva dancing with Parvati in this region beside a lake, nestling among the hills, lit by the brilliance and sparkle of the 'mani' (gem) on the forehead of Shiva's serpent gave rise to the Jagoi dance, performed by Meiteis, followers of the Bratya religion that had inputs of Shaivism, the Shakti cult and other primitive beliefs. This led to ritualistic dances dedicated to Lord Shiva, Nongponkningthu, and Parvati, Panthoibi. 'Chingkheiol' namely Dance of Usha (Dance of Dawn) is also considered to be amongst the oldest Manipuri dances for it is believed that the people of Manipur regard themselves as descendants of Usha, the Goddess of Dawn. Similarly, the hill people on the eastern border of Manipur, the Tangkus, regard themselves as descendants of Sage Tandu, disciple of Lord Shiva who had taught the art of dance to Sage Bharata, the author of *Natyashastra*. The word Tangku is supposed to be a derivative of Tandu.

The tragic love story between Khamba and Thoibi, based on a Manipuri epic, Moirang Parba, a semi-historical legend written in the eleventh or twelfth century, forms an important part of pre-Vaishnav repertoire. Another dance drama of the Meitei culture, mirroring the tantric and early Hindu cultures is the Lai Haroba or The Festival of Gods, wherein Lai stands for God. Danced during the month of Chaitra (spring), a performance usually spreads over several days and nights. This dance drama is based on the Meitei concept of cosmology, which believes that the earth was brought down from heaven by nine gods and seven goddesses. In this, the love duets between Nongpokningthou and Panthoibi are reminiscent of the love sport between Lord Krishna and Radha.

The principal male and female dancers are known as Amaibas and Amaibeas or sometimes shortened to Maibas and Maibeas. Both Maibas and Maibeas were temple dancers. Unlike the devadasis of southern India, women temple dancers of Manipur namely Maibeas could lead a normal married life even while sanctified as temple dancers. The Maibas and Maibeas are usually dressed in distinctive white costume.

The costume for the Lai Haroba is the traditional Meitei costume consisting of the Phanek, a sarong-like skirt with black and red stripes sporting a border with the traditional pattern of a lotus and bee with the upper part of the body being covered by a tight-fitting blouse. In Khamba Thoibi dance, Princess Thoibi is usually in a red Phanek with an emerald green velvet blouse with gold and silver embroidery while Khamba is attired in a purple and gold dhoti and a green velvet jacket with gold trimmings. On his head he sports a white turban with red and gold embroidery and a peacock feather.

(b) Cholan Dances

Responding to the needs of providing protection and also as measures of self defence, acrobatic exercises and training with self-defence weapons such as spears and swords, were part of society's occupations. This slowly emerged into a distinct art form. As even training was a ritual in itself, the exercises were accompanied by the beating of drums. Some scholars opine that the origin of Cholan dances lay in "Sangkeertana" when these dances accompanied rituals. Thus, there was a blend of the ritual, the devotional, the occupational, the social and the artistic in the Cholan dances, which were masculine and virile in nature. These 'tandava' dances came to belong to the Chalanam group and were danced by men alone. The tradition continues till date.

The two most well known Cholan dances are the Pung Cholan and the Kartal Cholan. However, there are also the Duff Cholan and the Dhol Cholan. In the Pung Cholan, the male dancers attired in spotless white dhotis, white turbans and a folded shawl over the left shoulder, with a 'pung' or 'mridanga' drum hung horizontally in front with a strap going over the shoulder, play incredible rhythms while executing some of the most difficult leaps and pirouettes and maintaining an effortless grace. The other cholams are similar yet the instruments used are according to the names. For example, Kartal Cholan would employ large cymbals, the Duff Cholan, a kind of tambourine and the Dhol Cholan, a kind of large drum usually seen played with folk music. These Cholams can be performed all through the year and on important religious occasions too. The Mandilla Cholan is performed by women alone who dance decoratively, using cymbals as accompaniment to devotional songs.

(c) Post-Vaishnav Dances -Raas Dances:

The Raas dance owes its origin to King Bhagyachandra who ruled in the eighteenth century. Influenced by Vaishnav missionaries from Bengal who were worshippers of Lord Krishna, King Pamheiba converted to Vaishnavism and made it the State religion. In 1764, Maharaja Bhagyachandra, grandson of King Pamheiba, adopted Gaudiya Vaishnavism, the cult of devotion to Lord Krishna, as advocated by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Inspired by a dream of Lord Krishna dancing the Raas dances with the 'gopis' or cowherdesses, King Bhagyachandra composed three of the six Raas-Leela dances. These, Maha Raas, Vasant Raas and the Kunj Raas, were first performed at the Govindji Temple at Imphal wherein the main idol of Lord Krishna was carved out of a particular wood, again based on a vision. He is also accredited with the authorship of *Govinda Sangeetalila Vilasa*, an important text on the details and fundamentals of Raas dances of Manipur.

The box-like costume called the 'kumil', result of Bhagyachandra's vision, enhances the effect of gliding on stage! Unlike performers in other dance forms, the Manipuri dancer is hardly ever seen to sport ankle bells. On the other hand, the feet of women dancers are adorned by an elaborate piece of ornamentation.

Manipuri dancers weave figures of eight, 's' shapes, circular and serpentine patterns, with graceful movements of the hand, that impart lyricism and unparalleled fluidity. The arms are never stretched out to the fullest nor are the hands ever raised far above the head or very low. The women never jump while the men are known for their swift movements, leaps and sudden sitting positions. The facial expressions are supremely controlled displays of emotion, cloaked in serenity, for all feelings seem to emanate from the movements of limbs. The predominant mood that seems to emanate is that of 'shringara' or love in its two counterpoints of 'viyog' (separation) and 'sambhog' (union).

Within the Manipuri dancer's repertoire are short musical compositions known as 'swarmalas', compositions with four different combinations of music, rhythmic pattern, poetry and text known as 'chaturangs', songs with rhythmic sounds called 'kiriprabandhas' or texts or verses recited to the accompaniment of drums, known as the 'sheigonnabi'. The musical accompaniment is usually provided by the percussion instrument called the 'pung' in addition to other varieties of drums, the flute, cymbals, conch shell, the trumpet-like horn and vocals. The style of music rendered is typical of the north-eastern region.

(2) Sattriya

Hailing from Assam, Sattriya is the latest addition to the classical dance panorama. The name is derived from the 'sattras' (monasteries) that had ritual dancing performed by celibate priests. This ritual was later incorporated into the practices followed after the adoption of Vaishnavism in 16th century AD. Further theatrical elements were incorporated from Ankia Nat Theatre, Ojapali traditions and Sankaradeva's 'Chinha-yatra'. The legend of Radha does not play a dominant

role in the traditional Ankia Nat. Verses of Shankaradeva, a devotee of Lord Krishna (15th century AD) provide the bulk of textual content for interpretation.

With the introduction of women artistes, this stylistic ritual dance has undergone a subtle change in the nature and treatment of movement. In its journey to the proscenium, the ritualistic core has been further elaborated upon and many items from mythology have also been added. Rhythmic patterns have seen further developments and are more visible in their renderings. Performances demonstrate the defined 'ora' that is different for the 'purusha' (male) and 'prakriti' (female). The genesis of teaching methodology is attributed to Mahadeva, disciple of Sankaradeva. The movements employed in Sattriya are basically circular in nature with a number of leaps and jumps being frequently employed. The impact of other dance forms in the ever-expanding repertoire, music and development of the form is visible.

Following the 'Dhemali', a musical prelude in a traditional Sattriya dance drama, there is a dramatic entry by the 'sutraddhar' or narrator, from behind a curtain, to the accompaniment of rhythmic drums and clashing of cymbals, as is the requirement of a Sanskrit Drama. The 'sutraddhar' plays a crucial role for he is the one who links the various limbs of the evening's play. Some of the traditional items of the repertoire are the Gosai Pravesar Nritya or the 'Dance of the Lord' describing the valorous deeds of the hero, the Gopi Pravesar Nritya, Jhumuras, Yuddhar Naach, Nritya Bhang, Naach of the Natwas and the Sattria Raas.

A traditional Sattriya was performed only by young pre-pubescent boys who also danced female roles. But today, with the entry of women dancers, a Sattriya classical dance evening follows a format of presentation that is similar to other classical dance forms. The women sometimes wear the traditional white 'kurta-dhoti' with white front-peaked turban of male Sattriya dancers with a 'tulsi mala' (rosary) adorning the neck, but the majority dress in traditional Assamese long skirts with floral motifs and stiff fans adorning the front center as well as on two sides of the waist.

The musical system followed by Sattriya dancers is the characteristic music of the northeast that also follows the 'raga' cycle with its own distinctive variation. The 'tala' (rhythmic cycle) structures employed in Sattriya are mixed, for a cycle could contain an arrangement of a series of different 'tala' patterns. The rhythmical accompaniment is chiefly given by a horizontal drum from the 'mridanga' family known as the 'khol'. Other musical accompaniments include a pair of cymbals, vocals and stringed instruments.

Social Influences on Development of Performing Arts

Any discussion on the repertoire of the performing arts automatically presupposes it to be far removed from the prevailing social environment. This is because performing arts to a common man are synonymous with representation of beautiful imagery. But the evolution and the growth of the performing arts have themselves

been conditioned by social atmosphere and the prevailing conditions during the period through which they have passed. It is only when such changes have withstood the test of time that these have become traditions within the different areas of arts. The influence of social environment reflects itself in the development, style and repertoire of music and dance, themes sung and enacted, material and fashion of costumes used as well as the growth of musical instruments.

The world of classical dance could not remain untouched by society. Its very birth is in the womb of society, for how can we forget that all the Indian classical dance forms originated in the temples of different regions of the country where devotees gathered and sang and danced in reverence to the Lord. It is interesting to note that most of the stories have their origin in the social matrix. It is only with the distance of time that these stories, based on the happenings of earlier periods, became romanticized and sanctified myths. The same themes, if done in their present social context today may lead members of society and the dance world to raise questions as to whether such issues should be performed by the artistes. A comparison of some of the happenings of today would find similar parallel projections of emotions in the happenings illustrated in various mythological stories. Quite a few dancers today are choosing to depict 'abhinaya' through items and themes which range from the abstract to depiction of concern for happenings in society, largely with modern interpretations of age-old mythological legends.

