CHAPTER-1

THE ARYAN PROBLEM

THE ORIGINAL HOME OF THE ARYANS

During the last hundred years many distinguished orientalists tried hard to find out the original home of the Aryans but with out striking at the root of the question. The attempt to trace the Aryans from their earliest station in the arena of history leads us to a veritable labyrinth of complicated and intermingled cultures each with a long and intricate history of its own behind it. There is no single thread to guide us certainly out of the maze but rather a multitude of strands intertwined and entangled and leading along divergent paths. The original home of the Aryans is a matter of great controversy and in spite of the lapse of time and the researches of scholars from time to time, there does not exist any unanimity of opinion. However, it is desirable to refer to some of the important theories regarding the original home of the Aryans.

The invention of the Aryan race in 19th century Europe was to have, as we all know, far reaching consequences on world history. Its application to European societies culminated in the ideology of Nazi Germany. Another sequel was that it became foundational to the interpretation of early Indian history and there have been attempts at a literal application of the theory to Indian society. Some European scholars now describe it as a 19th century myth. But some contemporary Indian political ideologies seem determined to renew its life. In this they are assisted by those who still carry the imprint of this 19th century theory and treat it as central to the question of Indian identity. With the widespread discussion on ‘Aryan origins’ in the print media and the controversy over its treatment in school textbooks, it has become the subject of a larger debate in terms of its ideological underpinnings rather than merely the differing readings among archaeologists and historians.

We intend to begin by briefly sketching the emergence of the theory in Europe, in which the search for the Indian past also played a role. It was initially both curiosity and the colonial requirement of knowledge about their subject peoples that led the officers of the East India Company serving in India to explore the history and culture of the colony which they were governing. The time was the late 18th century. Not only had the awareness of new worlds entered the consciousness of Europe, but knowledge as an aspect of the Enlightenment was thought to provide access to power. Governing a colony involved familiarity with what had preceded the arrival of the colonial power on the Indian scene. The focus therefore was on languages, law and religion. The belief that history was essential to this knowledge was thwarted by the seeming absence of histories of early India. That the beginnings of Indian history would have to be rediscovered through European methods of historical scholarship, with an emphasis on chronology and sequential narrative, became the challenge. These early explorations were dominated by the need to construct a chronology for the Indian past. Attempts were made to trace parallels with Biblical theories and chronology. But the exploration with the maximum
potential lay in the study of languages and particularly Sanskrit. Similarities between Greek and Latin and Sanskrit, noticed even earlier, were clinched with William Jones’ reading of Sandracottos as Chandragupta. Two other developments took place. One was the suggestion of a monogenesis of single origin of all related languages, an idea which was extended to the speakers of the languages as well. The second was the emergence of comparative philology, which aroused considerable interest, especially after the availability of Vedic texts in the early 19th century. Vedic studies were hospitably received in Europe where there was already both enthusiasm for or criticism of, Indian culture. German romanticism and the writings of Herder and Schlegel suggested that the roots of human history might go back to these early beginnings recorded in Sanskrit texts. James Mill on the other hand, had a different view in his highly influential History of British India, where he described India as backward and stagnant and Hindu civilization as inimical to progress. Comparative philologists, such as E. Burnouf and F. Bopp were primarily interested in the technicalities of language. Vedic Sanskrit, as the earliest form of Sanskrit, had primacy. Monogenesis was strengthened with the notion of an ancestral language, Indo-Germanic or Indo-European as it came to be called, as also in the origins of some European languages and their speakers being traced back to Iran and India or still further, to a central Asian homeland. Europe was on the edge of an Oriental Renaissance for it was believed that yet another Renaissance might follow, this time from the ‘discovery’ of the orient, and thus taking knowledge into yet other directions. The scholars associated with these studies and therefore with interpreting the Indian past, were generally based in Europe and had no direct experience of India.

The latter part of the 19th century witnessed discussions on the interrelatedness of language, culture and race, and the notion of biological race came to the forefront. The experience of imperialism where the European ‘races’ were viewed as advanced, and those of the colonized, as ‘lesser breeds’, reinforced these identities, as did social Darwinism. Prominent among these identities was Aryan, used both for the language and the race, as current in the mid-19th century. Aryan was derived from the Old Iranian airiia used in the Zoroastrian text, the Avesta, and was a cognate of the Sanskrit drya. Gobineau, who attempted to identify the races of Europe as Aryan and non-Aryan with an intrusion of the Semitic, associated the Aryans with the sons of Noah but emphasized the superiority of the white race and was fearful about the bastardization of this race. The study of craniology which became important at this time began to question the wider identity of the Aryan. It was discovered that the speakers of Indo-European languages were represented by diverse skull types. This was in part responsible for a new turn to the theory in the suggestion that the European Aryans were distinct from the Asian Aryans. The former were said to be indigenous to Europe while the latter had their homeland in Asia. If the European Aryans were indigenous to northern Europe then the Nordic blonde was the prototype Aryan. Such theories liberated the origins of European civilization from being embedded in Biblical history. They also had the approval of rationalist groups opposed to the Church, and supportive of Enlightenment thinking. The application of these ideas to Indian origins was strengthened by Max Muller’s work on Sanskrit and Vedic studies and in particular his editing of the Rgveda during the years from 1849 to 1874. He ascribed the importance of this study to his belief that the Rgveda
was the most ancient literature of the world, providing evidence of the roots of Indo-
Aryan and the key to Hinduism. Together with the Avesta it formed the earliest stratum
of Indo-European. Max Muller maintained that there was an original Aryan homeland in
central Asia. He postulated a small Aryan clan on a high elevation in central Asia,
speaking a language which was not yet Sanskrit or Greek, a kind of proto-language
ancestral to later Indo-European languages. From here and over the course of some
centuries, it branched off in two directions; one came towards Europe and the other
migrated to Iran, eventually splitting again with one segment invading north-western
India. The common origin of the Aryans was for him unquestioned.

The northern Aryans who are said to have migrated to Europe are described by
Max Muller as active and combative and they developed the idea of a nation, while the
southern Aryans who migrated to Iran and to India were passive and meditative,
concerned with religion and philosophy. This description is still quoted for the
inhabitants of India and has even come to be a cliché in the minds of many. The Aryans,
according to Max Muller were fair-complexioned Indo-European speakers who
conquered the dark-skinned dasas of India. The ary-varna and the dasa-varna of the
Rgveda were understood as two conflicting groups differentiated particularly by skin
colour, but also by language and religious practice, which doubtless underlined the racial
interpretation of the terms. The Aryans developed Vedic Sanskrit as their language. The
Dasas were the indigenous people, of Scythian origin, whom he called Turanians. The
Aryan and the non-Aryan were segregated through the instituting of caste. The upper
castes and particularly the brahmanas of modern times were said to be of Aryan descent
and the lower castes and untouchables and tribes were descended from the Dasas. Max
Muller popularized the use of the term Aryan in the Indian context, arguing that it was
originally a national name and later came to mean a person of good family. As was
common in the 19th century, he used a number of words interchangeably such as Hindu
and Indian, or race/nation/people/blood-words whose meanings would today be
carefully differentiated.

Having posited the idea of a common origin for the languages included as Indo-
European and among which was Indo-Aryan, common origin was extended to the
speakers of these languages. Aryan therefore, although specifically a label for a language,
came to be used for a people and a race as well, the argument being that those who spoke
the same language belonged to the same biological race. In a lecture delivered later at
Strassburg in 1872, Max Muller denied any link between language and race. In spite of
this, he continued to confuse the two as is evident from his description of Raja Ram
Mohan Roy in an Address delivered in 1883. Mohan Roy was an Arya belonging to the
south-eastern branch of the Aryan race and he spoke an Aryan language, the Bengali. We
recognize in Ram Mohan Roy’s visit to England the meeting again of the two great
branches of the Aryan race, after they had been separated so long that they had lost all
recollection of their common origin, common language and common faith. The sliding
from language to race became general to contemporary thinking. An equally erroneous
equation was the identification of Dravidian languages with a Dravidian race. This
reconstruction of what was believed to be Aryan history, supercedes the initial
Orientalist search of Biblical parallels or connections with early Indian history. There was
now a focus on common origins with Europe, untouched by the intervention of the Semitic peoples and language. As an Aryan text the Rgveda is said to be free from any taint of Semitic contact. Northern do the Puranas which were significant to Orientalist reconstructions of the past, enter Max Muller’s discourse for whom they were not only later but were in comparison, second order knowledge. The Puranas, in their descriptions of the past, do not endorse an arya-dasa separation in a manner which could be interpreted as different races. There was also an exclusion of anything Islamic in Max Muller’s definition of the Indian. He refers to the tyranny of Mohammedan rule in India without explaining why he thought it was so.

The theory of Aryan race became endemic to the reconstruction of Indian history and the reasons for this are varied. The pre-eminence given to the role of the brahmanas in the Orientalist construction of Indology was endorsed by the centrality of the Vedas. The Aryan theory also provided the colonized with status and self-esteem, arguing that they were linguistically and racially of the same stock as the colonizers. However, the separation of the European Aryans from the Asian Aryans was in effect a denial of this status. Such a denial was necessary in the view of those who proposed a radical restructuring of colonial society through new legislation and administration, and in accordance with the conversion of the colony into a viable source of revenue. The complexities of caste were simplified in its being explained as racial segregation, demarcating the Aryan from the others. And finally, it made Indian origins relevant to the current perceptions dominating European thought and these perceptions were believed to be ‘scientific’ explanations. Max Muller’s books were read in India and his views were endorsed in various influential publications, such as John Muir’s Original Sanskrit Texts (1858 -1863) and John Wison’s Indian Caste (1877). Both authors were Christian missionaries and drew attention to the plight of the low castes, oppressed by brahmanas, an oppression which they claimed went back to the Aryan invasions. They referred to the conflict of the aryas with the non-aryas. The term arya was used as a patronymic referring to the Aryan people. They launched an attack on the inequities of caste and therefore of Hinduism and maintained that Christianity alone could bring these to an end.

Missionary views in the later half of the 19th century were familiar to many Indians. Among these, Jyotiba Phule provided a radical exposition of the Aryan theory. He viewed caste relations as relations of inequality, where society had been divided into a hierarchy of ranked castes. By emphasizing the importance of the non-Aryans he used the theory of Aryan race to argue a different origin and status for the lower castes. Referred to as the dasas and the sudras in brahmanical texts, the lower castes were, according to him, the indigenous people. They were the rightful inheritors of the land, whose rights had been wrongfully appropriated by the invading Aryan, and who had subjugated them and reduced them to a lower caste status. The immediate context was for him the recent Peshwa rule in western India and the confrontation between the brahmanas and the non-brahmanas. The brahmanas were Aryan and therefore alien and the indigenous peoples were the sudras and others, whom he labeled as ksatriyas. The argument ran that the golden age was prior to the invasion of the Aryans when King Bali ruled and what are now the lower castes were then in the
ascendant. The invasion of the Aryans was crucial to the creation of segregated groups in the form of castes, where the Aryans were the victorious aliens who kept the indigenous people permanently subordinated. He used to good effect the well-known myth of the brahmanas Parasurama destroying the ksatriyas, in this construction of the past. Phule’s radicalization of the theory was popular among the lower castes and became central to many non-Brahmin movements in other parts of peninsular India. By stating that the upper castes were not indigenous, the theory was used to exclude the upper caste dominated middle class claiming an Aryan identity. From Phule’s perspective, the theory endorsed a confrontation of castes.

The upper castes had their own use for the theory and it was again given a twist which suited their social aspirations and political needs. The views of Phule were generally ignored. The theory was used to argue the superiority of the upper castes and promote their self-esteem by maintaining that not only were the upper castes the lineal descendants of the Aryans but that they were also racially related to the European Aryan. Keshab Chandra Sen follows Max Muller and John Wilson in his statement that, in the advent of the English nation in India we see a reunion of parted cousins, the descendants of two different families of the ancient Aryan race. B.G. Tilak endorsed the antiquity of the Rgveda by taking it back to 4500 B.C. much earlier than the 1500 B.C. suggested by Max Muller, basing his argument on what he interpreted as references to planetary positions. Influenced by the theory of a Nordic homeland for the Aryans, Tilak suggested that they had migrated from the Arctic regions in the post-glacial age and then branched off, with one group going to Europe and the other coming to India. The European Aryans according to him relapsed into barbarism but the Indian Aryans retained their original, superior civilization, which they re-established on conquering the non-Aryans of India. The introduction of geology into the argument was also seen as supporting an early date for the Rgveda. Tilak’s view were known to Max Muller who of course did not agree with him but was incidentally, helpful in getting Tilak released from jail when he was incarcerated for nationalist activities.

Dayananda Sarasvati, seeking to return to the social and religious life of the Vedas, used the Vedic corpus as the blueprint of his vision of Indian society. But he argued that the Vedas are the source of all knowledge including modern science, a view with which Max Muller disagreed. He underlined the linguistic and racial purity of the Aryans and the organization which he founded, the Arya Samaj, was described by its followers as ‘the society of the Aryan race’. The Aryas were the upper castes and the untouchables were excluded. The innovation, or according to some the revival, of, the ritual called Suddhi or purification made it possible for those converted to other religions to be accepted back as caste Hindus. The same ritual, but with less frequency, was also used to ‘purify’ those outside caste, into being given a caste status. For Dayananda, it was said, castes were merely different professions or guilds established by the state and therefore the de jure status could change. A change in the de facto status had to be ordered by the state or by society regulating itself. This was his reply to the criticism that he wanted to retain caste as practiced in the Vedas, despite its being projected as a rigid system in the Sutra texts. These views coincided with the emergence of nationalism in the late 19th century in India, articulated mainly by the middle class, which was drawn from the
upper caste and was seeking both legitimacy and an identity from the past. Origins therefore became crucial. To legitimize the status of the middle class, its superior Aryan origins and lineal descent was emphasized. It was assumed that only the upper caste Hindu could claim Aryan ancestry. This effectively excluded not only the lower castes but also the non-Hindus, even those of some social standing. Aryanism therefore became an exclusive status. In the dialogue between the early nationalists and the colonial power, a theory of common origins strengthening a possible link between the colonizers and the Indian elite came in very useful. For early nationalism, Aryan and non-Aryan differentiation was of an ethnic and racial kind, but was also beginning to touch implicitly on class differentiation.