During the Bhakti Movement when there was a resurgence of religious philosophy. It manifested itself not only in the poetry of the Ashtachhap poets, but also in the emergence of the Raas-Leela tradition of Vrindavan that has been nurtured carefully till today. Parallel to the growth of music, influenced by social change of the time, the 'tarana' also became part of the dance repertoire. The 'purdah' (veil) which came into prominence in the medieval period of Indian history, finds echo in the various 'ghunghat gats' of Kathak besides forming an important part of poetry. It also conjures flavours of romanticism.

Languages and regional dialects have also had their influence on the language of the performing arts. Elitist Sanskrit gave way to Pali and then again to a number of local dialects, such as Brijhasha, Avadhi, Maithili, Bhojpuri and Bundelkhandi, to name a few that entered the repertoire of the dancers of the Indo-Gangetic region over succeeding ages.

The twentieth century with its modern, impersonal and large auditoria equipped with the latest sound and light technologies, has also influenced the presentation of the performing arts. In yesteryears, they were performed on a smaller scale in the temple courtyard or the court of a local ruler. Today the dancer has to take into account the vastness of space available and consequently re-orient movements of dance and patterns of group compositions. Surrounded by modern technology, performing artists have now the opportunity of exploiting available electronic and other aspects of visual media.

Though the arts remain steeped in Indian classical music traditions, the instruments utilized in the music and dance scenario have been keeping pace with changing times. The violin, the gift of the British period in India, has now become part of the classical music and dance scene. With the emergence of various kinds of electronic instruments, these have also found their way into the world of classical performing arts. Thus, the development of the performing arts is closely interlinked with social changes, and the two cannot be divorced from each other.

Communalism and the National Movement

- By Bipin Chandra

The strong Hindu tinge in much of nationalist thought and propaganda, in spite of the basically secular approach and programme of the Indian National Congress, tended to develop a communal outlook with the feeling that the success of such a national movement would mean "a Hindu supremacy in Indian politics". This was particularly true of the strong Hindu religious element in the extremist thought and propaganda from 1905 to 1909. Many of the Extremists identified nationalism with the revival of Hinduism and saw nationalism as religion – which was invariably in the nature of things, Hinduism.¹ They tried to provide a Hindu ideological underpinning to Indian nationalism or at least a Hindu idiom to its day-to-day political agitation.

Also important in this respect was the role of a certain type of modern literature in Bengali, Hindi, and other Indian languages whose tone was often communal. Representative of this were the novels of Bankim Chatterjee, which became prototype of much of later Indian literature of this genre. Bankim treated Muslims as foreigners and identified nationalism or Indianhood or indigenesness with Hindus. The former were usually cast in the role of oppressive and lecherous tyrants, while Hindus were portrayed either as heroes struggling for positive values, including freedom or as traitorous collaborators. This type of literature inevitably led to resentment among literate Muslims and alienated them from the emerging national movement.²

Of course, any intellectual or writer may adopt what may be described as Bankim's approach as part of writer's license, especially when the process of nation-in-the-making was in its initial stage. And Bankim had no strong national sentiment to guide him. More important was the use to which he was put later. He was hailed as a great nationalist writer precisely for the wrong reasons; some of his novels were proclaimed as genuine historical novels. His role became reactionary and communal not so much in his own times and not so much in terms of his own writings, but because of the manner in which their "communal" parts were hailed to serve chauvinism and communalism. It is interesting to note that, as modern intelligentsia began to arise among Bengali Muslims and national sentiment spread among them they tended to accept Bankim as a great Bengali writer, in spite of his negative portrayal of Muslims. But the semi-communal Hindu writers insisted that he was great precisely because of this portrayal. Consequently, the nationalist Muslim intellectuals gradually yielded to the pressure of the loyalist and communal Muslim writers.³

Tilak too encouraged the growth of the Hindu tinge in Indian nationalism through the revival of Ganesh Puja and Shivaji Festival with their Hindu religious

overtones. It is true, however, that his basic political propaganda and agitation's were organized around political and economic issues and contained little appeal to Hinduism, and certainly much less in the case of Aurobindo Ghose and B. C. Pal. He glorified Shivaji because the Maratha ruler was a popular hero in Maharashtra. In northern India, he said, he would have adopted Akbar as the common hero of Hindus and Muslims.⁴ But while Tilak's politics, ideology and agitational methods were not communal, and a large part of the "communalism" imputed to him is the result of large-scale falsification of history by imperialist writers like V. Chirol and by the later Hindu and Muslim communists, there is no doubt that because of the Hindu tinge they breed, communalism among both Hindus and Muslims and antagonized the latter.

As pointed out earlier, many extremist leaders like Aurobindo Ghose, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lajpat Pal used Hindu symbols, idioms and myths in their political speeches and writings, India was often referred to as Mother Goddess, or compared with Kali, Durga and other Hindu goddesses. The revolutionary terrorists aware of the Gita and Kali, and some even saw in the Hindu tinge a revolutionary feature.

All this caused unease and apprehension in the minds of the educated and politically conscious Muslims during the 1890s and 1900s: they viewed the National Congress as a Hindu movement. It created, as S. Abid Hussain has pointed out, "general unrest, panic and doubt"² and "an atmosphere of fear and suspicion" among them, especially in northern India. Till then, "the secular nationalism of the Congress had a great appeal" for Muslims. But now circumstances became extremely unfavorable for secular nationalism among Muslims and it received a great setback.⁵

A contemporary Muslim intellectual, who was otherwise oriented towards vigorous nationalism, expressed these feelings in words, which bear reproduction in full. In an article in the Comrade under the heading "Communal Patriot", Mohamed Ali wrote in 1912.

"Whatever may be the inspiration of Hinduism as a religious creed, the educated Hindus made it a rallying symbol for political unity ... Past history was ransacked for new political formulas, and by a natural and inevitable process 'nationality' and 'patriotism' began to be associated with Hinduism. The Hindu 'communal patriot' sprang into existence with 'Swaraj' as his war cry ... He knows, of course, the use of words like 'India' and 'territorial nationality' and they ... form an important part of his vocabulary. But the Muslim weighs on his consciousness all the same, as a troublesome irrelevance; and he would thank his stars if some great exodus or even geological cataclysm could give him riddance ... The spectacle of a go-head Hinduism, dreaming of self-government and playing with its ancient gods clad in the venture of democracy, dazed the conservative Muslim ... He felt as if he was being treated as an alien, as a meddlesome freak, who

has wantonly interfered with the course of Indian history. Strange incidents were ranked up from his long and eventful career, which he was called upon to justify.. With the lose of empire he felt as if he were to lose him self-respect as sell. The 'communal patriots' among the Hindus treated him as a prisoner in the dock, and loudly complained of him as an impossible factor in the scheme of India's future.⁶

Later, in post-1909 period, the Hindu tinge was not so strongly etched. Even so, a vague Hindu aura pervaded much of Congress agitation or at least the idiom of Congress political expression.

Gandhi's religiosity made its own contribution in this respect, Gandhi's politics was, of course, fully secular, and he appealed to the people on economic, political and moral grounds, and never on religious grounds. His political thought, however, was permitted with religiosity. Moreover, he often employed Hindu symbols, though their use by him was seldom offensive to the followers of together religious. The best example of his use of a religious symbol was his interpretation of independence as Ram Rajya. Similarly, his definitions of non-violence and truth were steeped in Hindu religious traditions. His notions of 'Spiritualizing politics' inner voice' were also rooted in a religious ideology and tended to create a religious aura around politics. He also used cow protection and many other Hindu religious ideas, though his ideas on cow protection were very different from contemporary aggressive, communal versions.

Moreover, as if replying to accusations of Hindu religiosity, Gandhi encouraged similar religiosity among Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. He also tended to compromise with the religious tinge being imparted by communal nationalists among Hindus and Muslims. Thus his secularism came to represent the confluence of several religiosities or what Mohamed Ali described as 'federation of religions'.⁷ Gandhi's approach was paralleled for example by Mauland Abul Kalam Azad who in his early years simultaneously promoted nationalism and religiosity among Muslims.⁸ The culmination of this trend was the Khilafat movement which represented anti-imperialism through a religious issue.

Apart from Gandhi, leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose as well as many Congress workers freely used Hindu symbols, myths and idioms: they found it difficult to bypass religion in their daily political practice. The only exceptions were Jawaharlal Nehru, the different Marxist parties, and a handful of liberal intellectuals and politicians. It is therefore not surprising that, during the 1930s, many young Muslim intellectuals were attracted by left nationalism and not by the conservative, Hindu-tinged nationalism.⁹

Inevitably, some of the Hindu tinge was carried into the functioning of the Congress Ministries from 1937-39, especially at the level of the lower cadres.

The secular aspects of the national movement were distorted by several other features. A large number of nationalist leaders assumed a dual socio-political role; they were simultaneously religious-social reformers within the circle of their co-religionists and political leaders within the wider national political arena. This duality started with the very founders of the National Congress, or earlier still. Even Dadabhai Naoroi was till the 1870s both a vigorous, secular nationalist and a Parsi socio-religious reformer. This often led the nationalist leaders to talk of 'we' with different meanings in different contexts, sometimes meanings Hindu or Muslim and sometimes Indian. While in theory it could be maintained that there was nothing wrong in a person being a good Indian and a good Hindu or a good Muslim, in practice this could apply only to their personal lives. It was neither possible nor desirable to have such dual public roles in a multi-religious country where communal elements were active with the full backing of the Government. This invariably spread confusion among the people, which was freely taken advantage of by the communal leaders.

At the best, this dual socio-political role produced individuals like Ranade, Gandhi and Maulana Azad. At its worst, it led many Congress leaders to participate in the downright communal movements of Sangathan and Shuddhi on one side and Tabligh and Tanzim on the other. In any case, it encouraged the 'good Hindu = good Muslim friendship' approach towards national integration.

Much more damaging was the presence of 'communal nationalists' or even plain communalists in the ranks of the National Congress. The Congress leadership permitted openly communal elements or those whose ideological and political make-up contained a large dose of communalism to join the Congress and even occupy positions of leadership in its form the local to the all-India plane. Such communal nationalists often left the Congress and opposed it from communal platforms. But soon after they would be readmitted into the Congress fold and leadership without any disavowal of their recent politics or even current communal or semi-communal ideology.

Till the early 1930s several leaders were simultaneously members and leaders of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha or the Muslim League.¹⁰ It was only in 1938 that the Congress barred its doors to members of the communal organizations. Both in Punjab and Bengal, many a Congress leader had no difficulty in, simultaneously within nationalism, championing the 'Hindu cause' in respect of jobs or constitutional discussions or communal riots. But, while a communal Muslim joined the Muslim communal organizations, only the very rabid Hindu communalist would join the Hindu Mahasabha or the RSS in the 1930s; the ordinary one tended to remain in the Congress, creating unease among the Muslims.¹¹

A large number of newspapers such as the *Tribe*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Leader*, known as nationalist newspapers and serving as the main printed vehicles for nationalist propaganda, simultaneously championed Hindu communal causes.

In case of communal riots, for example, their editorials roundly condemned the riots, preached Hindu-Muslim harmony and usually blamed the Muslims as the initiators.¹² Their reportage was invariably loaded on the side of the Hindu communalists. These newspapers reached nationalism in one breadth, and complained of Hindus losing government jobs to Muslims in another. The average Muslim reader could hardly be blamed for being suspicious of such nationalism, for failing to distinguish between their two roles and for becoming embittered.

The Congress leadership failed to take notes of and struggle against the communal elements within the nationalist ranks, especially in the local and middle level leadership. There was also the wider failure to wage any real, active, consistent and principled political and ideological fight against Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communalism.

It would of course be preposterous to suggest the because of the Hindu tinge and other weaknesses discussed above the National Congress became a communal body and the national movement can be characterized as a Hindu national movement. Nor were there the 'causes' of the birth of communalism in modern India. They were rather a cause of the failure to check the rise and growth of communalism. The made, it difficult to win over the Muslims to the Congress. Moreover, they put a powerful weapon in the hands of the Government and the communalists who used it effectively to turn away the Muslims from the national movement and to instill the feelings among them that the success of this movement would mean Hindu domination. Even Gandhi could be portrayed not as an Indian leading all Indians but as a Hindu leading all Hindus.

The Hindu tinge also made it difficult to ideologically oppose the Hindu communalists; and it helped the spread of a Muslim tinge among the Muslim nationalists.

A few other relevant points may be clarified here:

- (a) Uses of religion and the traditional religious-cultural idioms or the glorification of the past was not a special feature of the Indian national movement. They have been a very common feature of the 19th and 20th century national movements from that of the Greeks and Italians to that of the Irish. They have been used both as an easy method to reach the people with the new ideology of nationalism¹³ and to restore among the oppressed and dominated peoples feelings of self-respect and self-confidence. Even the Soviet leadership appealed to the past and used traditional (pre-1917) symbols and idioms to mobilize the people during the Second World War. In fact, in India the process of appealing to the past was initiated by the entirely secular leadership of the Moderate period – Surendranath Banerjee was the first to glorify Shivaji and Guru

Gobind Singh as national heroes during his 1877-78 speeches – and the more Hindu-tinged leadership of the Extremist period as a conscious imitation of the nationalist movements of the Greeks, the Italians and the Irish. The inculcation of self-respect and self-confidence was even more necessary in India because their destruction was one of the basic features of colonial ideology.

But the Indian national movement had to be different in this respect because Indians were a different type of people. It was essential not to follow Italy and Greeks here, as Aurobindo Ghosh and others did, because a multi-religious, multi-caste and multi-culture country like India could not afford to exalt, or claim to restore, any one religion, caste, culture or historical tradition; it could not afford to build the new by appealing to the past or by pretending to be restoring or reviving it.¹⁴

The task of the national leadership here was not only different but stiffer, more difficult, requiring immense patience, ideological clarity, and boldness. Here the appeal had to be entirely modern, secular and democratic. Here nationalism required 'a fundamental change in the system of values'. Here a national movement had to base itself on an entirely modern political, economic, social and cultural programme as the Moderates had done and Nehru and the Left were doing, and not on a programme of cultural revival or 'cultural nationalism' as the Extremists and the later conservatives did. The latter would invariably divide, for it was basically and perhaps inevitably based on the dominant Great Tradition of the upper caste Hinduism of northern India. Nor was it a question merely of the division fostered by communalism. In time, it produced or would produce regionalism, casteism and tribalism.

Upper caste Hindus, among whom nationalism first arose, could identify cultural consciousness based on the Great Tradition with nationalism, but followers of other religions, members of the lower castes and tribal peoples would awaken. Whenever cultural and political awakening came to them, to other cultural, social and religious traditions. They would rebel against any nationalism based on the culture of caste hierarchy. Then either nationalism would transform itself to respond to their social and cultural ethos or they would take to communal, casteist, or other forms of divisive politics. Even women would not work actively for a movement that glorified and aimed at the restoration of the culture of their utter degradation and domination.

- (b) A major dilemma faced by the Indian national movement, as any other movement was that any 'massization' politics would also tend to bring in the masses' backward cultural and social outlook and ideology. As a recent author has pointed out, any nationalist attempt "to come closer to the mass of population was in the nature of things likely to adopt a Hindu for Muslim or Sikh) idiom."¹⁵

So long as the national movement was confined to the intellectuals, as in the Moderate phase in the 19th century, it could maintain a certain balance in keeping religion out of political vocabulary and trying to build an entirely modern nationalist ideology. But as the social base of the movement shifted to the lower middle classes, most of whom were socially and culturally conservative and intellectually narrow and limited, its ideological modernity began to get compromised. As the movement reached down in the masses, religious idioms, myths, symbols, entered its language, for in the language, culture, way of life and worldview of the Indian people religion played an important part.

In India, therefore, simultaneously with modern mass politics, it was necessary and urgent to have a Cultural Revolution or complete modernization. India, more than any other country, needed all-round radicalism based on a socially radical mass ideology and not merely political radicalism. Otherwise, even mass politics, depending on the existing backward social and cultural consciousness of the masses, had this reactionary aspect that it would tend to strengthen socially backward ideologies and outlook.

Finding the radical process more slow, tedious and difficult, and not having a ready-made consciousness to appeal to the nationalist leadership found it easier, and tended to some extent, to appeal to the existing religious consciousness in order to create a national movement which would gradually help make India a nation and in time create a more advanced and modern secular consciousness. But in the process, however unconsciously, it left space for communalism, and casteism. This failure of traditional leadership was in one respect shared by the rising leftwing leadership. The latter, too, with some exceptions as in Kerala, did not actively propagate modern culture and value systems among the people, let alone initiate a Cultural Revolution. It also did not mobilize its followers actively against communal and caste forces and ideology.

- (c) A sharp distinction has, however, to be made between religious consciousness and communalism. Use of religious myths, symbols, idioms, etc, is not communalism though, it creates an opening for communalism. Communalism arises for other reasons, though it uses religion for the purposes; and to that extent any intrusion of religious consciousness, etc, into nationalism contributes to the growth of communalism.

Not only Gandhi but even Tilak cannot be placed in the communal camp, though the latter's appeal to Hindu culture and an extremely narrow historical tradition proved harmful in the Indian context. In particular, the entire criticism of the Hindu tinge should be put in its proper historical setting so far as the post - 1918 nationalists are concerned. Their use of the Hindi political idiom was very different from that of Aurobindo Ghose and Bipin Chandra Pal. To brand Indian nationalism since the 1970s as Hindu nationalism is absurd it is also wrong to say that in the

Gandhian era one of the basic elements of nationalism had been 'orthodox and revivalist varieties or Hinduism'. Gandhi, not to speak of Nehru and the Left Wing, was fully secular and free of religious narrow mindedness. Even when couched in the language of religion-which was much less common than is asserted by his critics - his appeal was to modern, secular, economic, political and social principles.

It is true that the leaders of the national movement and the intellectual generators of national consciousness were predominantly Hindu. It is also, that not all of them would measure up to the highest standards of secular nationalism. But it is equally true that in politics they did not act as Hindus; that they produced as basically non-communal, secular national movement. The nationalist intelligentsia was limited by class but not by communalism or religion. As G.C. Shah, one of the most profound Indian writers on nationalism and communalism, has remarked, "non-communal bourgeois nationalism has always been the political ideology of the Indian National Congress and the Nationwide political movement it organized."¹⁵

Footnotes

1. Aurobindo Ghose, for example wrote in 1908: "Nationalism is a religion that has come from God If you are going to be a Nationalist, if you are going to assent to this religion of Nationalism you must do it in the religious Spirit". And again in 1909: "I say no longer that nationalism is a creed, a religion a faith: I say that it is the Sanathana Dharma, which for us is nationalism. This Hindu nation was born with the Sanathana Dharma; with it, it moves and with it, it grows". Similarly, Bipin Chandra Pal said in 1910 "Behind the new nationalism in India stands the old Vedantism of the Hindus". Quoted in K. P. Karunakaran, continuity and Change in Indian Politics, 1972, New Delhi, pp. 97-8.
2. Thus, for example, in 1917, the Bengali journal the Al-Islam, criticized the absence of Muslims in the national song Banga Amar composed by D. L. Rove, and wrote: "It mentions Ashoka, Nimal, Rasumai, Pretapditya - but contains no trace of Muslim heroes like Gyasuddin Khan, Isa Khan, and so forth. The population of Bengal is seven crores - more than half of these are Muslims. Why then were Muslims excluded from a national song composed for this vast Bengali nation constituted of both Hindus and Muslims"? In 1918, the Al-Islam wrote that a major ground for Hindu-Muslim ruction was that "Hindu unjustly and unfairly attack Muslims in literature". Similarly, in 1926, the Ahmadi complained that "Hindu cultural media still bred anti-Muslim feelings". Quoted by M. N. Islam, Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press, 1901-1930, Decca, 1973. Pp. 118, 128.
3. See M. N. Islam.
4. Ram Gopal, Indian Muslims, Bombay, 1959. P.88.