Sympathetic to nationalism in India were the views of the Theosophical Society which changed the theory to suit its own premises. A prominent member of the society, Col. Olcott maintained that not only were the Aryans (equated with the Hindus) indigenous to India but that they were also the progenitors of European civilization. Theosophical views emerged out of what was believed to be an aura of oriental religions and particularly Hinduism, as also the supposed dichotomy between the spiritualism of India and the materialism of Europe. The romanticizing of India included viewing its civilization as providing a counter-point to an industrializing Europe obsessed with rationalism, both of which were seen as eroding the European quality of life. The theosophical reading of the Aryan theory was echoed in the interpretation of the theory by Hindu nationalist opinion. A group of people, close to and involved with the founding of the R.S.S. (Rashtriya Swayamsevaka Sangha) and writing in the early 20th century, developed the concept of Hindutva or Hinduness and argued that this was essential to the identity of the Indian. Since Hinduness in the past did not have a specific definition, the essentials of a Hindu identity had to be formulated. The argument ran that the original Hindus were the Aryans, a distinctive people indigenous to India. Caste Hindus or Hindu Aryas are their descendants. There was no Aryan invasion since the Aryans were indigenous to India and therefore no confrontation among the people of India. The Aryans spoke Sanskrit and were responsible for the spread of Aryan civilization from India to the west. Confrontations came with the arrival of foreigners such as the Muslims, the Christians and more recently, the Communists. These groups are alien because India is neither the pitrbhumi – the land of their birth – the assumption being that all Muslims and Christians are from outside India, northern the punyabhumi – their holy land. Hindu Aryas have had to constantly battle against these foreigners. Influenced by European theories of race of the 1920’s and 1930’s, parallels were drawn between the European differentiation of Hindus and Muslims. Justifying the treatment of the Jews in Germany, the threat of the same fate was held out to the Muslims in India.

The Hindutva version of the theory became a mechanism for excluding some sections of Indian society, specifically Indian Muslims and Christians, by insisting that they are alien. Inevitably it also ran into problems with the lower castes and the untouchables, who propagated Jyotiba Phule’s view. There was a certain ambiguity among the Hindutva group as to whether or not the untouchables were Hindus and therefore Aryans. This posed the problem that if only caste Hindus are Aryans then the
untouchables would have to be excluded, and this reduces the numerical count of Hindus; whereas, if the lower castes and Dalits are included as Hindus, then although this may upset some caste Hindus nevertheless the numbers listed as Hindu increases the Hindu constitution of the majority. The question of numbers also influenced the insistence that Aryans are indigenous and not invaders. Such an increase in numbers is important to political mobilization and to the assertion that since Hindus constitute the majority in India, it should be declared a Hindu state. The identity and origins of the Hindus was seen as crucial to the identity of the nation of the Hindus and of the nation-state. From this perspective, it is emphasized that the national identity has to focus on the antiquity and continuity of the Hindu Arya as the major component of the Hindu nation. This inevitably brings historians and archaeologists into a debate which is at one level about history but also touches on questions of political ideologies and national identities. Mainstream historians writing on ancient India did not accept the Hindutva version of the theory. Going back to the views of Max Muller they began their narrative with the coming of the invading Aryans. The Vedas therefore came to be seen as the foundational texts of Indian civilization. With the growing influence of nationalism in writing of Indian history, Max Mullar was seen as sympathetic and positive in his reading of the Indian past. The idyllic Indian lost in philosophic speculation could have been viewed as a condescending image, but in fact was appreciated. Indian historians were themselves largely from the upper castes and not averse to the highlighting of their own status. The acceptance of the Aryan theory underlined the Hindu idiom in nationalist historical writing. The Aryans were eulogized for laying the foundation of a civilization thought to be at least equal, if not superior, to most others.

The discussion on caste as we have seen, also incorporated the Aryan theory. Caste as racial segregation, separating the upper caste Aryans from the lower caste non-Aryans, was viewed as a scientific way of organizing society in keeping with modern ideas, but this view was gradually discarded when there was evidence to the contrary. The Christian missionary criticism of caste was partially conceded by referring to the extreme rigidity of caste. This became a way of explaining the weakness of Indian society, particularly in its confrontation with Islam and ‘in the face of Muslim invasions’, for it was said that caste was divisive and the Hindus could not unite to meet the threat. But it was also argued that caste saved Hinduism from being absorbed into other religions such as Islam and helped maintain its continuing identity. There were only a very few analysis where caste was seen to have its own history of change and adaptation. Moralising on the evils of caste precluded the need to see it as an agency of power, dominance and subordination, or to recognized the large area of flexible negotiation which, to some degree, permitted certain castes to shape their status. For example, families of obscure origin and some even said to be of the lower castes, rose to political power and many legitimized their power by successfully claiming upper caste ksatriya status. To concede these facts would have contradicted the theory that the upper castes are the lineal descendants of the Aryans. This varied exploitation of the theory received a jolt with the archaeological discovery of the Indus civilization. The excavation of the cites of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro in the 1920's and subsequent excavations in India and Pakistan, revealing an extensive urban culture in the northern and western parts of the
Indian subcontinent, created problems for the Aryan theory. Being predominantly urban, the Indus culture in distinctively different from the pastoral-agrarian society described in the Vedic texts. The Vedas are primarily ritual texts and their depiction of society is ancillary to their main purpose. The archaeological evidence, more specific on data relating to the environment, technology and economy, covers a much wider area and goes further back in time. It has become therefore the primary data for the reconstruction of the earliest history of India. But because the Vedic texts were used in reconstructing the past, prior to the availability of archaeological evidence, there is a readiness to read the archaeological data in the light of the literary.

The nature of the literary data is significant to the historical reconstruction of this period. It is virtually impossible to date the Vedic texts with precision since they are essentially ritual texts and in some passages are clearly anachronistic. They are composed in the language of ritual and require explanatory and etymological commentaries. Among those surviving is the Nirukta of Yaska, generally dated to 700-600 B.C. Panini in his grammar differentiates between the language of ritual and the spoken language. The compositions were preserved orally for many centuries through careful methods of memorizing. However, the question has been raised as to whether the systems of memorization were this also to the compilation of the hymns, and further whether this was also prior to the adoption of a script. On this opinions differ. A long period of a few centuries intervened between the composition of the earliest hymns and their compilation into the Rgveda as we know it. Even within a strictly monitored oral tradition there can be changes and if the memorization extends over some centuries, then some degree of additions and subtractions may be expected. The use of astronomy in dating an entire text is regarded as unreliable since the references to planetary positions could have been incorporated from an earlier tradition which need not have been Vedic but was known in the area where the hymns were composed. The Rgveda has been approximately dated to about 1500 B.C. by when the Indus cities had declined. Therefore in accordance with this chronology; the Indus civilization was prior to the Vedic culture and precedes it as foundational to Indian civilization. If however there is an insistence on 4500 BC as the date of the Rgveda, (which is unlikely on the basis of linguistic evidence), then the Vedic would precede the Harappan culture. Excavations in Baluchistan indicate that some settlements there go back to the seventh millennium and continue to the 1st millennium thus vastly preceding even the early date which some have proposed for the Rgveda. But the pre-Harappan cultures of these sites are not present at the same date in the sites of the Punjab and the north-western borderlands of the Indian subcontinent, which is the location of the Rgveda. It is difficult to find an archaeological counter-part among the pre-Harappan settlements to the material culture as described in the Rgveda. The mutation to the pattern of the Harappan culture takes place at approximately the same period in both areas.

Pre-Harappan cultures in the areas where eventually the Harappa culture prevailed, are of diverse kinds and distinctively different. The Ghaggar-Hakra river system which some have sought to identify with the Rgveda Sarasvati and are projecting it as the nucleus of that evolved into the Harappa culture, has a large number of sites but these cannot be regarded as the sole precursors to Harappan urbanization. The
contribution of the sites in the Indo-Iranian borderlands and in Baluchistan as also in the Indus system itself, appear to be more significant. The Harappan sites, although not entirely uniform, do maintain a pattern which is not only recognizable but marks a departure from the earlier cultures. Its major characteristics are the emphasis on a grid and a rationalization of streets in terms of direction and size, with an extensive drainage system, distinctive domestic and public buildings, artifacts such as seals and weights and measures associated with developed exchange, a variety of crafts and distinctive pottery. This was a motivated reaching out into a wide area through various networks of settlements. The requirement of manpower and the exploitation of resources was on a scale unfamiliar to preceding cultures. The sheet size of the area tapped by the Harappan culture led inevitably to some regional variation.

The Late Harappan phase, from the early to mid-second millennium BC when the Mature Harappan began to decline sees a return to a stronger regional articulation and diversity in archaeological culture which is geographically delimited. Once again there are a variety of cultures which emerge at this time, some with no ostensible links with other regions, some with continuities with the Harappan and some with evidence of the arrival of innovations from elsewhere. Settlements in Baluchistan suggest links with central Asia and Iran in the 2nd millennium BC. Interestingly the overlap between the Late Harappan and subsequent independent culture – that of the Painted Grey Ware – occurs in Punjab and Haryana. With the decline of the cities there appears to have been a ruralisation in the regions earlier associated with the Harappan culture, since it takes a features centuries before another urbanization is witnessed and this time in the Ganga valley. Rgvedic references to the grassy banks of the Sarasvati would predate the hydrological changes which led to the drying up of the Sarasvati just prior to about 1,000 BC provided that the Rgvedic Sarasvati is not located in Afghanistan. The geographical location of the Rgvedic saptasindhu is generally taken to be the Punjab and the adjoining borderlands, although some scholars would place the geographical location of the Rgveda closer to central Asia and Afghanistan. There is virtually no familiarity in the Rgvedic hymns with Sindh and Baluchistan, leave alone Gujarat (all these being areas were Harappan settlements have been found), northern with the middle Ganga valley. The last is part of geography of the later Vedic corpus, when interestingly; the language of the north is described as superior. Thus the Punjab could have been the geographical overlap between a part of the area of the Harappan culture and the Rgveda.

Although the earlier notion of a systematic destruction of Harappan sites by Aryan invaders has been questioned from the evidence of archaeology, this does not allow us to maintain that the speakers of Indo-Aryan were therefore indigenous to India. Northern does the evidence support the identification of Vedic culture with the Indus/Harappan culture. That Indo-Aryan has cognates in a few words that occur in texts from northern Syria, and that the links with Old Iranian suggest more than just a linguistic affinity, is well-established. Parallels from Iran occur in rituals, deities and social forms, but these were not imports from India as is also suggested by the deliberate reversal of some associated ideas in the two societies. The cult of soma/haoma and the emphasis on the worship of fire were common to Iran and India. The cult of soma does not occur elsewhere in the Indo-European speaking world suggesting a particularly close
relationship of the Indo-Iranian culture, if not a common source. The ritual of soma has also been linked to some proto-type shamanistic rituals from earlier periods in Central Asia. The Indo-Iranian links tie into the chronology of the Rigveda since the earliest suggested date not of Zoroaster is circa 1200 BC. There is also no evidence of a linguistic movement from India to Iran. The Vedic texts indicate to the contrary, that Indo-Aryan speakers moved eastwards from north-western India to the Ganga valley. The problem for the historian then is to try and understand the mechanism by which Indo-Aryan was brought and adopted in India. For this it is necessary to go back a little in time and observe activities in west Asia and Iran since these are closely connected with events in North India.

Archaeological evidence from the 3rd millennium BC confirms wide-ranging, overland contacts between north-western India, southern and eastern Iran and the Oxus region, and maritime contacts with Oman and Mesopotamia. It was clearly a cosmopolitan world with people on the move, making languages mobile too. Traders from the Indus cities would have had to use diverse languages such as Akkadian, Elamite, and possibly Indo-European in the upper Oxus. This further complicates the decipherment of the Indus script, which so far has been divided between two main schools one reading it as Indo-Aryan and the other as Proto-Dravidian, where the latter reading seems to be based on a greater reliance on the rules of linguistics. One attempt however which remains controversial among linguists is the close connection which has been suggested between Elamite in southern Iran and Proto-Dravidian. The Proto-Elamite script suggests comparison with the Harappan and it was being used in eastern Iran. Elamite was the language known in the area lying between the Harappan culture and Mesopotamia, prior to the arrival of Old Iranian when Indo-European place-names and proper names start being mentioned in cuneiform documents from northern Mesopotamia in the 2nd millennium BC.

The decline of the Indus cities in the early 2nd millennium BC is now attributed to environmental changes, the closing of trade with the Gulf and the collapse of political authority in the cities. However, the decline of the cities is not an abrupt termination of the Indus civilization as there is some continuity of Harappan traits in post-Harappan cultures and an overlap at some sites in Punjab and Haryana. In relation to cultural traits from Iran and central Asia, the possibilities of small-scale migrations into India and the interaction of peoples and cultures over a long period of time, can be assumed. The emphasis is both on smallness and long duration as there was no massive migration of such as to overwhelm the existing cultures. This is also much more likely to have been the mechanism by which the Indo-Aryan language came to be established in north-western India. If the archaeological evidence is given primacy in establishing the roots of Indian civilization then it is possible to reconstruct a picture of the evolution of various societies in the northern and western parts of the subcontinent. In this reconstruction, the Indus civilization/Harappan culture is a significant landmark and interest is shifting away from futile attempts to identify every new archaeological culture with the Aryans. A close examination of the archaeological evidence in various dimensions permits a comparison of Harappan society with the depicted in the Vedic texts and the two are diverse. The one characteristic which is striking in the archaeology of the Harappan
culture is the strength of the urban organization, reflected in the way the towns were planned and the amenities provided. Urban centres were central to extensive trade in Harappan life, whereas the Vedic society was pastoral and agricultural without descriptions of urban living. There are no references to granaries or large-scale storage systems under administrative authority. Craft production which was an established feature of the Harappan cities is mentioned in passing in the texts. The use of a script is evident from the seals but is absent in the texts. Vedic society gradually becomes more familiar with the use of iron and this is absent in the Harappan culture where the metal technology is of copper and bronze. Other technologies also point to major differences, as for example, the raja in the Vedic texts was equipped with a chariot run on spiked wheels neither or which are to be found at Harappan sites where oxen drew carts and the wheels were discoid. Chariots were drawn by horses but these are late arrivals and there is only sporadic evidence of the horse at the time of the decline of the cities.

Despite these differences, an alternative view is being propagated. This interpretation seeks an unbroken genealogy for the Hindu as Arya and therefore supports the Hindutva reconstruction of events. The argument runs as follows: the Indus civilization is said to be Vedic and Aryan and this, together with the lack of evidence of a large-scale Aryan invasion from archaeology, is said to further prove that there were people who called themselves the Aryans and who were indigenous to India. The preferred date for the Rgveda is 4500 BC so that it precedes the Indus cities, but the two can also be made to coincide chronologically. It is claimed that the Indo-Aryan language originated in India and spread from India westwards. Such an early date for the Rgveda is untenable on the available linguistic evidence northern is there support for the argument of a westward flow of people from northern India, neither from linguistic northern from archaeological source. Since language cannot be identified by an archaeological culture, the use of the term Aryan in this interpretation refers to a combination of people, culture and language rather than strictly only to language. We are back once more to Max Muller’s confusion over language and race. The attempt to push back the chronology of the Rgveda is accompanied by the attempt to take the Harappan culture back to the 4th millennium or even earlier and the equating of the Harappan culture with the Vedic texts. There is a focus on those pre-Harappan cultures whose location is along the Ghaggar-Hakra which is identified with the now invisible Sarasvati river, important to the Rgveda. It is argued that the number of sites along the Ghaggar-Hakra river system is greater than along the Indus, therefore the former should be seen as the nucleus of the Harappan culture. The claim is then made that the Indus civilization should more correctly be called the Indus-Sarasvati civilization. The theory ignores the existence of a variety of pre-Harappan cultures in other areas, some of which were closely related to the process of Harappan urbanization. It has also been contested by some archaeologists who disagree with the count and location of sites as with the implicit argument of what constitutes the nucleus of a civilization. However, there are ideological and political dimensions to this theory which makes it acceptable to those seeking origins in what they call indigenous identities. The equating of the Harappan and Vedic culture is not essentially an attempt at co-relating archaeological and literary sources in reconstructing the beginnings of the history of the
subcontinent. There are other agendas which are being addressed in this attempt. If it can be argued that the Harappan culture is in fact Vedic or that the Rgveda is earlier even than the Harappan, then the Vedas continue to be foundational to the subcontinental civilization of South Asia and also attract the encomium of representing an advanced civilization, superior even to the pastoral-agrarian culture actually described in the Vedic texts. The Vedic culture then, has an unbroken flow, as it were, from the 4th millennium into the historical period, and in terms of the antiquity of civilizations (which was a 19th century obsession), places it on par with the earliest. The Sanskrit base of the civilization is sought to be established by reading the Vedic into the Harappan. The label Indus-Sarasvati civilization evokes the Rgveda. There is also in this interpretation, the advantage that an extensive territory can be claimed for the Vedic culture, since Harappan artifacts and sites are located in a widespread area from Badakshan in Afghanistan to northern Maharashtra and from the Ganga-Yamuna doab to Baluchistan. This vastly extends the geographical area as described in the Rgveda and which is much more limited. The discovery of Harappan sites on the Indian side of the border between India and Pakistan, is viewed as compensating for the loss of the cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa which are located in Pakistan. By insisting on the Ghaggar-Hakra being the cradle of the Indus civilization, there is an element of recapturing the civilization for India. The equation of the Harappan with the Vedic strengthens the notion of an unbroken Hindu Aryan origin for the historical beginnings of both India and Pakistan.

Another curious agenda is that of what is described as ‘a critical mass’ of Indians and a few others in America and Canada who refer to themselves as the Indo-American school (as against what they call the Indo-European school of scholars who work within the earlier Indian and European scholarship). The Indo-American school, (as they call themselves), according to one of its prominent spokesmen, consists of predominantly American-trained Indian professional scientists researching on ancient India (presumably as a hobby), and using the resources of modern science and technology. Obviously well-endowed, they run their own journal from their main office in Canada. They too are committed to proving that the Vedic and the Harappan cultures are the same and that their antiquity goes back to the fifth millennium BC and therefore the Aryans are indigenous to India and took the Aryan mission westwards from India. Much of their writing contributes to the invention of yet more mythologies about a complex subject. What is striking about their reconstructions is their evident unfamiliarity with the methods of analyzing archaeological, linguistic and historical data. Consequently their writings read rather like 19th century tracts Buddhism peppered with references to using the computer so as to suggest scientific objectivity since they claim that it is value-free. Those that question their theories are dismissed as Marxists! That Indian scientists in America should take upon themselves the task of proving the Harappan to be Vedic, to having influenced other civilizations such as the Egyptian, and to proving that the Aryans proceeded on a civilizing mission issuing out of India and going westwards, can only suggest that the ‘Indo-American school’ is in the midst of an identity crisis in its new environment. It is anxious to demarcate itself from other immigrants and to proclaim that the Indian identity is superior to the others who have also fallen into the ‘great melting-pot’. These reconstructions disregard the linguistic data,
probably because it would puncture their argument. It is conveniently stated that the
linguistic models arise out of political and cultural factors and presumably therefore may
be ignored. Yet linguistics introduces another dimension, other than archaeological,
which has a considerable bearing not only on the nature of the Vedic language but also
on the reconstruction of the history of this period. Linguistic analyses, subsequent to
Max Muller and particularly those of the last few decades have led to the radical revision
of many earlier views. The internal evidence of the Vedic texts points to Indo-Aryan
traveling eastwards from north-western India to the middle Ganga valley. The Rgveda
has its location in the saptasindhru region, but the later Vedic corpus indicates a shift
eastwards and the crossing of the river Sadanira/Gandak is specifically mentioned.
Changes are apparent within the evolution of Vedic Sanskrit from the period of the
Rgveda to that of the later Vedas. There is also a greater incidence of non-Aryan
linguistic elements in the later Vedic corpus as compared to the Rgveda. There is
therefore an induction into Vedic Sanskrit from Indian non-Aryan languages registering
an increase over time, and thus suggesting that Indo-Aryan was not indigenous. The
recent linguistic analysis therefore is set aside by those who argue to the contrary.

Yet the linguistic evidence cannot be ignored as it forms part of a primary source –
the Vedic texts – in the reconstruction of the history of this period. But this evidence has
also to be seen in a wider context. Related languages, constituting what is called the Indo-
European family are said to go back to an ancestral language spoken in the Indo-
European homeland which has generally been located in central Asia and which is
referred to as proto-Indo-European. Such reconstructions previously assumed that a
proto form could be arrived at from words taken from later texts. This has been
questioned and historical linguistics is now particular about possible changes in the
history of words. Linguistics also places an emphasis on the structure of the language
and does not limit itself to comparing similar sounding words.

A single homeland would imply a widespread diffusion from a small area, and the
explanations for such diffusion have been speculative. The drying up of the pasture lands
in the steppe area has been suggested. In central Asia settlements tend to acquire simple
fortifications in the 3rd millennium BC perhaps indicating a more than normal movement
of people. An alternative reconstruction might suggest that there was a wide belt of Indo-
European speaking peoples inhabiting a large part of central Asia, from the Tocharian
speaking region to the Slavonic. These would have moved in different directions and
associated with a variety of pre-existing cultures, thus resulting in some similarities
among Indo-European derives languages but with variant characteristics as well, the
latter deriving from pre-existing languages of these cultures. This would involve some
variation in the ancestral languages and a wider spectrum of migrations and movements
of peoples. The languages taken to new areas would have changed to some degree on
coming into contact with non-Indo-European speakers and establishing of languages
related to Indo-European would have taken a few centuries. The imprint of Indo-
European would vary from the maximum impact, namely that of gradually establishing
an Indo-European language in the area, to the minimum, namely, that of the local
language merely incorporating a few Indo-European words. Given the interrelatedness
of Indo-European languages and that these languages in contiguous areas have historical
roots which are often connected; it is not possible to study the history of any single Indo-European language in isolation. Each has to be viewed in the context of the group with which it is associated. Thus Indo-Aryan has to be examined within the context of links with old Iranian and a possible Indo-Iranian phase at an earlier stage. Some clarification in the use of these terms is necessary. Indo-Iranian descended from an original Indo-European would have preceded the division into Old Iranian and Indo-Aryan. The early sections of the Avesta, associated with Zoroaster provide evidence of Old Iranian. Indo-Aryan is available from the Rgveda onwards. However, there is another form which some scholars identify with Indo-Aryan and which they argue is perhaps a little earlier and therefore it is called Proto-Indo-Aryan. This would make it possibly earlier than the Rgveda. Its occurrence is not in south Asia or Iran, but in a few inscriptions from Turkey and Syria. There is however, no evidence of an Indo-Aryan language acting as a connecting link form an earlier location in south Asia towards the area to the west. Furthermore, these inscriptions are firmly dated to the 2nd millennium BC and this has some relevance for dating the Rgveda.

The term ‘Aryan’ in the label Indo-Aryan, refers solely to the language and not to the people who spoke it or for that matter to any imagined race. The word airia in the Avesta is seen as the same as the arya of the Rgveda. Its etymology has been discussed at length and has been read as derived from meanings such as companion, enemy-friend, stranger, guest, a person of noble lineage or a person of status and possessions. The inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings of Iran are also quoted where they identify themselves as Aryan. But the earliest of these inscriptions are of the 6th century BC and therefore much later than the Avesta. Although the term has been associated with descent, it can also be read as referring to nobility of status. Since Indo-Aryan refers to a language and arya refers to a social status, attempts to identify either with archaeological cultures tend to be meaningless.

Cultural similarities recognized in the various Indo-European languages have given rise to theories concerning the organization of the societies which use Indo-European. Of these most influential is that of Dumezil who describes the tripartite function of Indo-European society as consisting of three categories – priests, warriors and hereditary-cultivators. However, it has been shown that these divisions are so general that they can even be seen in non-Indo-European literature such as the Bible. A similarity of patterns and their traces have also been sought in the mythology and laws of Indo-European speaking societies. The assumption that the speakers of Indo-European became the dominant group in the areas where the language spread, has not been superseded by the recognition that the diffusion of a language introduces some new ideas and institutions in an area, but that frequently there is restructuring of existing ideas and institutions. Tentative suggestions from this perspective have been made in relation to rituals. Some rituals characteristic of the Indo-Iranian area, are not practiced in other areas where Indo-European in spoken. This may be because of the close connections between north-western India and Iran, even prior to the establishing of Indo-European language in the region. One such ritual is the cult of soma (in Indo-Aryan) or haoma (in Old Iranian), which involves the consuming of the elaborately prepared juice of a plant with hallucinogenic properties as part of major sacrificial rituals. It has been thought that
the tradition goes back to shamanistic practices in central Asia. The plant has been identified by some with the ephedra, found in a ritual context at the site of Togolok 21 in Margiana (Turkmenistan) and by others with the fly agaric, a mushroom which grows in a habitat associated with mountains of Afghanistan. The geographical restriction of the cult may have arisen because the plant was specific to a limited location. A tentative hypothesis takes the cult back to the Harappans. The argument is not that the Harappans therefore were the people of the Vedas, but that this cult had pre-Vedic and pre-Avestan origins and was incorporated into the Vedic and Avestan ritual. This underlines the need to examine how a ritual is constituted, and the extent to which it retains archaic features and introduces new ones.

The earliest definitive evidence of Indo-European, apart from a few names in a Mesopotamian source of the 19th century BC comes from Hittite and Mitanni inscriptions from Turkey and Syria in the period between about 1750 to 1300 BC and from the names of the Kassites whose short-lived presence in Mesopotamia is dated to the mid-2nd millennium BC. These data are not texts in Indo-European, but words; names of deities and rulers, and terms used in the training of horses. The occurrence of Indo-European words is striking in an area which was non-Indo-European speaking prior to this and remained the same after this brief intrusion. This does not indicate large numbers of Indo-European speakers, northern a substantial local population taking to the new language. That this form of Indo-European is close to Rgvedic Sanskrit has tended to endorse the date of about 1500–1200 BC for the early hymns of the Rgveda. Linguistic evidence of language or words close to Vedic Sanskrit prior to the 2nd millennium BC in the area between the Indus and Turkey is not forthcoming. This is also the period when the earlier connections between the Indus and West Asia begin to decline. In the absence of language links in the intervening area, it has been suggested that Proto-Indo-Aryan may have traveled originally from a more central point, perhaps in Iran, westwards to Turkey and eastwards to northern India. Avestan references to the migrations of the airiia mention places in northern and Eastern Iran and the direction would appear to be from the north to the northerners-east.

The assimilation of non-Aryan linguistic elements into Vedic Sanskrit raises the question of whether there was bilingualism between the speakers of Indo-Aryan and of other languages, and if so, then to what degree; and who were the authors of these texts? It could be that groups of migrants over many centuries came from the region of Margiana and Bactria to north-western India. The migrants could have been slow-moving pastoralists, who also functioned as itinerant traders. This is suggested by the centrality of pastoral society in the Rgveda. They probably settled in places en route, so that those who entered India were already ethnically and culturally mixed and spoke what evolved into Indo-Aryan carrying traces of closeness to Old Iranian, but nevertheless distinct. It would have been more convenient for them to use local artifacts rather than carry items from their earlier settlements. Archaeology therefore would register their presence in indirect forms and not as a major change in material culture. They would have met with non-Aryan speakers in India, using proto-Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic and possibly in some areas even Tibeto-Burman. Bilingualism would have followed, resulting in the induction of non-Aryan traits into Aryan, recognizable in
morphology (word formation), phonology (sound), syntax (sentence pattern and grammar), lexical items (vocabulary) and semantics (meaning). Non-Aryan speakers were part of this bilingualism and over many centuries may have become proficient in Indo-Aryan. Apart from elements of language, it is likely that custom and ritual were also incorporated into Vedic practice, amalgamating cultural items from local and distant traditions. This would result in some anachronisms. Bilingualism would have been a necessity. But the motivation for the adoption of Indo-Aryan by non-Aryan speakers may have been encouraged if the language being adopted gave access to artifacts, rituals, status and security. In order to strengthen this hypothesis, it would be necessary to examine the artifacts which are innovatory towards the early 1st millennium BC. Was the increasing use of the horse and the spoked-wheel chariot linked to the Aryan speakers? Or the introduction of iron artifacts? The horse is an insignificant animal in the Indus cities and can be said to arrive, at the earliest. Towards the decline of the cities and not before the 2nd millennium BC. It is noticeably absent in any ritual context such as a depiction on a Harappan seal or at places thought to be associated with rituals. This is in contrast to its presence in some post-Harappan cultures and its centrality to Vedic ritual and life. This centrality was probably because the horse, and certainly the quality livestock, was imported even in later times from central Asia or from Arabia.