5. S. Abid Hussain, *The Destiny of Indian Muslims*, Bombay, 1965, pp. 50-3.
6. Mohamad Ali, *Selected writings and Speeches* edited by Afzal Iqbal, Vol. I p.77.
7. For the danger of this approach so far as secularism and nationalism were concerned, see the following comment of Beni Prasad. "It may be that all religions, if properly understood, would exert unifying and a hormones influence but the crucial feat is that religions are not likely to be properly understood in a world where everything is likely to be misunderstood". *The Hindu-Muslim Questions*, Allahabad, 1941, pp. 50-1.
8. In 1921, Hakim Ajmal Khan asked Hindus to form, as a complement to the Jamat-ul-Ulama-I-Hind, their own Jamai-I-Panditan: Sharaddananda, *Hindu Sanghathan*, Delhi 1926, p. 118.
9. It may also be remembered that more young Muslim intellectual moved to the nationalist (and the socialist and communist) stream during the 1930s than into the communal stream.
10. The prominent role-played by Madan Mohan Malaviya in the Congress during the 20s and 30s constantly baffled and annoyed Muslims. 'See for example, Mohamed Ali to Jawaharlal Nehru, June 15, 1924. In Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, Bombay 1958, p. 37-9.
11. Thus, in 1987, Ambika Charan a Congress worker, complained to the central leadership that an Arya Samaj preacher had become President of the Tehsil Congress Committee at Barirampur and was advocating Shunddhi and Hindu-Muslim unity simultaneously. This, he warned, would produce, "great conflict, collision and misrepresentation". Similarly a Congress worker of Bulandshar complained in a letter to the AICC in September 1937 that the Muslims looked upon the District Congress Committee with suspicion because its members "take prominent part in the communal affairs". Quoted in Anita Singh, *Nehru and the Communal Problem 1936-1939*. Unpublished M Phil Dissertation, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, p. 240.
12. **Muslim communal newspapers** took a similar approach, but they did not claim to be secular and nationalist.
13. The defence of new institutions and the dissemination of new ideologies and outlooks by appealing to the past and claiming to be restoring or reverting to the earlier ideologies and institutions is again very common. As Marx has put it: The tradition of the dead generation weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living. And, just when they appear to be engaged in the revolutionary transformation of themselves and their material surroundings, in the creation of something which does not yet exist, precisely in such epoch of revolutionary,

crisis they timidly conjure up the spirits of the past to help them; they borrow their names, slogans and costumes so as to stage the new world-historical scene in this venerable disguise and borrowed language. Luther put on the mask of the apostle Paul; the Revolution of 1789-1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman Republic and the Roman empire; and the revolution of 1848 knew no better than the parody at some points 1789 and at others the revolutionary traditions of 1793-95. In the same way, the beginner who has learned a new language always retranslates into his mother-tongue he can only be said to have appropriated the spirit of the new language and to be able to express himself in it freely when he can manipulate it without reference to the old, and when he forgets his original language while using the new one. The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, in *Surveys from Exile*, Penguin Books, 1973, pp. 146-7.

14. Even Ireland got divided because of the Catholic religious base of its nationalism.

15. P. Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge 1972, p.227.

16. G. C. Shah, *Maexism, Gandhism, Stalinism*, Bombay, 1963, pp. 173-4, On the other hand, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS were not only communal, they were not bourgeois nationalist at all. They did not represent nationalism, whether Muslim or Hindu. They were just communal, and objectively allies of colonialism.

*(Extract from " Modern India- The Origins of an Asian Democracy"-
Judith M. Brown, part of " The Short Oxford History of the Modern World")*

M.K. Gandhi and the enterprise of swaraj

ii) M. K. Gandhi and the enterprise of swaraj

Such is the mythology now surrounding Gandhi that it is hard to realize how unlikely a candidate he was for all-India political prominence in the early twentieth century and, indeed, how strange and unprepossessing a figure he was to his contemporaries. He was born in 1869 into a western Indian family who were grocers by caste, though its men had for several generations been in the administrative service of minor Indian princes in Gujarat. The young Gandhi was awkward, shy, and barely able to follow English: but when as a teenager (but already married) he lost his father, his family decided to send him to England to become a lawyer. His English experience was an emotional and social ordeal; and he soon abandoned his early attempts at being a late-Victorian dandy and lived in London as quietly and cheaply as possible. His only "public" venture was activity in the Vegetarian Society! Gandhi returned to India a barrister in name, but failed in practice in Bombay because he was too tongue-tied to speak in his first case. A year's legal contract with an Indian firm in South Africa was a welcome relief from professional failure and dependence on his family. He went in 1893 and stayed until 1914, becoming the main spokesman for Indians in their struggles against white settler racial policies. He had none of the advantages which helped to make the all-India leaders of his vintage. He was from an area undistinguished in Congress politics; he was not a Brahmin or even from a traditional 'writer' caste. Nor did he have the education the Presidency towns could provide, the professional status and expertise of a Surendranath Banerjea, a Pherozeshah Mehta or a Gokhale; nor the connections which such men had acquired by legal practice or educational work, and long involvement in politics and a range of voluntary associations. He had to make his mark in 1915 as middle-aged stranger lacking powerful backers and allies, and without institutional standing in local, provincial or all India politics.

South Africa was a crucial experience in fashioning Gandhi into a potential national leader. It prepared him internally to take a public role in his homeland by giving him a new confidence in his ability to handle public issues, deal with large numbers of Indians, and both confront and co-operate with men in authority. As he tried to help Indians in Africa he taught himself the rudiments of political organisation and publicity, and launched his first journalistic venture, *Indian Opinion*, to publicize immediate political issues, rally support, and suggest strategies for coping with the situation. It also educated Indians in English and several vernaculars in a wide range of social and religious issues. It was the start of an immense literary outpouring. Papers, pamphlets, books, and a vast personal correspondence were one of the hallmarks and mechanisms of Gandhi's public

influence in India. His championship of Indian rights also gave him a public reputation in his homeland, but as a social worker rather than as a potential political leader. The Government of India recognized his services to Indians abroad by awarding him a Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal in 1915. His name had become known in Congress circles, and he had forged a close friendship with Gokhale, who visited him in South Africa, and whom he called his political guru. It is significant that Gokhale, realizing how out of touch Gandhi would be with India, advised him to observe a year's silence on public matters when he returned.

Gandhi's South African experience enriched him in ways which were to give him a potential very different from that of men already established in the all-India political arena. The variety of Indians in Africa, ranging from Muslim traders to low-caste indentured labourers, and the diversity of their problems, drew him into contact with a wider range of his compatriots than his contemporaries in India would have had occasion to meet, let alone weld into a co-operating political group. They included men from southern and western India, Hindus and Muslims, people of very little education, traders and labourers; and women - whose marital and therefore moral status was threatened by a court judgement which would have invalidated all non-Christian Indian marriages. In helping them Gandhi learnt and experimented with different techniques for putting pressure on the authorities in Africa and London, and for binding Indians together. These included the conventional political methods of the public meeting, the petition, visits to government officials, including the Colonial Office in London, and press campaigns. But when it came to challenging registration laws and bans on entry into different provinces because of racial identity when such decorous methods had failed, Gandhi took Indians into direct but non-violent confrontation with authority; as when he organised bonfires of registration documents or an Indian march into prohibited territory. Yet this method of non-violent resistance which he used from 1907 was not just passive resistance as known to the English speaking world. For him it was a moral force, a mode of conducting unavoidable conflict which was integral to his religious vision of life. He called it 'satyagraha' (truth-force or soul force), to distinguish it from passive resistance, the pragmatic response of a weak group to a situation in which they had no other means of redress.

It is crucial to try to understand Gandhi's religious sense and to see something of his vision of the meaning of man and his world. Otherwise the historian can fall victim to a cynical analysis of Gandhi as 'using' religion to cloak political ambition and manoeuvre; an attitude common among British officials and even his Indian contemporaries, who found him at times exasperating and unpredictable, and could not conceive politics in the religious and moral language in which he frequently discussed it. This should not lead to unthinking acceptance of Gandhi's claims, and uncritical adulation, as occurred among some of his devotees. Gandhi's vision dawned on him gradually in Africa, particularly in the first decade of the century, though he continued to explore its ramifications in changing situations, and saw himself as a pilgrim in search of deeper truth.

Gandhi saw people as spiritual beings created to search for the abiding truth which was their own deepest nature and underlay the whole universe. He believed passionately that there were as many religions as there were individuals, because each person to be fully a person had to reach truth in his or her own way. In his autobiography he expounded this conviction.

...for me, truth is the sovereign principle. ... This truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God. There are innumerable definitions of God, because His manifestations are innumerable. They overwhelm me with wonder and awe and for a moment stun me. But I worship God as Truth only. I have not yet found Him, but I am seeking after Him. I am prepared to sacrifice the things dearest to me in pursuit of this quest. ... Often in my progress I have had faint glimpses of the Absolute Truth, God, and daily the conviction is growing upon me that He alone is real and all else is unreal.

Later in his life he felt he could say not that God was Truth but that Truth was God.

However, as each individual at a particular point in time would only have a partial or relative grasp of and relationship with truth, non-violence in all relations between people and groups was essential: in any situation of conflict only non-violence would safeguard the integrity of all those concerned, rather than forcing the weaker to accept the views of the stronger against his own deepest convictions. Gandhi's commitment to non-violence had deep roots in the Hindu and Jain heritage of his western Indian homeland. Just as *ahimsa*, non-violence, was a powerful strand in Indian religious tradition, so the wider Hindu understanding of truth and man's *dharma* or duty in relation to it undergirded Gandhi's conception of ultimate meaning.

The primacy of non-violence in relationships had wide implications in Gandhi's social and political concerns. It drove him in his later African years to total disillusion with western society as basically materialistic, indoctrinating false ideals of merit and wealth, and gripping its members in relations which were predominantly violent because they were competitive. In contrast, and as a remedy, he looked to what he perceived (though often inaccurately) as India's traditional society based on spiritual values. He preached a life of simplicity in which people worked not for conspicuous consumption and ever-improved status, but for the satisfaction of their essential needs. He spoke of the need to limit wants and desires, of the dignity of labour, of the trusteeship of wealth on behalf of all by those whose accident of birth had made them richer than their fellows. He felt that the one social framework where this was possible was the village, where interdependence and co-operation were the guiding principles of relationship. He shunned the idea of urban industrial society, fraught with

Opportunities for exploitation of man by man, and for conspicuous gain by some at others' expense.