The use of the horse and of the bovine in ritual, especially the ritual of sacrifice, is not identical. The sacrifice of a bovine carries less status than that of a horse. In the dana-stuti hymns of the Rgveda in which the poets list the wealth they request from their patrons, the number of horse is far fewer than of cattle. Excavated animal bones from Hastinapur in the 1st millennium BC when the use of the horse was more frequent, indicate that horse bones make up only a very small percentage of the bones, the largest amount being those of the bos Indicus, the humped cattle. The horse being more valuable, its association was with the more spectacular sacrifices such as the asvamedha. The eating of cattle flesh was limited to occasions when the animal had been sacrificed or on special occasions. It was not eaten routinely. This is a common feature among cattle pastoralists who thus preserve quality stock. The horse sacrifice is mentioned in the Vedas and the number of horses said to have been sacrificed are sometimes excessive. Exaggerated figures may have been intended to suggest power and wealth and need not be taken literally. There is no evidence of the sacrifice of a horse from Harappan sites and even what is interpreted by some as evidence of the sacrifice of an animal is extremely limited.

In the Indo-Iranian borderlands, horse remains date to the 2nd millennium BC. The arrival of the horse in the Swat valley of Gandhara and in the Ganga valley dates to the 1st millennium BC. Found in the early part of the millennium at sites such as Atranjikhara, Hastinapur, Bhagwanpura, the remains increase in the subsequent period. From the Vedic texts onwards the horse is symbolic of nobility and is associated with people of status. In the Avesta the suffix aspa meaning ‘horse’ is frequent in the names of those claiming status and even as late as the Mauryan period, a high official in Saurashtra carries the Iranian name, ‘Tushaspa’. Functionally, mounted herders could substantially improve efficiency in controlling herds grazing in extensive areas, apart from being an important adjunct in combat and in the fast transportation of individual
riders or those riding chariots. If the culture of the Rgveda is to be equated with temple Harappan culture, then obviously the horse has to be found in the Harappan cities. But even allowing for a generous time margin, there are no horse remains prior to the 2nd millennium BC of the earlier suggested identifications of bones being now confirmed as those of the onager and the ass. There is therefore a frantic search for horse bones from archaeological levels prior to the 2nd millennium BC. The point which also needs to be emphasized is that the discovery of a single tooth of a horse at Lothal does not indicate the presence of the horse on the scale described in the Rgveda. Such single items are a striking contrast to the more substantial bones found at Hastinapur and other sites in the 1st millennium BC. Associated with the horse was the chariot and the spoked wheel, appearing on the scene at the same time and with antecedents further west. Prior to this, the ox-cart and the discoid wheel were extensively used in north-western India. Models of actual wheels for toy carts from Harappan sites are generally of the discoid variety. Occasionally there are wheels with four lines radiating from the hub painted over the solid wheel. These have been taken to represent spoked wheels. But the construction of a spoked wheel is different and presumably would be represented with many more spokes and a rim.

Iron weaponry dates to about 800 BC although some iron artifacts from central India are said to be earlier. References to iron therefore in the Vedic texts would date to the 1st millennium BC. Interestingly in peninsular India, megalithic burials in the 1st millennium BC reveal the extensive use of iron artifacts as well as the presence of the horse, but such burials are located in areas which are either still proto-Dravidian speaking or else have had a proto-Dravidian substratum. Thus in spite of these innovations, there seems to have been little inclination to adopt Indo-Aryan. Two other non-artefactual innovations may be suggested: the binary system of measurement used in Harappan times may have been replaced by the decimal, more familiar to Vedic texts; and the use of the solar calendar in addition to the lunar calendar would have been a functional advance with the gradual reorganization or agricultural activities. Did these technological changes provide a lever, giving an edge to the speakers of Indo-Aryan who may have introduced the innovations initially. Possibly the claims based on the power of sacrificial ritual was yet another lever. The redefinitions in culture, social organization and economy resulting from technological innovations would have been a slow process. They also imply far more complex and varied dimensions of historical change than the simplistic mono-causal explanations of either conquest or alternatively indigenous origins for everything.

Archaeology and language can provide separate evidence on some essential questions, as for example an enquiry into migrations. This would involve an explanation of why there was a need to move and of the numbers involved. The expending of wealth on the journey would have to be controlled so as not to be counter-productive and this would determine up to a point the goods with which people traveled. Assessing linguistic change would indicate the adoption and modification of the languages of those migrating and the areas to which they migrate. In the case of pastoral migrants, the animals bred might provide clues to travel. The domestication of the bos Indicus breed of cattle, evident from excavations, links the Indus valley and Iran. Migrations may have
been occasioned by the search for pastures and north-western India may have been familiar to herders from the borderlands. If exchange and incipient trade also featured as they often do with pastoral groups, then the circulation of items may have encouraged a larger circuit of travel and a greater mixing of the populations. Where the migration included farming communities, new agricultural land and the diffusion of crops would be part of the pattern. If the existing evidence is integrated then the emerging picture is one where the presence of Indo-European in the form of Old Iranian and Proto-Indo-Aryan and Indo-Aryan is registered in the 2nd millennium BC. This period also sees the arrival of the horse, the chariot and spoked wheel, and the use of iron, all of which are more evident in the first millennium. At a few sites in India there is an overlap of Late Harappan with the Painted Grey Ware – the latter dated to the 1st millennium BC. This makes a more plausible picture for the entry of Indo-Aryan into India than the arbitrary picture for the entry of Indo-Aryan into India rather than the arbitrary shifting of the chronology of the Harappan culture to make them coincide.

Equally important to the question of why Indo-Aryan was adopted is the nature of the interaction between the speakers of the various languages. We have suggested elsewhere that initially it involved a symbiotic relationship between agriculturalists and pastoralists, a symbiosis which is evident in many such mixed societies. With temple decline of the cities of the Indus civilization and the breakdown of political authority, villages would have been open to predatory raids from various sources. In the collapse of the Harappan system, the erstwhile farmers and craftsmen and particularly those living in villages who had been deeply integrated into the Harappan system, would have been economically rootless. The Harappan agrarian system appears to have been more carefully controlled in the north-west, if the granaries can be regarded as an indication. This was the region which would have received settlers from the borderlands. The incoming groups may not have been averse to controlling what remained of the pre-existing hierarchical structure. Did non-Aryan speaking agriculturalists seek protection from the chiefs of pastoral clans who were Aryan speaking? This does not imply the conquest of the former by the latter, but a system of patronage, which may even have existed in Harappan times except that now the patrons were not from the Harappan cities. The familiarity which these chiefs had with the horse and with new weaponry would have enabled them to provide the required protection as well as place them in a status of superiority. Such a relationship may on occasion have led to localised conflict, but would have soon assumed a symbiotic pattern, involving bilingualism at first and substantially the adoption of an evolving Indo-Aryan. Linguistic convergence may follow from the meeting of two languages. Curiously, words associated with agriculture in Vedic Sanskrit and as early as the Rgveda, are often non-Aryan. At some sites of the Painted Grey Ware cultures in northern India, frequently identified as ‘Aryan’, there is an interesting mixture; the cultivation of rice and the domestication of the water buffalo are associated with developments in eastern India, but the horse is an importation from the west.

The historical reconstruction of this period therefore presents a different picture from that envisaged in existing theories. Given the range of evidence, there can now be a greater exploration of reconstructions rather than an insistence on reconstructing a
history for which the evidence has yet to be found. The identification of archaeological cultures as Aryan, which was methodologically un-tenable, becomes irrelevant. Archaeology does not provide evidence to identify language where there is an absence of a script. Even where languages are related as in Proto-Indo-Aryan, Old Iranian, and Indo-Aryan, the material culture of the societies associated with these languages is dissimilar.

The notion of an Aryan race identified on the basis of an Aryan language has now been discarded. Language and races are distinctly different categories. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to discard the term ‘Aryan’ as well, using only Indo-Aryan to identify the language, or else staying strictly within the definition of aryas from Sanskrit texts where it is a linguistic and social qualifier, without the overlay of nineteenth century theories. The reconstruction of the societies of the period would draw substantially on archaeological data. How and when the Aryan language entered India and the process of its adoption and adaption requires to be investigated as a process in social history and not as providing identities which we today can label as indigenous or alien for purposes of narrow nationalism. A comparative analysis of analogous situations might provide some clues. Interestingly, the Indian experience parallels that of Iran where Old Iranian as an Indo-European language was ancestral to later Iranian languages. This contrasts with the short-lived intrusion of Indo-European in Turkey and Syria. Such a change of focus would require a search for a graduated interaction over many centuries between various settlements and cultures, where large-scale violent conflict would be limited. The Rgveda refers to relations between the aryas and the dasas. These are generally identified as distinct peoples, although arya carries the connotation of a person of status and knowing Sanskrit. The presence of non-Aryan speakers are registered in the reference to those of obstructed speech, mrdhravac and those who could not speak correctly, mleccha. The later Vedic texts provide evidence of regional variations. Whereas appeals are made to the gods to destroy to the dasas, mention is also made of the generosity of wealthy dasas chief for whom rituals are performed. The hostility of the arya towards the dasas, refers more frequently to differences in worship and rituals, than to physical differences. Northern was the conflict always between arya and dasas. Conflicts also occur between established clans and arya enemies are mentioned. Subsequent Vedic texts also acknowledged that some respected brahmanas are dasiputra, the sons of dasis and this evidence has been used to suggest that Vedic brahmanas were, to a large extent, recruited from the priest class of the pre-Aryan population. It has even been hypothesized that the dasas were the remnants of the Indus civilization. It would seem then, that the relationship is more ambivalent that has been recognized so far.

This in turn relates to the subordination of the dasas by the arya. This is central to Jyotiba Phule’s version of the Aryan theory revived in Dalit politics today and its reversal from the Hindutva perspective. With the emergence of varna, which some sociologists have described as ritual status, the lowest category came to be called sudra and was expected to be servile. Dasa was not a ritual status and the word eventually was used for a slave or a servant, its antonym being arya. In the post-Rgvedic Brahmana texts, the appeal to the gods to destroy the dasas declines, for by now they are already low in
the hierarchy of stratification. In a situation as complex as this, the mechanisms of subordination may be less evident than in the projection of conquest, but nevertheless they cannot be ignored. The presumed identity and lineal descent of the supposed Aryan in this reading of the evidence becomes questionable and therefore, difficult to use for political mobilization in contemporary times.

The process of the subordination of the dasas by the arya could provide clues to some aspects of relations of dominance and subordination in the social history of later times. Hierarchies, differentiations and regulations essential to caste, exist as part of its stratification and social functioning, irrespective of an Aryan component. The insistence on differentiating between the alien/foreign and the indigenous is historically untenable for earlier times when even the existence of such a differentiation based on the premises being suggested, is questionable. ‘Indigenous’ and ‘foreign’ as notions are neither permanent northern unchanging northern transparent. The identities of the indigene and the alien are constantly mutated throughout history. It is more pertinent to analyse the major historical processes of early times, namely, the emergence of dominant groups – the aryas, and the subordination of others referred to as sudras and dasas.

1. The most important theory which held the field for a long time was that the Aryans originally lived in Central Asia. In his “Lectures on the Science of Languages” Professor Max Muller, a German scholar of comparative languages, pointed out that the ancestors of the Indians, Greeks, Persians, Romans, Germans and the Celts must have lived together originally. This was revealed by a study of the languages of these people. The Pitri and Matri in Sanskrit were the same as the Pidar and Madar in Persian. Father and Mother in English and the Patar and Matar in Latin. These were not trade terms but fundamental words of everyday use in families which could have been adopted only if the ancestors of these people lived at one common place. The view of Max Muller was that the main stream of the Aryans flowed towards the North-West. The Aryans of Europe migrated by a route South of the Caspian through Asia Minor to Greece and Italy. One of their groups came to India through the North-West passage. In support of the theory, it is also pointed out that the people speaking the Indo-Germanic group of languages were spread over an area extending from the Brahmaputra to the Atlantic. The languages of the Vedas and Zend-Avesta have changed the least but the Celtic languages have changed enormously. The original home of the Aryans must have been nearest to the lands occupied by the Indians and the Iranians and that probably was Central Asia. There is also a tradition in the Zend-Avesta that the first creation of man took place in Airyana Voejo and from there the Iranians went to Iran. Most of the places connected with Airyana Voejo are situated in or about Central Asia. This view is also supported by a study of the comparative languages which shows that the original home of the Aryans was a region “where trees like birch and pine grew and where winter was familiar with its snow and ice”. A language called Tocharian, which is spoken in North-West Afghanistan, is allied to Centum which is a Western and European language. A Babylonian tablet of 2100 B.C. shows that the horse was newly introduced among the ass-using people of Babylon. It is mentioned as “an ass from the East” or “from the mountains”. From this it is concluded that it refers to
the coming of the people from Iran or beyond who founded the Kissite dynasty of Babylon. According to Rapson, this refers to the eruption of Aryans from the North-East. Central Asia was the breeding place of the Tartar hordes who later on went to India, Persia, the Euphrates Valley and Europe. This region could have been also the original home of the Aryans. The words for salt and sea are not common to the various Aryan languages and from this it is concluded that the original home of the Aryans must have been an inland country. Central Asia possesses all those things which are considered necessary for specialization in language and culture. Those things are vast plains undivided by mountains, deserts or forests, abundance of food and a temperate climate.

Critics point out that it is improbable that the Aryans with such a superior civilization could have been cradled in one of the most barren tracts of land in Asia. However, it can be pointed out that the Central Asia of the Aryans must have been different from what it is today. The climate of this region has changed even during the historic times. It is the testimony of the geologists that there has been a decrease in rainfall in this region and consequently agriculture has also been affected. The regions which were described as fertile by ancient writers are at present deserts. Sir Aurel Stein has shown that there was a great civilization in Chinese Turkistan, but that is not the case today. Even Hiuen Tsang referred to a flourishing civilization in Central Asia when he came to India during the 7th century A.D.

2. The late Bal Gangadhar Tilak was of the opinion that the original home of the Aryans was the Arctic region. This view was propounded by him in his book. The Arctic Home of Aryans. Working on the theory that the earth is losing heat day by day, Tilak came to the conclusion that the North Polar regions were at one time habitable areas and the Aryans originally lived there. Tilak critically ransacked the Sanskrit literature and came to the above conclusion. The Vedas refer to days and nights lasting for six months which are to be found in the Arctic region. The varying and continuous Ushas which are divided into several parts with elaborate rites are stated to be the same as the perpetual day of the astronomers. The movements of the stars of the Polar region are also described in detail to support the view. It is pointed out that the horizontal movement of the stars is a peculiar experience of the Polar region. The books of the Iranians point out that the original home of the Aryans had long winters. The traditional Elysium of the Hindus is the North. The theory of Tilak might seem strange to the modern mind which can think of only severe winter of the Arctic region. However, the geologists have proved that in pre-historic times this region had a congenial climate and a perpetual spring. Under the circumstances the theory of Tilak cannot be summarily rejected. His astronomical calculation should be given due consideration.

3. According to A.C. Dass, a Bengali historian, the original home of the Aryans was the Sapt-Sindhu or the Punjab. This point of view was put forward by him in his book called "Rigvedic India". The Sapt Sindh was irrigated by seven rivers, viz. The Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, Satluj and Saraswati. His view was that the geographical conditions described in the Rigveda point out to this region. India was connected with Western Asia by land and the Aryans migrated from Sapt-
Sindhu to the West. To quote him, “The original cradle of the Aryans was, therefore, Sapt-Sindhu, which included the beautiful valley of Kashmir on the North and Gandhara on the West. Its southern boundary was Rajputana (then was not desert) and its eastern boundary covered the Gangetic through. It was completely our off from Southern India by sea, but it was connected by land with Western Asia in the direction of Gandhara and Kabulistan through which waves after waves of Aryan migration advanced to the west and to Europe……The earliest Aryan tribes had left Sept-Sindhu having pushed farthest into Europe by those who followed them on long intervals and in different stages”. The theory has not been accepted by the scholars of the world and has not been taken very seriously.

4. According to Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Pargiter, the original home of the Aryans was Tibet. The view has been expounded by them in the Satyarth Prakash and Ancient Indian Historical Traditions respectively. Those who support the Indian origin of the Aryans point out that the Europeans and Iranians must have migrated from India. The Vedas were composed in India and exist in India. The modern structure of Indian society and religion can be directly traced from the Vedic institutions. Neither in the Vedas nor in other Sanskrit literature do we find any tradition which refers to the immigration of the Aryans into India from outside. If they had come from another country, there ought to have been some tradition about the same. However, the critics of the theory of Indian Origin of the Aryans point out that the things with which the early Aryans were familiar were not Indian. They were familiar with the birch, pine, oak and willow and these do not grow on the plains of India. They were not acquainted with rice, tiger, lion, elephant and banyan tree. They considered the elephant to be a strange animal and called it a Mriga (deer) with a Hastin (trunk). According to Lassen, “None of the phenomena of speech, customs or ideas observable among the other cognate nations indicate an Indian origin”. According to Schlegel, the Aryans spread over so large a part of the world that they could not have come from its Southern extremity. They must have started from a central place in various directions. It is also pointed out that if the Aryans originally inhabited India, they ought not to have migrated from this fertile region to less hospitable places like Iran and Europe.

5. According to another view, the West Baltic coast was the home of the Aryans. This view is based on the ground that the oldest and simplest artifacts of the period following the palaeolithic age and the tasteful and technically perfected stone implements are found there in abundance. However, critics point out that in that case the large number of beautiful stone artifacts of New Zealand should give a high degree of antiquity to the Maori culture.

6. According to Nehring, “Tripolje culture is the culture of the original Indo-Europeans and the Indo-Europeans’ original home lay indeed also in South Russia, but extended far beyond to the West”.

7. On the basis of his substratum theory that a later language is always fundamentally modified by the older language over which it spreads, Pokorny came to the
conclusion that “as the original home of the Indo-Europeans before the dispersal of the tribes (2400 B.C) should be regarded the wide stretches of land between the Weser and the Vistula and beyond these up to White Russia and volhynia”. The region indicated as the cradle of the Indo-Europeans is a very wide one.

8. According to Brandenstein, the undivided Indo-Europeans lived originally in what is now called the **Kirghiz steppe**, from where the Indo-Iranian tribes moved eastwards and the other tribes at a later date westwards. The tribes that moved towards the West were divided into two groups. One of them went to north Europe and the others went to Ukraine etc.

9. German scholars have proposed **Germany** as the original home of the Aryans. However, this view is rejected on the ground that in pre-historic times and long afterwards that country was covered with forests Sigmund Feist has proved that the Germans, though they knew as Indo-European dialect, did not belong to the Indo-European stock.

10. According to Morgan, the cradle of the Indo-Europeans was in **Western Siberia**. According to his view, the population of Siberia poured out both towards the Danube and towards Iran and the Far East. As Siberia became colder, the inhabitants of the steppes were forced to emigrate.

11. Jairazbhoy points out that Aryans speaking the laterite of the Vedas are remembered in a late tradition as having descended from common ancestors of the Kashyapa who lived in Saka Dwipa or Western Region, probably bordering the Caspian. The Saka-Dwipa of the Puranas has been connected with the Saka Tyaiy Taradraya, i.e. “the Scythians that are beyond the sea”, in the Nakshi Rustum inscription of Darius. The Greek author Aristeas from Prokonnesus (7th century B.C.) told of a great “Völkerwanderung” in the 8th century B.C. starting somewhere in the heart of Asia and resulting in the Scythians turning westward invading the South of Russia and ousting the Cimmerians. The Aryan invasion of a millennium earlier may have arisen in a similar fashion. We must not omit to compare the later parallel of the Sakas and Kushans pouring out of Central Asia into India and of the Hunas crossing the Volga into Europe. The Avesta knows the beginning or the source of the Aryans as Airyana Vaego. The Avestan Vaego corresponds to the Sanskrit Bij meaning “beginning or source”. The Avesta describes it as a place of extreme cold that became over-crowded. From the description in the Avesta and the Pahlavi Bundehash, J.D. Nadir Shah has claimed that the site of the Airyana Vaego, the birth-place of the primitive Aryans, was to the South-eastern foot of the Caucasus.

Jairazbhoy is of the view that whether the Mitannian Kings (1475-1280 B.C.) on the upper Euphrates were a direct off-shoot of the Aryans or not, their names are certainly Aryan, for example, Saussater, Artatama, Sutarna, Tusratta and Mattiuaza. Aryan Chief also rules in the Near East, since we find in the Amarna letters (1380-50 B.C.) such names as Artamanya and Suwardata. These names come from a dialect closely allied to Iranian. A name, such as Sunassura, King of Kizwatna, is claimed to be an Indian name related to
Sura as well as Avestan Sura, “string, brave, hero”. Indian etymologies were gradually found for the other names, such as, Abiratta = old Indian Abhiratha, “owner of a superior chariot” and Artassumara = Ritasmara, “remembering the sacred law”. The following are some of the equivalents of a large number of names:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indian Name</th>
<th>English Meaning</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swardata</td>
<td>Indian Svardata: “given by Heaven”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subandu</td>
<td>Indian Subandhu: “having good kinsmen”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satuara</td>
<td>Indian Satvara: “swift”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indaruta</td>
<td>Indian Indrota: “upheld by Indra”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birasena</td>
<td>Indian Virasena: “possessing an army of heroes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artadama</td>
<td>Indian Ritadhaman: “abiding in the Divine law”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biridaswa</td>
<td>Indian Brihadasva: “possessing great horses”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namyawaza</td>
<td>Indian Name: “one who owns a glorious prize”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suttarna</td>
<td>Indian Sudharna: “very strong”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endarva</td>
<td>Indian “Indra’s man”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summittaras</td>
<td>Indian Su-mitra: “a good friend”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The view which is accepted in the West is that the original home of the Aryans was in South-East Europe. According to Professor MacDonell, the common trees like the oak, the beech and the willow and the common animals like the horse and the cow with which the ancestors of the Aryans were familiar, as is shown by a study of the Rigveda and Zendavesta, could be found in those days in South-Eastern Europe. According to Dr. Giles, the original home of the Aryans was “the area which is bounded on its eastern side by the Carpathians, on its south by the Balkans, on its western side by the Austrian Alps and Bohmer Wald and on north by the Frzgebirge and the mountains which link them up with the Carpathians”, i.e. the plains of Austria and Hungary. The ancestors of the Indians, Greeks, Germans and English lived originally at some common place. According to Dr. Giles, when they were all living at one place, they were known as “Wiros”. They lived together for a pretty long time. They knew the art of agriculture and called themselves as Arya or Airya. The words Arya or Airya mean the persons living on agriculture or persons of good family. The Aryans of India came to be known as the Indo-Aryans.

**EXPANSION OF ARYANS IN INDIA**

Dr. Hoernle has put forward his theory of double invasion of India by the Aryans. The first horde of the Aryans came to the Punjab and settled there. They came along with their families. Then came their second invasion. As they found the route by the Kabul Valley blocked, they pushed their way through Gilgit and Chitral and entered like a wedge into the midland country which extended from the Himalayas on the north to the Vindhyas in the south and from Sirhind in eastern Punjab in the west to the
confluence of the Yamuna and the Ganges in the east. The second group developed it system of sacred rites on the banks of the Saraswati, the Yamuna and the Ganges. The result was that the Punjab which was inhabited by the first group came to be considered as an unholy land and the land between the Saraswati and Drishadwati, i.e., Brahmavarta, came to be considered as the holyland. The theory of Dr. Hoernle is based on a study of the Indian languages. According to him, Punjabi, Rajasthani and eastern Hindi belonged to the first group of invaders and western Hindi as the language of the second group of invaders.

The theory of Dr. Hoernle has also been supported by Sir George Grierson who was the Director of the Linguistic Survey of Individual and as such possessed a unique knowledge of Indian languages. His conclusion was that there was a world of difference between the western Hindustani and such languages as Sindhi, Kashmiri, Marathi, Bengali, Bihari, Assamese and Oriya which we otherwise closely related to one another. To quote him, “In fact, at an early period of the linguistic history of India, there must have been two sides of Indo-Aryan dialects, one the language of the midlands and the other the group of dialects, forming the outer-band. It is concluded from above that the Aryans entered India in two separate district bands”. It is also pointed out that “it as difficult to account for the marked divergence of type that distinguishes the people east of Sirhind from those of the Punjab. Had there been no distinct incursion coming in like a wedge, no such sharp contrast would be discernible. One type would melt into the other by imperceptible gradations and scientific observations and popular impressions would not concur as they did in affirming that a marked change takes place somewhere about the longitude of Sirhind”. C.V. Vaidya also comes to a similar conclusion by his study of the Epics. According to him, the Pandavas and their kinsmen represented the second band of invaders, and the battle of Kurukshetra was the victory of the second group over the first group. The system of polyandry was prevalent among the Pandavas as they could not bring their women with them on account of the difficulty of the passage through which they came to India. The physical differences between the people of the Punjab and those of the Gangetic Valley point out to a similar conclusion.

However, Professor Rapson has criticized the theory of two invasions in these words: “The theory is made improbable by the difficulties of the route suggested and some of the arguments advanced in its favour are demonstrably mistaken. There is no such break of continuity between the tribes of Rigveda and the peoples of later literature as it pre-supposes. Both of the facts mentioned above – the abrupt transition from the Indo-Aryan to the Indo-Dravidian type and the extension of Aryan influence from Brahmavarta to Brahmarsidesa – are best understood if we remember the natural features which connect the plain of the Indus with the plain of the Ganges. This is the strait of habitable land which lies between the desert and the mountain. It is in this strait that the decisive battles on which the fate of India had depended have been fought; here too we may suppose that the progress of racial migrations from the north-west in pre-historic times must have been checked. Both politically and ethnologically it forms a natural boundary. In the age of the Rigveda, the Aryans, had not broken through the barrier though the Jumna is mentioned in a hymn as though a battle had been won on its banks. It was only at some later date that the country between the upper Jumna and
Ganges and the district of Delhi was occupied......The epoch of Indo-Aryan tribal migration was definitely closed. It was succeeded by the epoch of Indo-Aryan colonization”.

Professor Chanda has given a new theory of his own. According to him, the early Aryan invaders belonged to the dolichocephalic brand and they occupied the greater portion of Hindustan. The later Aryan invaders belonged to the brachy-cephalic brand. When they found their way blocked by the early invaders, some of them managed to reach the lower Gangetic plain by crossing over the table-land of Central India and others went to Kathiawar and ocean. Chanda’s theory has been criticized by Barnett. He points out that Chanda’s theory does not explain the predominance of the long headed people of the Punjab. It also does not account for the change of head form towards broadness from the Punjab to the Gangetic Valley. There is also a gradual change in the form of the head and nose from the Yamuna to the lower Gangetic Valley. There are also diversities between the people of Kashmir, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Bengal although they are stated to belong to the same race. Our conclusion is that the nature of the Aryan invasion or invasions cannot be satisfactorily solved. It is difficult to separate the one group of invaders from the other group after the lapse of centuries.