Non-violence also shaped Gandhi's notion of the ideal polity-one with as little government as possible. He believed this would guard against the misuse of public power, and thought that truthful individuals leading a simple, co-operative life would need little outside regulation, and as truth-seekers would be able to manage their own affairs harmoniously. He seems to have visualized a loose linkage of independent village republics as the ideal form of the state. In sense he can therefore properly be called an anarchist. Where conflict of opinions and interests occurred the right response was peaceful persuasion of the opponent of the rightness of one's cause, always being prepared to compromise except on vital principles, culminating as a last resort in action to rouse the opponent's conscience, to defend one's own integrity and suffer the consequences that is, through satyagraha. This could take various forms, as it had in Africa. Its most extreme and dramatic form was civil resistance to unjust laws. Satyagraha was peculiar to Gandhi's total religious vision, although forms of self-suffering to convert an opponent had long been known in Gujarat; just as passive resistance was well established in western political thinking. But Gandhi seems to have come to it without any conscious reflection on either tradition. For him satyagraha was the last resort of those strong enough in their commitment to truth to undergo suffering in its cause. It solved the perennial dilemma of ends and means, because it was both means and end: its operation created stronger, more dedicated followers of truth, while converting their opponents to a deeper vision of truth. Gandhi has an apocalyptic belief in its virtue, for in all situations of injustice and conflict he believed it could only generate truth and never evil or falsehood.

Gandhi worked out his ideals in the several communities he founded in Africa and in India. In his ashrams in Ahmedabad (Gujarat) and Wardha (CP) he trained his followers to practise and preach satyagraha, considering these community experiments to be perhaps his most significant work. For him a precondition of 'seeing truth' was self-purification from baser desires; while the preliminary to exercising 'truth force' was to strengthen oneself through self-discipline and persistent adherence to non-violence. So men and women in his communities were dedicated by a series of vows to a highly disciplined life of labour and prayer, simplicity and non-violence. They performed all domestic chores without respect to personal status and tried to produce their own food and spin the material for their clothes. They were also to refrain from sexual intercourse, even if married, following his example. Such restraint, brahmacharya, was deeply embedded in Hindu tradition as essential for anyone pursuing a course which demanded special energy and dedication. In his ashrams men and women had equal importance: and people of all religious, social and racial background were welcomed, conventional caste distinctions being disregarded.

Gandhi was therefore in the tradition of the *guru*, the Hindu holy man who taught the followers who clustered round him, attracted by his personal sanctity. However, his relationship with Hindu tradition and current practice was highly ambiguous, reflecting his conception of religious truth and authority. Placing reason above scripture as authoritative where the two conflicted, and relying finally on his experience of an 'inner voice', he could advocate radical reform, as in his rejection of Untouchability which he considered an accretion on earlier and purer tradition and a deforming blot on Hindus' religious heritage. Gandhi's attitude to authority set him at loggerheads with the orthodox who gave overwhelming significance to the ancient Sanskrit scriptural texts. His ignorance of Sanskrit and treatment of textual sources also set him apart from the traditional *pundits* who expounded scripture. Yet he followed the longestablished Hindu pattern of syncretism, and 'imported' from the West the notions of the dignity of labour and equality of the sexes, without any sense that he was threatening the Hindu heritage, rather that he was enriching it.

Gandhi's return to India forced him to sharpen his perception of how his vision could be applied in practice. Before 1915 he had considered India's position and problems in the light of his changing ideas. It was clear from his pamphlet, *Hind Swaraj* (1909), that he did not envisage a westernized, industrialized India whose *swaraj* would be mere freedom from the British. He maintained that *swaraj* could never be granted to Indians by their rulers, however radical the constitutional reforms they could be induced to grant. It was a state of being which had to be created from the roots upwards, by the regeneration of individuals and their realization of their true spiritual being and goal. Therefore to him *swaraj* was far wider than mere constitutional arrangements: indeed he argued that India would be in no better state if Indians merely replaced Britons in the existing seats of government. His *swaraj* bore three hall-marks-unity among Indians of all religions, but particularly between Hindus and Muslims; the eradication of Untouchability; and the practice of *swadeshi*. The first two would indicate that Indians recognized their equality and unity as spiritual beings and were tolerant, as befitted those who realized how partial was their own vision of truth. The practice of *swadeshi* would signify self-limitation of wants and simplicity of life-style, simultaneously eroding on of the benefits of India to Britain and thereby weakening the imperial commitment to the existing form of *raj*. It demonstrated the dignity of manual labour; and one of its elements, hand-spinning, became part of Gandhi's daily routine and that of his closest followers. It had other practical benefits, such as helping to alleviate rural poverty and under-employment, and uniting educated and uneducated in a shared experience.

One of India's great figures, Jawaharlal Nehru, remembered that Gandhi was 'delightfully vague' about the actual form of government to be aimed for. In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi had harshly criticized Britain's parliamentary government, but back in India he was prepared to work for some form of parliamentary government as an interim measure until India was ready for radical self-rule at village level. For most of his contemporaries the departure of the British was an

essential part of self-rule as they saw it solely in terms of controlling the machinery of government; though they differed on the time-scale they envisaged for colonial withdrawal, and were often prepared (as a political strategy) to pitch their demands higher than they thought possible. At least until 1920 Gandhi does not seem to have seen any urgent need to eject the British. The conversion of his compatriots was a far more pressing problem. He felt that despite the disadvantages of British rule as the bearer of corrupting civilization, despite the humiliation of being a subject nation, there were certain ideals in British imperialism such as justice and equality which were valuable for India, if only their rulers would rule in accordance with them. He was even prepared to recruit soldiers to defend the empire at war; partly to teach Indians courage and self-respect, essential qualities for potential adherents of satyagraha; but partly because he still felt that there was a future for Indians as equal partners in the British Empire. Because Gandhi approached the problem of the right society and political order from his distinctive moral standpoint he was able quite consistently to say that he never hated British people, however much he disliked their raj; and he hoped for as radical a 'change of heart' among them as among Indians.

On his return to India Gandhi did not see himself as a potential rebel or as leader of a nationalist movement, but as a social worker in the tiny area of western India where he had family roots. Furthermore, he disliked the status of Mahatma which people increasingly accorded him, experiencing pain and embarrassment in its connotations and the outward veneration which began to accompany it. Yet despite his intention to limit his sphere of work, and his studied political silence in 1915, he became involved in political life, in Gujarat and other localities, and ultimately at the all India level. Even then his inner compulsion seems to have been the religious conviction that if he was to follow truth he must serve his compatriots and right 'wrongs' wherever he saw them. He maintained that all his speaking and writing, all his 'ventures in the political field' were part of his striving after *moksha*, salvation; and that anyone who sought truth could not 'afford to keeo out of any field of life'.

That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.

Although Gandhi was deeply committed to political action he was never a career politician. He always retained great flexibility in his approach to his work, being prepared to 'opt in and out' of politics (as his contemporaries understood politics) whenever he felt there was a task for which his capacities fitted him and which was likely to further the cause of true *swaraj*. His vocation was not to a political career but to the building of a new India by a variety of means - personal contacts, writing, life in his ashrams, social work, prayer, as well as obviously political action and the use of satyagraha in a political context. Believing that satyagraha was the 'sovereign remedy' for India's ills he was committed not only to spreading its message and training exponents of it; but equally to preserving it from mis-use

- and that meant being prepared not only to launch satyagraha campaigns but to end them if he felt satyagraha was being manipulated or prostituted by the weak or irreligious.

From 1915 to 1922 Gandhi began to grapple with the real India and its problems as distinct from the India of his imagination and limited experience. In 1922 he began his first term in an Indian jail following attempts to give his countrymen a radical alternative to the official design for a new order as offered in the 1919 reforms. The dramatic transition from social worker honoured by government to a jailed rebel, leader of a Congress campaign of non-co-operation, and preacher of *swaraj* within a year came in stages through involvement in different levels of political life.

Gandhi's first essays in public action were in three local areas, each with a distinct problem which he felt called to rectify through satyagraha. In Champaran district of Bihar he took up the cause of peasant tenants forced to grow indigo at disadvantageous terms by white planters who dominated the locality and harassed the recalcitrant by means which even the government admitted to be dubious and disruptive of rural peace. There satyagraha took the form of individual action by Gandhi when he refused to obey an order to leave the district. The next year (1918) he championed two groups in his home territory, Gujarat - the substantial owner-cultivators of Kaira district who disputed with the government the enhancement of their land revenue; and the workers in the Ahmedabad cotton mills whose problem was low pay. In Ahmedabad Gandhi fasted as a personal part of satyagraha, and organised a workers' strike against the Indian mill-owners. In Kaira satyagraha's form was refusal to pay land revenue. Only in Champaran and Ahmedabad did the campaigns achieve a real solution to the original problem: and though the opponents shifted their position it was not the result of a 'change of heart' or a new perception of truth, but because they were in some way vulnerable to pressure generated by Gandhi's campaign. In Bihar the planters were not converted, but pushed by the provincial government, which in turn agreed to an official enquiry because of pressure from Delhi where the Government of India's priority was war time peace. In Kaira by contrast the Bombay administration and the Government of India saw eye to eye: satyagraha was not able to drive a wedge between them and so weaken the local government's hand in dealing with Gandhi. Although satyagraha may have generated real local enthusiasm and support, it did little to alter the basic structure of relationships between Indians, which for Gandhi was crucial to *swaraj*. In Champaran the campaign for village uplift and education soon ebbed; and his *ashram* followers imported from Gujarat were among the only ones to engage in rural reconstruction. In Kaira Gandhi's supporters among the locally prestigious Patidar farmers contained in treat their low caste neighbours and labourers with disdain.

Yet these local actions were important for Gandhi personally and for his public standing. They gave him a confidence that he could and should act beyond the

restricted area he had at first envisaged for himself. They broadened his geographical experience of the sub-continent, and brought him into contact with social groups whom established provincial and national politicians had rarely touched. Moreover in these three campaigns Gandhi recruited men from regions which had carried little weight in Congress politics, but who now became his committed allies. As small-town lawyers, teachers or prosperous peasants they had little interest in existing all India politics; but Gandhi's impassioned declaration of his vision of swaraj and his training of them in a new and more accessible political style opened for them new horizons in terms of perception and action. Rajendra Prasad from Bihar, and Vallabhbhai Patel from Gujarat, for example, were to work with him until the end of his life, giving him access to networks of local supporters and themselves achieving all India political careers of distinction. Gandhi's satyagrahas also gave him a continental reputation though responses to him were ambivalent. Peasants in Champaran flocked to venerate him as a saviour, but educated Indians were disquieted by his 'primitive' habits such as sitting on the floor, his hostility to English as a medium of conversation and education, and by the potential disruption of established conventions of political action and the lawlessness which Satyagraha seemed to threaten. Officials began to think that the religious enthusiast and social worker was becoming a dangerous agitator, capable of stirring up discontent precisely because of his unwestern style and his grass roots contacts. Yet Gandhi was still politically isolated. He had found no permanent allies in the Home Rule leagues, nor even in the Servants of India Society founded by his political guru, Gokhale, whose death in 1915 deprived him of his closest friend in the political world. As late as mid-1919 he told an old friend that he felt lonelier in India than in Africa and lacked the depth of rapport which he had had with his co-workers there.