When the Aryans came to the Punjab, they carried fire and sword with them and the result was that the original inhabitants were completely exterminated. There seems to be a reference to the wars between the Aryans and the non-Aryans in the Rigveda. After having overpowered the Dasyus and occupied the Punjab, the Aryans began to struggle for supremacy among themselves. They also began to expand towards the east and south-east. As their number was not large and the territory was a huge one, there was no necessity of following a policy of extermination. The children and wives of the natives were made slaves. While the Aryans were in occupation of the Gangetic region, they were affected by the Dravidian blood and that explains the difference in the stature, complexion and noses of the people of the Gangetic Valley. The Gangetic Valley was occupied by a policy of blood and iron and not by peaceful penetration. On account of the contact of the Aryans with non-Aryans, strict rules were framed to maintain the purity of the Aryan blood. The non-Aryans were called by the name of Sudras. As regards the conquest of Magadha, Anga, Vanga and Kalinga, the non-Aryans were very strong in those territories and consequently could not be absorbed by the Aryans. The non-Aryans continued to have their own social organization and consequently eastern India was not thoroughly aryenised. It was the dominance of these regions by the non-Aryans that helped the rise of Buddhism and Jainism there.

If the Aryans occupied the north of India by a policy of conquest that was not so in the case of south India. Our knowledge of the Epics tells us that the Rishis or sages played an important part in this matter. As a matter of fact, Aryan penetration into the Deccan was carried out under the leadership of the sages such as Agastya. Although the sages were troubled a lot and sometimes they had to seek protection from the Kshatriya rulers, they continued their work of peaceful penetration into the Deccan and ultimately succeeded in their mission. The Brahmans of the Deccan still retain memories of their migration from the north. However, as the number of the Aryans who went to the Deccan was not
very large and as the people were not completely Aryanised, the Dravadian culture remained dominant in that region. Even the little influence that was there in the Deccan must have lessened after the Muslim conquest of northern India and the overthrow of the Hindu power. It is maintained that with the expansion of geographical horizon, a new era of history began. The first important change was demographic. The settlers were small in number and they were warriors and priests. Their subjects were mostly local inhabitants or a mixed group of the old Vaisyas and the local people. There were Sudras who were cultivators and artisans. Their economy underwent a change. Pastoral pursuits became less important and agrarian occupations became more important. Forests were cleared by burning them. The virgin soil yielded bumper crops. There were plenty of rainfalls. In the east, Magadha was endowed with metals. There was plenty of iron and copper. Iron provided better and more efficient tools to artisans. The ploughs replaced the harrow. Industrial and agricultural produce increased. The military class acquired weapons which gave them superiority over the masses.

The differentiation between the higher and lower classes based on colour became rigid. Their functions became stratified into castes. The sacrifices prescribed in the Vedas were grand public rites. They required the services of a large number of priests. Extensive arrangements had also to be made. As time continued to pass, more and more precision was required in the recitation of the Mantras. The result was that the priests became professional hierophants. The warriors were constantly busy in wars and hence they became a hereditary fighting caste. It was in this way that the three upper castes and the fourth lower caste came into being. Marriage laws were altered. Strict rules of endogamy and exogamy were established. To begin with, both Anuloma and Pratiloma marriages were allowed. Later on, the marriage of a lower class made with the higher class family was forbidden, still later, even Anuloma marriages were frowned upon, although they never ceased completely. The other Vedic occupations also hardened into castes and were accommodated in the four castes. As society developed, large surpluses of agricultural produce accrued. Crafts flourished and trade expanded. Trade was stimulated by the opening up of the country from north to south and from east to west.

**THE SCIENCE OF LINGUISTIC PALAEONTOLOGY**

The science of linguistic palaeontology claims to reconstruct the environment of the still undivided Aryan people and to conjure up the image of their spiritual and material culture. The words and names which recur in Indo-European languages constitute in their totality the surviving vocabulary of the original Aryans. The sum of such corresponding terms would then depict the culture of the primitive people.

**THE ‘WIROS’**

Dr. Giles uses the term ‘Wiros’ for the speakers of the Indo-European languages, this being the word for ‘men’ in the great majority of the languages. From words preserved in their languages particularly in languages far separated and in circumstances where there is little likelihood of borrowing from one language to the other, we may gather something as to their animals and plants they knew, and perhaps a very little as to their
industries. The close similarity between the various languages spoken by them would lead us to infer that they must have lived for long in a severely circumscribed area so that their peculiarities developed for many generations in common. Such a confined area must have been separated from the outer world either by great waters or by mountains. The climate in which they lived belonged to the temperate zone is shown by the nature of the trees which a comparison of their languages leads us to believe they knew. To their habitat we may assign with considerable certainty the oak, beach, willow and some coniferous trees. The birch seems to have been known to them and possibly the lime, less certainly the elm. The ‘Wiros’ were in all probability not a nomad but a settled people. The useful animals best known to them were the ox, cow, sheep, horse, dog, pig and probably some species of deer. The ass, camel and the elephant were unknown to them in early times; and the great variety of words for the goat would lead us to suppose that this animal also was of later introduction. The ‘Wiros’ seem to have been familiar with corn. If so, they must in all probability have lived for a considerable part of the year in one situation. Of birds they knew the goose and the duck. The most familiar bird of prey was the eagle. The wolf and bear were known but not the lion or tiger.

No country, however which had not much variety of geographical features could have been the habitat of both the house and the cow. The horse is a native of the open plain; the foal is able to run by its mother from the first and accompanies her always in her wanderings. The calf on the other hand, is at first feeble, unable to walk or see its way distinctly, and therefore, is hidden by its mother in a brake, while she goes further a field to find suitable pastures. According to Dr. Giles to fulfill all these conditions there is such an area which is bounded on its east by the Carpathians on its south by the Balkans, on its western side by the Austrian Alps and the Bohmer Wald and on the north by the Erzgebirge and the mountains which link them up with the Carpathians.

PHILOLOGICAL DATA

The family is divided by a well marked difference in the treatment of certain k, g, and gh sounds in two parts, one of which keeps the k, g, and gh sounds, though submitting them to a variety of changes in later times, while the other party changes k and g into some kind of sibilant sounds, which are represented in the Slavonic and Iranian languages by s and z, in Sanskrit by s and j. The gh sound appears as z in Zend, the Iranian dialects confusing together g and gh, while in Sanskrit it appears as h. They agree also on the whole in the case system of the noun, a system to which the Slav, and the Armenian languages offer the closest approximation and in the elaborate mood and voice system of the verb, to which the only parallel is to be found in the similar, though not in all respects identical, paradigms of Greek. Here according to Dr. Giles the other languages accept the Slavonic, fall far short of the elaborate and intricate verb system that the other tribes have lost a large part of their share of the common inheritance. A characteristic which distinguishes the languages of this stock in both Persia and India is the tendency to confuse r and l, a tendency which is characteristic of practically all the languages of the far east. In India r is often found in words where the languages of the same stock in Europe show l; l is also though not so frequently, found for r, in the old
Persian of the Achaemenid inscriptions is found only in two foreign words and has otherwise been entirely replaced by r.

**Dr. Giles criticized**

Dr. Giles, the distinguished philologist makes no attempt to trace his ‘wiros’ with the aid of material remains. The Daunbian was the creation of these early Mediterranean colonists who may early have been mixed with descendants of palaeolithic tribes and influenced the east as well as the south. The Danubian manner of life does not really correspond very satisfactorily to the primitive Aryan culture deduced by linguistic palaeontology. Dr. Giles attributes the art of agriculture and swine breeding in this area. But the absence of arrow heads or other weapons deserve notice. Again the cult of a mother goddess is an un-Aryan trait among the Danubian peasants.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE LINGUISTIC PALAEONTOLOGY.**

The sum of the surviving equations can only give a fragmentary picture of the complete life led by the Aryans. Through migrations, intermingling with other races, commercial relations with alien civilizations and the autonomous local growth and specialization of arts and cults, many words have been lost and replaced by others. Allowance must also be made for changes in the meaning of the world itself. Finally even strict compliance with the approximate phonetic laws is not an infallible test of descent from the parent speech. The possibility is always present that the word in question came into the several languages by borrowing after the separation of their speakers, but at a date so early that the sound-shifts had not yet become so operative. Moreover, too much attention is paid to names of plants and animals and to various words of material culture and practically none at all to other grammatical relationships between the languages themselves. The first great division of the Indo-European family is into the Satum and the Centum groups. This division corresponds, of course, roughly to the geographical division of the Asiatics and the Europeans.

**ADVANCED CIVILIZATION OF THE WIROS**

The European scholars seem to regard the Indo-European people as almost identical with the primitive savage tribes of Europe. Even from the material side i.e. by considering only the ‘culture words’ common to the Indo-European languages we find that these people were distinctly a superior and more advanced people. But a far more valuable evidence of their culture is afforded by a consideration of the grammar of the parent Indo-European languages. The wealth of forms, the subtle distinction made in the various forms of verbs, the very numerous prepositions which all existed before the separation of the branches clearly indicate a very high intellectual development. Moreover, they certainly had the numerals up to 100 and probably up to 1000, they had developed the decimal system of numeration.
Saptasindhu and Semirechinsk

Prof. Chattopadhyaya relying on the Indra-Vrtra myth supports H. Brunhofer who suggests the name of such a possible earlier home of the Indo-Aryans. The Indra-Vrtra myth in short is as follows. The enemy (Vrtra) steals away the cows (-waters) and keeps them concealed in the cave Vala (-Vara, and enclosure from Vr to surround). Indra attacks him with the Maruts (the storms) and other helpers, cgases gun frin ricj ti ricj (i.e. from cloud to cloud), finds him at last and kills him. The covering stone of the Vala is also shattered and the waters are released and with eagerness they go the way of the ocean. The Rigveda describes in a very charming tone the victory of Indra as ‘letting the rivers or more specially the 7 Rivers to flow’. According to Durgacarya the commentator of the Nirukta these are the seven atmospheric streams namely Bahula, Asva, Titutra, Abhrayanti, Meghapatni Varsayanti and Arundha. The Saptasindhu and the Hapta Hindu are described in very affectionate terms in the ancient Indian and Iranian literatures respectively. Sayana would explain the Sapta Sindhu as the seven rivers beginning with the Ganges. Prof. Chattopadhyaya finds fault with him thinking that Sayana is referring to the Ganges, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvathi, Narmad, Sindhu and Kaveri for four of the above rivers are of later growth and suffests Simirechinsk in Russian Turkestan watered by the Ili, Lepsa, Karatal, Baskan, Aksu, Sarkan and Biyen – the seven rivers which flow into the Lake Balkash. Semirechinsk the name of the province means, the land of the Seven Rivers. Of these rivers some of them do dry before the rains. According to him a period of unusual drought (3000 B.C. to 2000 B.C.) led the Aryans or some of them to leave the lands and march towards India and also towards Iran. If the original home of the Indo-Europeans was in Siberia, as De Morgan would have us believe, Semirechinsk would be on the way to India and Iran. But according to Dr. Giles the southern stoppes of Russia, though possessing a very fertile soil, has not on the whole the characteristics which the words common to the various Indo-Germanic languages and at the same time unborrowed from one to another postulate.

THE VARIOUS CENTRES

Western Orientalists like Tomascheck, Von Loher, Cuno, Linden, Schimet, Penka, and Posche ascribe this honour to Eastern Europe, Germany, Central Europe, Northern Europe, Scandinavia, and the Rokotno Swamp respectively holding the archaic character of the neighbouring Lithuanian Language, that the Lithuiians were the surviving relic of the oldest Aryan race. According to Dr. I.J.S. Taraporewala the various centres indicated by the various scholars were the sub-centres making the various halts during the wanderings of various branches on their way to their homes in historical times. The first division of the Indo-European languages into the Satam and the Centum groups marks the two lines of migration one towards Asia and the other towards Europe. The former was first stopped from further progress southwards by the great sea in Central Asia, and slowly one branch moved off westwards upto the bank of the Volga, which forms the sub-centre of Scrader. Since the Huns invaded Europe from Central Asia and settled themselves in Hungary (Hunaghrha – the abode of the Huns) some of the European Scholars thought wrongly that India also must have been invaded by the inhabitants of
Central Asia at some remote date. Moreover in the opinion of Dr. Giles Central Asia is not probable, even if we admit that its conspicuous lack of water and consequent sterility in many areas is of later development. In the northern plains of Europe, there is no area which will satisfactorily fulfill the conditions. As we know it in primitive times it is a land of great forest.

**North Pole**

Lokamanya BAL Gangadhar Tilak, the great politician and the antiquarian, finding references to the cold regions of the north and the river Kubha in the Rigveda concluded that the scene of the human creation was the North Pole. But Tilak for his scientific argument relied on Crolls’ theory of Ice – Age which has now been definitely disproved.

**Caucasus**

The claim of Caucasus falls too flat for it was so inhospitable that Aeschylus selected it as the place of torment for Prometheus and tells us that it was a pathless wilderness.

**Mitani**

The recent discovery of Vaidika deities in an inscription, found at Boghazkeui, which relates to the treaty between subbiluliuma a Hittite King and Mattiuza a King of Mitani, (northern Mesopotamia), has led some to put the original cradle of Indo-Europeans somewhere in Upper Mesopotamia. The gods named are Mitra, Varuna, Indra, and Nasatyas (Asvins). The names of the gods might not be significant singly but the four combined give cumulative evidence of Indian origin that can not be explained away. The inscriptions date from about 1400 B.C. and the names appear not in the form which they take in the historical records of ancient Persia, but so far as writing in a syllabary will admit, are identical with the forms, admittedly more original, which they show in the hymns of the Rigveda. The names of the Hittite kings do not look in the least Aryan. Moreover, no Hittite deities have Aryan names. So we may conclude that the migrants kept the names of their gods correctly, but kings naturally modified their own names as they and their languages became more separated from India.