By that time Gandhi had begun to make his mark in the all India political arena, not consciously planning the expansion of his political connections and influence, but still taking up specific 'wrongs' which seemed rectifiable through satyagraha, and working to lay the foundation of true swaraj. In the summer of 1917 he urged Mrs. Besant's sympathizers to take up satyagraha as a protest against her internment, suggesting the drama of a march from Bombay to her place of restriction. Her release in September by a Delhi government anxious to secure a co-operative atmosphere for Montagu's tour of inquiry enabled Congressmen to shelve a decision over a strategy which divided them bitterly. The following year Gandhi spent much energy exhorting the government to release the Pan-Islamist politicians, the Ali brothers. In their case he only advised that they should break their own internment order when the government proved adamant, not contemplating any wider use of satyagraha. He made it clear that his championship of them was integral to his pursuit of Swaraj, one of its foundations being Hindu-Muslim unity which he hoped to further by this concern. Late in 1918 he told Mahomed Ali, 'my interest in your release is quite selfish. We have a common goal and I want to utilise your services to the uttermost, in order to reach that goal. In the proper solution of the Mahomedan question lies the realisation of Swarajya. But the brothers proved unstable allies, willing only to

accept Gandhi's advice and insistence on non-violence when it was clear that they had no other viable option. Yet even their erratic co-operation was highly significant for Gandhi and for the course of Indian politics. It gave Gandhi the personal sense of leading and championing Muslims, as he had done in Africa; and it gave him leverage in Congress politics because he appeared to be a lynchpin between Hindu politicians and those Muslims who because of their Pan-Islamic concerns would be most likely to join across communal barriers in an anti-government alliance. It also gave this small group of Muslims a hold over Gandhi, as he sought occasions and issues to unite Muslims and Hindus. Consequently it blinded him to the interests of millions of other Indian Muslims, particularly those who were provincial majorities and saw little profit in anti-British action when their local numerical weight would advantage them under the reformed constitution.

Gandhi's breakthrough into all-India politics occurred in 1919 on the issue of the Rowlatt Bills. When conventional political protest and the unanimous Indian vote in the Imperial legislative Council failed to stop the Rowlatt Act Gandhi offered an escape from the politicians' impasse, with a new method of direct action which did not take the terrorists' way of violence. He himself felt the Act was unjust and oppressive, and believed that satyagraha on this issue would 'purify the atmosphere and bring in real swaraj.' So for him this continental plan was novel only in scale, not in basic motivation. But it forced him to tackle the problem of offering satyagraha when there was not an 'unjust law' which could easily be broken. (Indians would have to be suspected conspirators and terrorists to fall foul of the actual provisions of the Rowlatt Act!) His solution in this case was to adapt to a new purpose a traditional demonstration of protest and mourning—the *hartal*, or stoppage of work. He advised all Indians on a specified day to stop work and devote themselves to fasting and prayer. Later he expanded satyagraha to include disobedience to the 1910 press Act, because this would be peaceful and educative. (The banned books chosen for illegal sale included his own *Hind Swaraj*!)

The Rowlatt satyagraha failed in that it neither changed the government's policy nor began the radical reconstruction of Indian society which was Gandhi's goal. He called it off because in April it erupted into violence in his own Gujarat and in the Punjab. Yet it was a remarkable breakthrough for a middle-aged stranger in Indian politics. His campaign became known throughout India, and in all provinces *hartal* was at least partially observed, though observance tended to be urban rather than rural, and varied greatly from region to region. Bengal and Madras were at the 'quiescent' end of the spectrum. But there was dramatic response in Bombay city and parts of Gujarat where Gandhi had established local prestige and the beginnings of an organizational base in the local Home Rule league branches and in a Satyagraha Sabha he founded in February 1919. On 6 April, the *hartal* day, a large proportion of shops in Bombay city were shut, and local transport was much reduced; and the police admitted that the whole effect was a strategic success for Gandhi. But the enterprise also showed that Gandhi,

like any other Indian politician before or since, found his plan for national action manipulated, distorted or even wrecked by the forces of provincial and local political life.

Where there were particular economic and communal strains, as in Punjab, these generated support for agitation but undermined Gandhi's careful strategy of non-violence. Where established leaderships in provincial or local politics saw no future in Gandhi's style of protest, as in CP, satyagraha hardly happened. Without a powerful countrywide organization, having only a limited regional standing in western India, Gandhi was at the mercy of those who chose to collaborate with or ignore him. 1919 showed that many educated Indians were still wary of the Mahatma, unconvinced by his vision of *swaraj*, and drawn more to co-operation in the raj's design for reordering public life. But just when Gandhi came hard up against the realities of Indian politics he became utterly convinced that he had a continental vocation which he could only pursue by permanent involvement in those politics. He dated his real entrance into Congress affairs from the annual session at Amritsar in 1919, and from then was prepared to challenge the established Congress politicians if he felt that their vested interests and their strategies were blocking the enterprise of true *swaraj*.

The Mahatma's challenge came in 1920, when he confronted the Indian public with a plan of non-co-operation with the *raj*, designed to achieve *swaraj* in one year. He posited the enterprise of *swaraj* in a year at the special Congress session in Calcutta in September 1920, and in a subsequent article in his newspaper, *young India*, reminding his compatriots of the humiliating fact that so few British were able to rule so many Indians. If they could only co-operate they could dispense with the British, and he urged them to withdraw from government schools, courts, and councils as a preliminary to non-co-operation in government service and payment of taxes; and to practise *swadeshi* as a means of ending their 'economic slavery'. Such 'self-purification' rather than armed rebellion was for him the core of India's destiny and her mission to the world. 'All this means discipline, self-denial, self-sacrifices, organizing ability, confidence and courage... Our salvation and its time are solely dependent upon us.' On the precise form of government to be aimed at he was vague and apocalyptic: to him the details of a political programme still mattered little compared with a reformation of attitudes and relationships.

Although *swaraj* had been Gandhi's ultimate goal for over a decade, his decision actually to launch the enterprise was a startling contrast to his position at the end of 1919. Then he had urged Indians to co-operate in the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, believing that in conjunction with a Royal Proclamation appealing for Indian co-operation they were a sign of British intentions to act justly towards India, and could be the basis of a new relationship between rulers and ruled. Gandhi moved to this new stance of overt disloyalty because in the intervening six months he felt he had proof that the supposed new order based on co-operation was a mirage and that the British would never live up to their imperial ideals in

India. Proof to him lay in the treatment of defeated Turkey after the war by the British and their allies and British disregard for Indian Muslim fears for the Khalifah's status, and in British reactions to the Punjab violence during the rowlatt satyagraha.

In 1919-20 a strident campaign on behalf of the Turkish sultan developed among a small group of Indian Muslims; the activists were mostly younger politicians and some *ulema*, particularly in UP, Bihar, and Sind. Yet Muslim unease on the issue was widespread, and deepened and broadened as the *ulema* took up the cause. Gandhi concerned himself with the Khilafat question because he felt it was a 'wrong' done to Muslim religious sensibilities, and provided occasion for promoting various causes central to his vision of a transformed India, including the achievement of communal harmony and the demonstration of satyagraha as the perfect action in situations of conflict and injustice. Rapidly he became the most prominent protagonist of the Khilafat case, the master-mind behind a Khilafat Day when he again urged the tactic of *hartal*, and eventually the formulator of a plan of non-co-operation with the raj if Muslim wishes were not respected. (In March 1920 the plan held in reserve by the Central Khilafat Committee, of which Gandhi had been the main architect, included staged relinquishment of titles and honours, and withdrawal from the legislatures, from private and public service with the British, culminating in refusal to pay taxes.) However, such a specifically Muslim issue had little appeal for most Hindus; and many Hindu public men were seriously worried at the prospect of a gandhi-style campaign and the possibility of violence if mass Muslim feeling was stirred up by religious and political leaders.

Fortuitously at Gandhi's disposal lay the problem of Punjab. His handling of this in conjunction with the Khilafat question enabled him to appeal to a real sense of outrage among moderate-minded politicians, and to Hindu and Muslim sentiment simultaneously. During the 1919 violence martial law had been declared in the Punjab city of Amritsar. On one occasion the British General Dyer had ordered his men to fire on a crowd which had gathered, despite the current prohibition on large gatherings, in Jallianwalla Bagh, a walled area with limited shelter and exits. Over 300 were killed and 1,000 injured; and London and Delhi both condemned Dyer's action, done more to display power than actually to control disorder. Nonetheless Indian politicians accused the British of 'whitewashing', and were outraged by public support for Dyer in England when he was required to resign from the Indian army. Gandhi became the key figure in a Congress counter-inquiry to the official investigation into the Punjab disturbances. By June 1920 he considered British policy in this matter to be 'an insufferable wrong'-to which Indians should respond with satyagraha. This and the khilafat question made him proclaim in July 1920, 'to my amazement and dismay, I have discovered that the present representatives of the Empire have become dishonest and unscrupulous. They have no real regard for the wishes of the people of India and they count Indian honour as of little consequence... I can no longer retain affection for a Government so evilly manned as it is now-a-days.'

These two issues changed Gandhi's assessment of and relation to British *raj*. His handling of them gave him access to new sources of support in politics and institutional political leverage which he had so far lacked. He now had the support of the Central Khilafat Committee, though he found his Muslim collaborators on it hard to control and convince of the necessity of non-violence and the sincerity of Hindu support. As the main author of Congress's report on the Punjab issue he acquired new standing in Congress itself. Furthermore, he had realized his need of institutional position if he was to advance the causes dear to him: for this reason he was prepared to accept office as President of the All-India Home Rule League in place of Annie Besant in April 1920, thus losing what he called his 'splendid isolation' in politics.