**Biblical theory**

Now the holy scriptures being infallible, one naturally looks upon them with reverence if they can help us in locating the birth-place of mankind. The Muslims have no records except that of the Holy Bible which asserts that the creation took place in a region where there flowed the four rivers Pison, Gihon, Hiddekal, and Euphrates. According to the Bible it was in Eden that Adam descended for the first time. In Hebrew it means delight. It is the first home of man, and the district in which the ‘Garden of Paradise’ was situated. There has been much discussion regarding the exact site of the place. Eden was the Sumerian name of the plain of Babylon. The accepted modern location appears to be El Qurnah in Iraq. The word Iraq literally means the delta land and the word Mesopotamia means the doab. It is not certain where the Pison flows. Some would identify it with the Nile but without any success, and others would consider it as lost in
the Arabian Sea. We have not succeeded in finding out its literal meaning. But the Gihon is the Ganges. The Hiddckel is the modern Dajala river which literally means ‘having pebbles’ and the Sanskrit word Drsadavati bears the same meaning (drsadah santyasyam Sangam). The Euphrates is the modern Alfarat or the Farat which in meaning exactly corresponds to the Sarasvati of the Rigveda ‘bursting or having flows’ (saramsi santyasyam Sangam) and the Hairavati of the Avesta. According to the late lamented C.V. Vaidya that there is no traca of Rasis and the yugas in Vaidika literature or indeed in any Indian literature up to 100 B.C. is the surest proof that Indo-Aryans never came from Mesopotamia in Vaidika or post-Vaidika days. If the Vaidika Aryans had come from Mesopotamia they would not certainly have forgotten the buffalo. The Rigveda does not mention the buffalo at all. They probably did not know it, as it is stated in the Puranas that the buffalo was a new creation of Visvamitra.

### Avesta

In the ancient Iranian literature we read “I, Ahuramazda, among the good lands and countries, did create first of all the land of Airyana Vaeja (the cradle land of the Aryas) on the bank of the Vehdati’. The Pahlavi of Airyana Vaeja is Iran Vej (the beginning or the source of the Aryans). The phrase ‘Vanhuyao Daityagao’ of the good Daitya is always added in the Zend Avesta to the name of Airyana Vaejo. The first king Jamshed, the founder of the dynasty, is called in the Avesta Yima Khshaeta, Jamshed, the son of Vivanhana (-Sanskrit Vivasvan) and his descendants Yima Vivanhana, Yam of the family of Vivanhat. The Amarkosa also calls Yama, the Vaivasvat – the son of Vivasvan – the sun. The last king of this dynasty was murdered by Spityura (-Savitr perhaps) nicknamed Yimokerenta (-Yamakranta). Prof. H.S. Hodivala a distinguished Parsee scholar in his letter dated the 17th March 1939 kindly informs me as follows: ‘The Airyana Vaejo is a land of which nothing is really known. The chapter in Venidad in which an account is given of the gradual colonization of the earth or the universe is a legendary history of the creation and all sorts of hypothesis and theories have been advanced about the so-called Original Home of the Iranian people. It has little or no connection with the rest of the contexts of the Venidad and it has probably been borrowed from some other ‘Nask’ and pitchforked here by some ancient compiler. The ‘Vehdati’ is really a middle Persian form of ‘Vanhu Dauti’ and some writers have identified it with the ‘Arasas’, just as the other river mentioned in this chapter the Raugha is supposed to be the Tigris. But these are only speculations of doubtful validity. Both these rivers have been regarded by other scholars as Rivers not belonging to our Earth but to Heaven – two Ganges so to say – which really belong, not to terrestrial but to celestial geography. According to J.D. Nadershah the territory of Airyana Vaejo was in the neighbourhood of Mazandran and Gilan, and not far from Babylonia. It stretched northwards as far as the Caucasus of which a considerable portion is always clad with ice and snow and latterly Airyana Vaejo was called Media. Airyana Vaejo may be a corruption of the Sanskrit Arya-Bija or Arya-Vraja which is nearer to it. Mazandran is the Persian for an obsolete Avestan word Mazindran (Mahindra or Mahendra in Sanskrit) the country of the great Indra. According to him the Daves of Mazandran (Mazainya Daevas) could not long hold their own against the inroads of the Asuras and, therefore, migrated to India; and so the birth-
place of the primitive Aryans lay to the south eastern foot of the Caucasus-Mazandran
the ancient home of the Vaidika Brahmanas.

Iranians and Indians belong to the same region

We know that Deva in Sanskrit signified ‘shining’, illustrious’, and hence ‘a god
among men, a deity’ but in the Avesta it means a ‘demon’; and like the deva, the Avestan
Ahura also indicates a king. In the oldest part of the Rigveda the term asura is used for
the supreme spirit and in the sense of ‘good’, ‘divine’; it was applied to several of the
chief deities such as Indra, Agni, and Varuna. It meant ‘giver of life’ or ‘adorable’ (asun rati).
This sense is no doubt a survival from those times when the Iranian and the Indian
Aryans were one people and lived together amicably. It afterwards acquired an entirely
opposite meaning and came to signify ‘a demon’, or ‘an enemy of the gods’. So it is not
surprising that Deva is not used in its primitive good sense anywhere in the Send Avesta,
as the whole of it was composed at a time when there was very bitter hatred between the
Devas and the Asuras. An Asura is called kratura – an enemy of sacrifices, Kratudvisa –
hating sacrifices. The Iranians also were sacrifice-lovers and held unshakable faith in the
God Fire (Atasa) which is highly revered by the Indians as well. But some did not see
the necessity of worshipping the fire, or performing the Soma sacrifice in honour of
Indra: While others regarded fire too sacred to be polluted by the offering of the flesh of
sacrificial animals. This gave rise to schisms, dissensions, religious intolerance, and active
hostility resulting intolerable bloodshed. Therefore they separated themselves from their
brethren the Indians who stuck themselves to Indra, who is later on despised in the
ancient Iranian literature. Zoroaster probably reformed the old Aryan religion by
prohibiting animal sacrifice or the throwing of any oblations into sacred fire as Christ
stopped animal sacrifice among the Jews.

Explicit reliance on Vedas undesirable

According to Pargiter, the ancient Indian history has been fashioned out of
compositions which are purely religious and priestly, which notoriously do not deal with
history and which totally lack the historical sense. This statement of the learned
orientalist is liable to modification for it is worded in very strong terms. As a matter of
fact the Srutis are proofs in themselves and their statements are verified by the other
sources as well and it is, therefore, that they command our respects. Certainly the
Mahabharata does assert that one should ascertain the meaning of the Vedas with the
help of the history and the Purana.

Aila-outflow

According to him what we call the Aryan race, is what Indian tradition calls the Aila
race, and so Aila-Arya. By far the greater part of ancient Indian historical tradition deals
with the doings of the Aila stock, its growth and expansion. Tradition asserts that the
Aillas or the Aryans began at Allahabad, conquered and spread out north-west, west and
south. Indian tradition knows nothing of any Aryan invasion of India from Afghanistan,
northern of any gradual advance from thence eastward. On the other hand it distinctly
asserts that there was an Aila outflow of the Druhyus through the north-west into the
countries beyond, where they found various kingdoms. The Rigveda is silent about the banyan; salt, and about the Pariyatra hills (the Aravalli range), which the Aryans had actually reached according to the current theory. The bulk of the Rigveda was composed in the great development of Brahmanism that arose under the successors of king Bharata who reigned in the upper Ganges-Yamuna doab and plain. The language of the Rigveda, as Sir George Grierson holds, represents the archaic dialect of the upper doab and that was the region in which the Aryan speech was the purest and whence it spreads outwards.

Ilavrta

The north-west frontier never had any sacred memories and was never regarded with reverence. And the tradition directly indicates that the Ailas entered India from the mid-Himalayan region Ilavrta in the north from where they came. Pururavas' name Aila occurs in the Rigveda.

Iranians, an offshoot

Now Druhyu's descendants are said to have been Bhojas and the sun-worshipping priests were called bhojakas. Hence the Iranians may have been an offshoot from India for the outspread from India cannot only account for existence of gods with Indian names and kings with Iranian like names, but may also have led to the genesis of the Iranians.

Aila-Adam

Now Aila can in no case be taken for the Arya where there is not the least resemblance. As a matter of fact Aila is just the equivalent for the Persian word Adam which means 'born of the earth' adam meaning the earth. Aila is from ila the earth in Sanskrit. The Rigveda may have been composed near Prayaga in the middle-country but the Aryans could not have come from the north of the ice-abode, for geographically the transit across the Himalaya would offer severe obstacles.

Aryans were agriculturists

In the opinion of the European scholars since the Aryans were shepherds and they lived by tending cows, sheep, goats they must be inhabitants of some extensive plateaux. Sir A. Somayasomayujula supposing the Aryans to be nomads regards them inhabitants of the South Indian plateaux. But according to the Rigveda the oldest extent literature of the world the Aryans were no nomads. Moreover the cows and the oxen unlike the sheep are not fit for nomadic life. There is many hymns in the Samhita in praise of agriculture and hence it may be said that the Aryans were agriculturists rather than pastoral.

Aryans did not come from abroad

There is no allusion or veiled reference in any of the Vedas Smrtis or the Puranas or any ancient Sanskrit text that the Aryans came from abroad. We shall try to see if the ancient literatures of India can help us to locate exactly the crade of mankind.
Inference from six seasons

The six seasons are named in the Atharvaveda and they are expressed in the Rigveda. Nowhere but in the Punjab one experiences the six seasons fully. It is simply impossible even to think of them at the North Pole. Moreover the Rigveda mentions the Great Himalayan Mountain and the Satapatha Brahmana calls it the ‘northern mountain’. If the Aryans were inhabitants of the northern region, they would not have called the Himalaya ‘the northern mountain’. Hence it is clear that they lived in a region south of the Himalaya.

Aryavarta

According to some critics it may be that the Aryans when the Vedas, Brahmans, and Smritis were composed might be living in a region south of the Himalaya, but it cannot be accepted on these evidences that before their composition the Aryans were not outside India. But we know that almost all the scholars have relied on the authority of the Rigveda to locate the original home of the Aryans or the human race. The word Arya occurs in the Rigveda again and again. Moreover the very word Aryavarta means the place where the ‘Aryans are born again and again’. Besides when it supports the geological evidences also, its statements can in no way be easily set aside, for there is no foundation upon which to build the palace.

Inference from the rivers

In the famous hymn of the Rigveda the seven rivers Ganges, Yamuna, Sarasvati and others are named from east to north-west in regular order and not from the north-west to the east which must have been the cast if the Aryans had come through the Khyber Pass. It also supports the well-known theory according to which ‘travels always follow the sun’s course from east to west’. In the above hymn the rivers are called my Ganges, my Yamuna and my Sarasvati. No foreigner would ever address a river in such a familiar term unless he is mingled within heart and soul. The Rigveda calls the scene of creation ‘the vulva created by gods’ and this is supported by the Manu which says ‘the god created region between the godly created rivers Sarasvati and Drasdvati (identified with the modern river Ghaggar lost in the desert) is called the Brahmavarta’. The word Brahmavarta means the abode of gods and possibly ‘the scene of creation’.

Vaidika evolution

The Vaidika Samhita supports the modern theory of evolution. The Rigveda asserts that ‘the herbs first came into existence and this statement is supported by the Holy Bible which affirms as follows:- Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed and the fruit tree yielding fruit’. The same book gives clue to the geological discovery that the animals were born on the bank of the Sarasvati. ‘In these, Sarasvati, divine, all generations have their stay’. It is established fact that the creation can take place only on the highest place in the world. It was for this reason that Svami Dayananda the greatest Vaidika scholar of the last century supposed Tibet (= Trivistapam) the birth-place of the Aryans and Max Muller another western Vaidika scholar placed it on the Himalayan
region. But according to the theory of evolution there can be no human creation unless there is already enough subsistence easy of access created for his wants and comforts. Undoubtedly the flora and fauna first came into existence on the Tibet or the Pamir region and the animals on the bank of the river Sarasvati.

**Of the bank foreign the Devika**

According to the Mahabharata the fifth Veda the human creation was first on the bank of the river Devika. 'O Lord of kings, the best of the Bharatas, after this you should go to the world famous river Devika where it is heard the Brahmanas were born.' Here the expression sruyate (it is heard) clearly points to some Vaidika hymn which has been lost along with so many branches of the Vaidika literature. Sjt. Nandalal Dey says as follows:

**Where is Devika?**

There are two rivers known as the Devika, the one identified with the Sarju or the Gogra and the other flowed in the Punjab. Here the first is inadmissible being out of the context and unsuited for the various requirements of the Aryan abode. Devika 'a river in the Punjab; it appears to be an affluent of the river Ravi. This river flowed through the country of Sauvira which according to Alberuni, was the country round Multan. It has its source in the Mainaka range. It also flowed through the country of Madra. Mulasthan (Multan) was situated on the Devika. It has been identified with the river Deeg, a tributary of the Ravi on its right bank and this identification appears to be confirmed by the Vamana Purana.

**Multan**

The river Sarasvati as Dr. A.C. Das points out flowed direct into the Rajputana Ocean. The Devika river was not far from it near Multan (Mulasthan = the original place) which perhaps may correspond to the Mazandara of the Avesta as well. Even at present the local residents of the place spell it Multhan which is certainly the corrupt form of the Sanskrit Mulasthan. It was near this Multan as is clear even at present that the human beings were first created.

**The first-born Brahmanas**

In the beginning of the human creation there must be one caste only whether we take it to be of a Brahmana or of a Sudra it was later on pronounced by the Smritis that one was a born Sudra and it was only through the Samskaras (purifications) that he attained Brahmismand. The Brhadaranyakopanisad the Manusmrti and the Mahabharata say in clear terms that there were the Brahmanas alone in the beginning and later on people were divided into different castes according to the social needs and their actions.

**How the World came into existence?**

We have also to take into consideration as to how the world came into existence. People have been discussing this topic since the beginning of the human civilization. The Dravidian theory may be accepted most reasonably about the
development of the creation laying aside the common belief that the ancestors of mankind were apes and so on down to the lowest creation. One has to take recourse to the mystery whether we call it God or Nature. We see that in the sun-flowers the male and the female parts are combined. It is later in the poppy tree that the male and the female plants are separated. About the sexual creation we read in the Prasnopanised and the Manu that the Almighty divided himself into the male and the female parts and then due to the sexual intercourse there was the progeny. Brahma himself created Sarasvati and intercourses with her. Similar ideas are to be found in other religious scriptures as well. The first creation must take place on the bank of a river where he can get ample fruits and water for his support.