It is less clear why Congressmen agreed to non-co-operation in the last quarter of 1920. In December 1919 Congress had promised to co-operate in the new constitution, though to conciliate those who wished for more radical steps it called the reforms 'disappointing'. Given the peculiar nature of the British *raj*-dependent as it was on Indian taxpayers, co-operation and on Indian allies inside and outside the formal structures of government -non-co-operation made good tactical sense. If thoroughly pursued by enough strategically placed Indians it could bring the British to their knees when petition or violence proved ineffective. But withdrawal from the reformed councils shut those interested in political power off from a wealth of new resources: and non-co-operation in law courts and schools threatened the position and purses of many of the educated, and the future of their children. There is no simple reason for the apparently dramatic change of Congress policy and Gandhi's dominance in its decision-making. Taking the evidence of the months August to December 1920 and the two crucial Congresses (at Calcutta in September and Nagpur in December) the one simple conclusion is that there was *no* large-scale conversion to Gandhi's vision or style; nor was there among Indians any real anticipation or hope of making a rapid end to the *raj*. Rather, the eventual Congress support for non-co-operation seem to have been the outcome of calculations by a range of groups of its advantages, often in terms of local and provincial politics. (For example, whether the actual distribution of seats in a particular legislature made it worthwhile for Hindu groups to contest seats, or whether they would be outweighed by special interests with separate representation. Another consideration was whether in a given local situation one faction found it temporarily attractive to appear 'extreme' under Gandhi's banner.) Furthermore, decisions were not seen as final. Many politicians envisaged temporary withdrawal from legal practice, and counted that they could stand in the next legislative council elections even if they stood aside in 1920.

One reason for the success of Gandhi's challenge to existing Congress policy was the absence of any other major all-India political leader or group who could organize opposition to him or provide a dynamic alternative. Mehta and Gokhale had been dead five years, Annie Besant was already being seen as a tiresome old lady; and death removed Tilak on 1 August, the very day Gandhi launched non-

co-operation. So divided were Congressmen by region and faction that they could not orchestrate their fears about the course Gandhi was proposing. Some accusations of 'packing' the two meetings with local men who supported him were hurled at Gandhi by the disgruntled after the voting at the two Congresses. As there was no limit to the number of delegates this was a common enough phenomenon and had for decades made the choice of Congress venue particularly significant. But Gandhi did not have the material resources for such a venture; and Calcutta in September was not a location in which he could have felt confident of local support. It soon became clear that much of his backing in Congress and the country was from areas, and from social and religious groups which had previously carried little weight in Congress. They now not only swayed the vote but altered the political environment in which existing political leaders and established groups had to decide on their response to Gandhi.

Particularly significant were the Muslims engaged in the Khilafat campaign who came in large numbers to Congress itself to vote for non-co-operation. This was clear at Calcutta, as was support for Gandhi from a bloc of Marwaris, those prosperous business men who were prominent in Calcutta's trade yet had no local roots. In terms of regional support Gandhi at Calcutta also drew on votes from areas which had been 'backward' in terms of Congress politics; not because they were 'unpolitical' but because the particular Congress style of all-India co-operation offered little to local men, except on rare occasions when local issues dovetailed neatly with a Congress session held locally, or with a particular continental issue. Among them were UP, Bihar and Punjab; and within the Presidencies themselves such areas as Sind and Gujarat (Bombay) and the Andhra region of Madras. At the Nagpur congress there was similar evidence of Muslim support for Gandhi; voters for him from 'backward' regions including Gujarat and Central Provinces; and people whose social origins in previous decades would have confined them to local politics. The Government of India noted this change of style and participation compared with the decorum of earlier Congresses which only the western educated had attended, and was considerably alarmed by it. 'As regards the class of persons attending, whilst many of the prominent politicians were present, the Bengal contingent included hundreds of ex-detenus and the intelligentsia, which dominated earlier Congresses, seems to have been swamped in a mass of semi-educated persons swept up from all parts of India.' The reasons for this wider social and geographical span of support for Gandhi varied according to the group involved. Gandhi's religious reputation was an element in his appeal. The Marwaris in Calcutta, for example, were drawn by this as well as his western Indian origins. But far more often men revered or followed Gandhi because he had personally conducted a local campaign in an area such as Gujarat or Bihar where they had come under his influence and seen what he could offer them, or because he had championed a particular cause of significance to a group such as the Muslim sympathizers of the Khalifah. Or his style and programme offered an opportunity for local and all-India influence to local leaders who had had little access to or interest in Congress because they came from areas where educational opportunities were limited.

The shift of a large segment of Indian opinion in Gandhi's favour created a crisis for the established political groups in provincial and all-India politics, particularly in the Presidencies. They were so divided among themselves that the appearance of Gandhi in Congress with country-wide support, coming partly from within their own regions, made those who hoped to appear the most extreme or nationalist consider that alliance with Gandhi, at least temporarily, was a better way of safeguarding their home bases as well as their repute in Congress, than coming to terms with their local opponents in joint hostility to this enigmatic new political force. This was true of the prominent Bengali, C.R.Das, and of Tilak's former followers in Bombay. It is also significant that Gandhi's policy victories in the Subjects Committee at the two sessions further increased their difficulties by producing the crucial resolutions put before the open congress, and thus giving Gandhi's outright opponents no real chance to vote down his plans. At Calcutta he swayed the Subjects Committee by a very small margin; but that was enough to determine the pattern of the open Congress. By the Nagpur session his standing was such that most established leaders judged him a profitable ally and a formidable opponent and preferred to make early terms with him rather than be seen in open conflict with him. As the elections to the new legislatures were now over they were prepared to give non-co-operation a trial, provided that they could influence its pattern and timing. In this Gandhi agreed, wishing to achieve as great a unity as possible as the prelude both to satyagraha and *swaraj*. He had no other implement than Congress, no other 'party'; and collaborators who had their fingers on the pulse of local life were crucial to him (as they were to the government) if his enterprise of *swaraj* was not to founder as had the Rowlatt satyagraha.

Non-co-operation lasted from 1 August 1920 to February 1922, when Gandhi called off the campaign because of a vicious attack on a police station in UP. *Swaraj* within the year had not been achieved, either in Gandhi's terms or according to the limited political definition of most Indians. Furthermore government was well able to cope with the unprecedented attack on its framework and prestige; shrewdly combining firmness at local level and restraint at all-India level combined with delaying tactics before taking what could be interpreted as provocative steps, particularly ones which would alienate more moderate political opinion. It refrained from arresting Gandhi to avoid giving him a martyr's halo until 1922. The revenue never dried up (though several provincial governments were embarrassed when temperance movements cut their excise revenue); nor did government's collaborators in the services and informal networks of support withdraw their co-operation. The *raj* only faced real crises of control in restricted areas at particular times, such as the outbreak of violence among the Moplah Muslims on the south-west coast, where rural disturbance was endemic, or in Calcutta and Bombay city in November 1921 when rioting erupted most disturbingly just before the goodwill visit of the Prince of Wales.

Nonetheless, non-co-operation marked a major change in the depth and dimensions of concerted political hostility to the *raj*. Never before had the British faced a continental campaign against their rule, masterminded by Congress, drawing support from deep within the provinces. The campaign clearly affected the November 1920 elections to the new legislatures. The polls occurred peacefully, and only in six cases out of 637 was an election impossible because there was no candidate. But most of the prominent Congressmen who would naturally have stood withdrew. The polls also varied wildly, from over 50 per cent in parts of Madras, down to 8 per cent in Bombay city and even lower to 4.4 per cent among Bombay Presidency's urban Muslims. In one UP village where Gandhi had spoken the day before the election there were no voters at all. Resignation of titles was the part of the 1921 plan which had the least success. By the end of January only 24 out of 5,186 Indian titleholders had resigned their honours. Few government servants withdrew their services: but in some places their work was hindered by passive public hostility, and their private lives made disagreeable by social harassment. Law courts continued to function normally, though nearly 200 lawyers gave up their practices-if only temporarily. A crop of informal courts, *panchayats*, sprouted early in 1921, but they soon withered, because of the curious justice they dispensed and their lack of sanctions apart from social boycott and violence. There was, however, a very marked and longer-lasting drop in attendance at government secondary schools and colleges, and the emergence of a range of 'national' educational institutions. But the educational boycott did not last because Indians realized that literacy and educational qualifications from recognize establishments meant profit, power, and prestige. Similarly they declined to cut themselves off from the resources available in the municipalities: and while boycotting *provincial* elections and legislatures they were anxious to stand in local elections and work the local government institutions whose value they had rapidly learnt in the previous decades. Later in 1921 Gandhi and the All-India Congress Committee emphasized the *swadeshi* campaign, and encouraged the use of *charkhas*, spinning wheels, both as a propaganda symbol and an economic strategy against poverty and some of the economic interests behind the *raj*. Imports of cloth decreased dramatically in 1921-2, though the *swadeshi* campaign was fortuitously strengthened by the bleak facts of reduced Indian purchasing power and a fall in the exchange rate in the disturbed economic conditions following the war. Indian merchants showed themselves to be shrewd and levelheaded in the context of economic dislocation; and many of those who actually traded in foreign cloth refused to give it up, including Gandhi's Marwari supporters in Calcutta.

Although the all-India plan of non-co-operation had limited effects, some of the most striking manifestations of political unrest and the worst challenges to order occurred where pre-existing local tensions found an outlet in the all-India campaign and moulded it locally into patterns quite unpremeditated-nor indeed welcomed-by those who had planned non-co-operation at Nagpur. In a sense non-co-operation 'succeeded' most where it was least planned or controlled. Ultimately it was such local variations and the tensions which created them which

broke apart the movement and wrecked anything approaching an authentic Gandhian satyagraha. In south India, for example, four distinctive campaigns contributed to non-co-operation though all had origins in local conditions predating Gandhi's national call for Satyagraha. They included hostility to government's forest regulations; temperance campaigns which stemmed more from opposition to the government's organization of the liquor trade than Gandhian or even orthodox Hindu morality; a brief stoppage of land revenue collection because of the resignation of some Indian district officials who were uneasy about their diminishing local position; and urban demonstrations which similarly were manifestations of preexisting local problems. Far off in Assam non-co-operation was fuelled by the economic distress of plantation labourers who had migrated to work in the tea gardens. In U.P. it became interwoven with a peasant agitation against landlord pressure, to the embarrassment of the Congress leaders who could not control it and its wilder spokesmen, and found that it alienated some of Congress's members or allies, including some of the smaller Muslim *zamindars*. In Punjab many non-co-operators were Sikhs who latched on to the campaign as they battled for control of Sikh religious resources against a group of their co-religionists who had legal rights to religious property and were therefore supported by the government. Ultimately these local conflicts, among Indians as much as against government and its institutions, led to increasing violence: and in February 1922 Gandhi advised that the campaign should be called off. The eruption of new group and regions into national politics had turned out to be a double-edged weapon. Moreover it was becoming clear that Gandhi's Muslim allies were becoming restive and reluctant to observe his idiosyncratic policies; while his uneasy colleagues among the Presidency politicians were re-thinking the value not only of the Mahatma but of his strategies which seemed to have produced so little permanent political benefit after the year which was supposed to bring in *swaraj*. When the government jailed Gandhi in March it saved him from recognizing that the bases of his dramatic influence in Congress affairs in 1920 had weakened to the point of collapse. Yet this first national episode in Gandhi's presentation of a radical alternative for India was of considerable significance. Most obviously it demonstrated that Gandhi was now a national figure. British and Indians alike could no longer ignore or ridicule him: his saintly politics were proved to have powerful practical repercussions. Non-co-operation also elicited from the British a changed attitude to political agitation which posed them a new problem because it was non-violent and so wide-scale, and because it erupted just when they were playing for wider political co-operation in the reformed constitution. In response they demonstrated skill in achieving a delicate balance of control and continuing solicitation of collaboration. But conflicts of opinion within the government and the near-failure of the policy at certain junctures (as when they nearly lost 'Moderate' political support late in 1921) showed, too, how the preservation of the *raj* would require continual re-formulation of political strategy in a rapidly changing context. Gandhi's enterprise also demonstrated both the possibility of Hindu-Muslim co-operation in action against the government, and the ambivalence of such co-operation in action against the government, and the

ambivalence of such co-operation. But in the perspective of India's political development and eventual achievement of nationhood and democratic independence, perhaps the most significant aspect of no-co-operation is the way it displayed the unprecedented disturbance of interests and senses of identity at different levels of public life. The dislocation of older patterns resulted from the economic and ideological pressures of the war, from the actions of government, particularly its restructuring of the official framework of collaboration with its subjects, and from the deliberate actions of those with diverse political interests who reached out across old barriers of region, district, and community to generate support and find allies.

The actual programme of satyagraha enabled changes in interaction between different types of politics. As a new and infinitely flexible mode of expressing grievances and pressurizing opponents it gave new political opportunities to people whose political vision and capacities had hitherto been restricted. It enabled some temporary mobilization of people who had never before been involved in a 'national' campaign, as in the case of those who flocked to Gandhi's meetings or participated in *hartal*. It gave opportunities for new aggregations of political awareness and action, when specific or local problems found an outlet in an all-India campaign, as in southern India or UP, or the Punjab. Temporarily the politics of different provinces and smaller localities might be synchronized and welded into a campaign which was national in spread if not in its basic motivation. The novelty of the situation lay in the synchronization rather than the actual content of those politics. Work on south India and on Allahabad, for example, has shown the degree of continuity in ideas, interests, and people, before, during, and after Gandhi's campaign. His plans and preaching did not change the components of more local politics, but permitted them to be re-expressed in conjunction with the politics of other regions. But this experience was educative: it demonstrated to Indians the possibilities and value of inter-regional co-operation. While Gandhi in his speeches and writings publicized the ideological content of a new national identity, his satyagraha was instrumental in effecting it, if only temporarily.

Satyagraha was a new bonding action and ideology in Indian political life. Under its impetus Congress became in a new way a bonding institution compared with its older role as the informal talking-shop of local political notables from restricted areas and social backgrounds. Gandhi was determined that Congress, if it was to be an instrument of *swaraj*, must be representative of the whole nation in terms of geography and society, rather than of an educated minority whose politics he believed were de-nationalizing India. He also insisted on efficiency in any organization in which he was involved. These convictions found practical expression in the new constitution Congress accepted at the close of the Nagpur session, of which Gandhi was the main architect. Under it Congress was to have a permanent and small executive in its Working Committee, while the loose and ineffective AICC of previous decades was relegated to a secondary position. Congress was also reorganized at provincial level; the Provincial Congress

Committees (PCCs) now representing language areas. Local organization was extended to subdivisional and *taluka* level, at least in theory. Both these developments were strategies to broaden Congress's geographical and social base. Furthermore, at annual sessions provinces were to send fixed numbers of delegates in proportion to their population, to guard against swamping or packing of sessions by men from one area. Some results of these changes can be seen in the expansion of Congress membership and the greater participation of rural men in the AICC immediately after Nagpur. Clearly, though changes threatened older modes of using and controlling Congress politics, they also made good sense in the context of wider agitational and electoral politics, when leaders needed to forge new links with potential voters and backers.

Thus reconstructed Congress became a far more significant organizational resource in politics. Despite violent fluctuations in membership and the actual operation at grass-roots of the organization prescribed for local units, it was becoming a regular political institution which those concerned with political influence could less easily ignore. Congress as a body also began to control more funds for political work in comparison with its earlier poverty. Between April and June 1921 Rs. 10 million were collected for a Tilak Memorial Fund; and from 1921-3 the total funds available to Congress exceeded Rs. 13 million. This enabled a wider range of political and allied activity as, for example, the new *Khadi* organizations to promote Gandhi's *swadeshi* plans, which were aligned with Congress. Expanded financial resources also heralded the rise of the permanent political worker who could make a living and a career within the Congress structures. It is noteworthy that areas such as Bihar, Sind, UP, Gujarat and Punjab, which would once have been called backward in Congress politics, were now prominent in their financial contributions, as were Gandhi's Marwari supporters, and a range of quite ordinary people who contributed to Congress collections in streets and cafes. As Congress planned and helped to finance non-co-operation it gained in prestige as the major national political body which could take on the *raj*. Its repute further added to its importance at different levels of public life, and its name became an increasingly significant asset. This, combined with its finances and organization, gave it a new potential both as a structure enabling interaction between levels of politics and as an institution which could bond India's political diversities into a national unity.

However the 1920-2 non-co-operation movement demonstrated the difficulties in the way of creating a new sense of national awareness and mutual interest across the subcontinent, and co-ordinating a political campaign which was national even in simple geographical terms. The problems of unity which had confronted early Congressmen were deepened now, precisely because the different levels of political understanding and action had been drawn into new and closer contact, because different modes of politics were not so disaggregated, and because Congress was no longer dominated by the western educated. No all-India leader after the First World War could exercise continental influence in the same way as a Surendranath Banerjea or a Pherozeshah Mehta. All concerned with all-India

political power, whether they were in the ranks of the *raj* or among Congressmen, needed deeper and wider networks of communications and alliances to achieve success in the changing political environment.

As non-co-operation generated new linkages between political arenas, regional differences became marked. There was growing hostility of men from some areas to India-wide strategies which appeared to conflict with their local interests or political style. The social elite among Bengali Hindus who had prospered in the new education and professions, for example, found the Mahatma's idiom uncongenial; while non-co-operation boded ill for them as a minority already politically threatened by Congress's all-India strategy at Lucknow in 1916 which had been written into the 1919 reforms. Strategic reasons led C.R. Das to make a pact with Gandhi at Nagpur in December 1920, but his hostility surfaced within the 1921, offered a Round Table Conference in an attempt to prevent embarrassing demonstrations when the Prince of Wales arrived. Non-co-operation could also underline caste hostilities where certain groups felt they were disadvantaged. The Justice party in Madras, for example, claimed to represent non-Brahmin interests. It resolutely avoided non-co-operation, and formed a ministry under the new constitution after successfully contesting the 1920 elections. For its members the fruits of office were far more significant as a strategy for consolidating power locally than any allegedly national call for self-denial by a Gujarati who seemed to be aligned with the Madras Brahmins who managed the local branch of Congress.

Even more destructive of non-co-operation as a mode of national action and regeneration were the communal and socio-economic strains which erupted under its banner, or were triggered by its propaganda. In the Punjab Hindu-Sikh relations deteriorated as the more puritan wing of the Sikhs in actual possession whom they accused of being 'Hinduized'. In Bihar non-co-operation brought to prominence long-standing issues between Muslims and Hindus, particularly cow-killing. That specific rift widened and seriously hampered the recruitment of volunteers and collection of funds for non-co-operation, despite Gandhi's request to leaders to stop discussing the question. A Hindu picture of Gandhi as Krishna above a Muslim flag deeply disquieted Bengali Muslims, as a local paper explained. 'The manner in which Mr. Gandhi is being worshipped in the country makes it impossible for the Moslem community to pull on with him. We are ready to work with the Hindus as their brethren; we can even forego *korbani* [cow-sacrifice] for their satisfaction, but we will never allow the holy crescent to lie low at the feet of Sri Krishna.'

The worst communal outbreak occurred on the Malabar coast, where the latest in a succession of Muslim peasant uprisings against Hindu landlords broke out in the wake of non-co-operation propaganda. There communal strains and socio-economic differences reinforced each other, precipitating a conflict disastrous alike for government and for Congress. Elsewhere class tension within communities was exacerbated by non-co-operation's particular local pattern. UP's

peasant movement, loosely and ambivalently linked to Congress's name and campaign; was the most obvious case. Non-co-operation in action uncovered many of the building blocks out of which a new order for India would have to be constructed. But despite Gandhi's insistence on non-violence, communal and class harmony, his campaign gave little indication that the groups and interests it brought together in new relationships would actually reinforce each other in the attainment of *swaraj*.

Followers, too, deserve a formula. Whatever motivation or conflict followers may have in common as they join a leader and the are joined together by him has to be studied in all the complementarity of

1. their personal lives, that is
 - a. the moment when they met the leader, their state of mind, and their stage of life;
 - b. the place of that moment in their life history, especially in lifelong themes transferred to the leader;
2. their communities, insofar as these are relevant to their search for an Identity by participation, that is
 - a. their generation's search for leadership
 - b. Traditional and evolving patterns of followership.

As to the last point, Gandhi, as we saw, was a master not only in the selection and acquisition of co-workers, but also in assigning them to or using them in all manner of different tasks and ways of life – from the position of elected sons and daughters in his ascetic settlement to that of revolutionary organizers all over India and of aspirants for highest political power, including the prime ministership, for which he "needed a boy from Harrow."

But any explanation, psychoanalytic or other, of how followers became singly what they proved to be together, is relative to – well, to the historical moment. The first Satyagrahi was, of course, unique in the manner of his ascendance and comparable only with equally unique individuals, his followers, however, were characterized primarily by the fact of having found this particular unique man among their contemporaries at a crucial moment in their own lives as well as in history – and of having been selected by him. My data may offer a fleeting glance into the mutual assimilation of motives, which might take place in a self-chosen group making history together.