**No mixture of colour**

As regards the colour mixture of the Aryans and the aborigines, there is no proof that it is due to the intermarriages of the black coloured aborigines and the Aryans of fair complexion. Caraka, the greatest authority on medicine says, ‘As for the colour pigment, it is the animal heat which is its source; but when the ether and water particles predominate in the food the animal heat of the metabolic process produces a fair complexion. Where earth and air particles predominate in the food blackness is the result; and where the different elements are combined in nearly equal proportion in the food, the metabolic heat produces a dark pigment’. In the later literature ghee (clarified butter) habitually taken by the female during gestation is supposed to produce a fair complexion and rice or wheat and salads a dark complexion. So there is no evidence to suppose that the Dravidians, Kols and the Bhils belong to some other branch of mankind different from the Aryans. The Prthu-Vainya myth also points to the same stock and the colonization of the South India by the sage Agastya is well known. They are all Aryans and it is simply on account of the surroundings or environment that they look different from the Aryans ethnologically. According to the Lamarckian theory the surroundings produce a direct effect on the individual. They bring about slight modifications in one direction or another and these slight differences are transmitted by inheritance to the next generation. Such slight modifications going on generation after generation produce eventually a marked effect on the character of the species. The chief agencies that might be supposed to act in this way are climate, the nature of the country and food.

**Kusa grass**

The Mahabharata states that the Soma plant was found only on the Munjavat mountain. The Zoroastrians found great difficulty in obtaining the genuine Soma plant and hence they substituted a similar fine juice which they called haoma (-Soma). Moreover the Kusa grass (poa cynosuroides) is found in India only and not in Central Asia or at the North Pole. The use of Kusa is very often found in the Veda and the Avesta. Even at the present day the Hindus and the Parsees use Kusa in all their necessary religious ceremonies.
India the Paradise

Dr. Giles the reputed philologist makes no attempt to contradict the origin of his ‘Wiros’ in India where the sounds and specially the consonants of the language spoken have survived in greater purity than in Iran or elsewhere. As early as 1880 Schlegel, led by the high antiquity of Sanskrit the purest representative of the Indo-European speech and its apparent linguistic purity, asserted that the parent language itself originated in India and spread thence outwards. Even prior to him Adelung (died 1806), the father of comparative philology, placed the cradle of mankind in the pleasant valley of Kasmira which he identified with paradise. India is certainly the Aryabhumi—the land of the Aryans and in no way inferior to the paradise itself. Abdulla Wassaf rightly says, “if it is asserted that paradise is in India. Be not surprised because Paradise itself is not comparable to it”.

Aryans went abroad from India

The Kalpasutra asserts that Pururavas had two sons by Urvashi-Ayvs and Amavasu. Ayus went eastwards and founded Kuru-Pancala and Kasi-Videha nations, while Amavasu went westwards and founded Gandhara, Sprsva and Aratta. And the Padma Purana states that the Sakas were driven out by king Sagara, a descendant of Iksvaku to the countries beyond the borders of India, after getting their heads etc. shaved under the advice of Vasistha, although they we Ksatriyas. We have already come to know the migration of Druhyu’s descendants, so we may say that the Aryans went abroad from India and established their colonies there. Certainly the Aryans continued their going out and coming in to and from all parts of the world. Hence it may be concluded that the man or the Aryans were first born on the bank of the river Devika near Multan in the Punjab. We hope the learned readers and scholars would very kindly oblige us with their kind opinion and learned criticisms.
CHAPTER-11
FEUDALISM IN INDIAN HISTORY

In recent years, the study of feudalism in the Indian context has attracted the due attention of scholars. It is being increasingly felt in different quarters that this stage of social formation can be neither completely ignored nor blindly accepted vis-a-vis its West European model. This realization has not only generated a growing interest in the study of the problem but has also led to an animated debate on the appropriateness of the applicability of the term “feudalism” to the early-medieval Indian situation. The basic problem with all such studies is their acceptance of differing sets of constituents of a feudal society. The problem becomes worse confounded in works which even refuse to take notice of the changing socio-economic pattern of the early-medieval times with a view to frustrate even a discussion on the subject.

The main contribution to the study of Indian feudalism has been made by the Marxist historians. Although B.N. Datta was the first Marxist historian to refer to the growth of feudalism in early India, it was only in the late 50s and 60s that the discussion of the problem gained momentum, as is evident from the writings of D.D. Kosambi and R.S. Sharma. Following them, a number of Marxist historians, notably B.N.S. Yadav, have made important contributions to this discussion. But this characterization of early-medieval Indian society is not universally accepted and the main challenge to the premises on which the model of early Indian feudalism is based has often come from such quarters which seem to be reluctant to recognize the elements of change in Indian society. Thus, Harbans Mukhia, while arguing against the existence of feudalism in India, puts undue emphasis on free peasant production as the characteristic feature of medieval Indian economy implying thereby a general absence of change at the primary level of the agrarian structure throughout the length and breadth of India during the ancient and early-medieval times. The most consistent opponent of the model of Indian feudalism is, however, D.C. Sircar, who goes to the extent of asserting that the early-medieval India different not witness the growth of feudal institutions; instead, the system obtaining in the contemporary society can be characterized as landlordism. He too refuses to recognize the changes that were affecting the economy of the period. This divergence of opinion has not only hindered a proper understanding of the nature of the problem, but has also led to wide variations in the chronological framework of Indian feudalism. Thus, while some historians, notably Soviet indologists, trace the origin of feudalism from Kautilya’s Arthasastra, for R.S. Sharma, Indian feudalism originated in the 4th century A.D. and reached its climax during the 11th and 12th centuries. B.N.S. Yadav too suggests that due to political and economic reasons, feudalism began to decline with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. On the other hand, the Russian historian M.M. Kovalevski believed that the process of feudalisation in India started with the “Muslim conquests”. To top it all, while D.D. Kosambi suggested the breaking down of the feudal system around the middle of the 17th century, under Aurangzeb, James Tod was witness to the functioning of what he believed was the classic form of feudalism in Rajasthan in the early 19th century. Similar instances can be multiplied to suggest altogether different
understandings of the problem by different historians and their application of this term to widely differing regions both in terms of time and space. This obvious confusion implies the absence of an accepted model of feudalism together with a not so proper understanding of its constituents. This, together with mutually contradictory views regarding the very existence of feudalism in India, hints at a situation in which the very basis for the study of an important historical formation is eroded, obviously due to the absence of an accepted framework of discussion for feudalism in the Indian context. Thus, before carrying our discussion further, we shall try to formulate a working definition of feudalism for the Indian situation.

Even in the West European context, there is an absence of an accepted feudal model, a point which should be taken note of by those Indian historians who advocate the blind applicability of West European feudal model to the Indian situation. Majority of the historians writing on West European feudalism differ widely as to the acceptance or rejection of the important constituents of feudalism. In this context, Marc Bloch’s well-known classic description of the elements of feudalism may be quoted, “a subject peasantry; widespread use of service tenement (i.e. the fief) instead of a salary, which was out of the question; the supremacy of a class of specialized warriors, ties of obedience and protection which bind man to man and, within warrior class, assume the distinctive form called vassalage; fragmentation of authority leading inevitably to disorder; and, in the midst of all this, the survival of other forms of association, family and state, of which the latter, during the second feudal age was to acquire renewed strength; such then seem to be the fundamental features of European feudalism”. Henri Pirenne putting more emphasis on economic features suggested that feudalism was a ‘closed estate economy’ where production was largely for consumption and trade practically absent. Thus, Pirenne recognizes the evolution of self-sufficient closed economic units as the basis of a feudalism society, a formulation which has been virtually accepted by the Marxist historian Paul Sweezy too. Another Marxist historian, Maurice Dobb, however, equates it with serfdom and explains the latter term as a type of exploitation that is enforced and perpetuated through the “so-called ‘extra-economic compulsion’ in some form”. Obviously in the West European context too, there is no accepted definition of feudalism mainly due to regional variations and somewhat distinctive economic modes in distinct areas. Perry Anderson probably comprehended this problem and sharply criticized the universalist definitions of feudalism. Thus, any attempt to standardize the concept of feudalism in the world context, will not only be futile but utterly unhistorical. Attempts should, therefore, be directed towards identifying some of the primary and basic traits of feudalism in the universal context, besides which, scope should be given to specific regional variables obtaining within that framework. Thus, from an analysis of the views of Bloch, Pirenne and Dobb, it appears that the more important constituents of feudalism can be divided into two categories-political (vassalage, fragmentation of authority, etc) and economic (emergence of closed economic units, serfdom, etc.). Changing pattern of land ownership is obviously the prime motivating factor for all these new developments.

Those historians who recognize only the political aspect of feudalism view it “as an agglomeration of institutions connected with the support and service of knights and
as a system of law, government and of military organization, whose central feature would appear to be administrative decentralization”. This concept of feudalism influenced a host of Indian historians, as is obvious from their use of feudal terms to describe a situation of parcellised sovereignty. Thus, way back in 1923, H.C. Ray Chaudhuri made comparisons between the mandalika rajas of the time of Bimbisara and the earls and counts of medieval Europe. In a similar vein, A.S. Altekar referred to the feudatories and feudatory states of ancient India. Even D.C. Sircar, the greatest opponent of the model of Indian feudalism, speaks of warriors of Karnataka serving the Chalukya and Rastrakuta kings as “feudatory families”. T.V. Mahalingam and Lallanji Gopal too make a similar use of the terms connected with feudal formation. In all such studies assuming political decentralization as basis of feudalism, the use of feudal terminology is completely devoid of any conceptual rigour of even a worthwhile conceptual framework; the various terms have been used without taking note of their implication and precise significance.

As against these loosely-knit variables equating feudalism with a system of government, “the school of Marxist historians has equated feudal phenomenon with a mode of production based on ‘feudal rent’ which subsumes the existence of a class of landlords (landed intermediaries), a basic class of producers (peasants) with a special connection with the land which, however, remains the property of the former, and of the overwhelmingly self-sufficient agrarian economy with little scope for the functioning of market system”. The study of feudalism within this frame of reference focuses attention not only on serfdom, various other forms of constraints on peasant freedom and the emergence of closed economic units but also provides a conceptual framework for a proper comprehension of the dynamics of change in the early-medieval Indian society. In India, scholars like D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma and B.N.S. Yadav have analysed the feudal system within this perspective without ignoring it as a system of government. These historians have put due emphasis on such aspects of feudal growth as exploitation of peasantry and rise of intermediaries in land, emergence of serfdom and currency of forced labour, decline in trade and towns as well as paucity of coins. Thus, the formation of a new agrarian structure and the emergence of self-sufficient closed economic units are the two prime developments which have been properly analysed by these historians, besides their political ramifications.

D.C. Sircar is one of the most vehement critics and consistent opponent of the theory of Indian feudalism. He asserts that “……the theory that, after the fall of the Guptas in the 6th century A.D., India exhibited the characteristics of feudalism involving payment of services in land instead of coins, which developed in an economy marked by dearth of coins and absence of trade and commerce….“ Is the most “absurd” one. And, for time to time, in order to strengthen his position, he has repeated his “anti-feudalism” formulations with whatever new material is available. The points raised by Sircar have been fully controverted by R.S. Sharma. But certain new evidences provided by the former needs a fresh examination of the problem. Instead of discussing all the features of feudalism, we shall mainly confine ourselves to the new issues raised by Sircar.

To begin with, Sircar is not ready to accept the theory of dearth of coins in early
medieval India; rather, he has culled evidences from widely divergent sources to give an impression of the currency of more coins during this period. References to various types of coins in the contemporary inscriptions get his undue attention; one has always to remember in this context that epigraphic references may simply allude to their existence, not use. Moreover, it will not be very proper to accept the currency of money just on the basis of epigraphic or literary references to this effect. He himself admits of this situation when he writes that “even though Haribhadra’s Neminathacariu (1159 A.D.) speaks of the issue of coins bearing the figure of Laksmi from the tanka-sala or mint of Chalukya Mularaja I (961-96 A.D.), we have not so far discovered any coins of the type”. Sircar further argues that coins of the type”. Sircar further argues that coins once entering the Indian market remained in circulation for many centuries and that, in many territories, it was not the state but the traders and moneyers who usually determined whether fresh coins required to be issued. Both these hypotheses are based on such flimsy pieces of evidence that otherwise they hardly deserve any notice. Talking about the continuing circulation of money in the Indian market, Sircar, on the basis of the statement of the Saratthadipani, concludes that the Saka coins “must have been” in circulation at least as late as the 5th century when Buddhaghosa flourished, if not much later still. Without going into the question of the precise historical value of this evidence, it may be pointed out that this is the only piece of information which Sircar has succeeded in marshalling in his favour and that too does not refer to the post-Gupta times. Even if some allowance is made to this view, it will be funny and highly hypothetical to expect from the coins issued in earlier times to have served the needs of exchange on the same scale for full four hundred years or so. The propagation of such a hypothesis is highly misleading from the point of view of economic history, for this will imply periods of coin-issues followed by non-issues at all at regular intervals.

The second argument of Sircar delegating the authority to traders and moneyers to determine the need for fresh coin-issues is based on very late evidence. Relying on the correspondence between the Marathas and the East India Company, he draws the conclusion that it was for the bankers, traders and merchants to decide whether fresh coins were to be introduced into the market. Sircar obviously wants us to stretch this evidence backwards in point of time and to accept a similar situation for the early medieval times. This raises two pertinent points: (i) D.C. Sircar’s suggestion that the traders and moneyers had the authority to mint fresh coins in no way explains the paucity or otherwise of minted money in any given period. In fact, the dearth of coins in such a situation will point to its unecessity for traders, etc., a fact which will imply lesser trading activity – a point which goes against his own basic formulations; (ii) the source is too late to be relevant for the period under discussion. Sircar also realizes this self-contradictory position when he says that “a number of facts known about the mint and money of the seventeenth or 18th century India were also true in the case of minting in the pre-Musalman days”. It is interesting to note that at another place, Sircar, talking about the 18th-19th century situation, refers to the problems created by the growing emphasis on payment in cash and adds that the earlier custom of payment in kind was better. Is not he suggesting that payments in cash were unknown during earlier periods, a point which will contradict his own assertions regarding the wide prevalence of minted
money during those times. Talking about the 18th-19th century, he further adds, “the coins in circulation were insufficient for the commerce of the country”. Like his earlier argument, if this statement too is pushed backwards in point of time, Sircar will have to face a funny situation, a situation in which he will contradict himself by his own logic.

D.C Sircar further argues that the cowrie-shells with dummy pieces of metal were always in use even when there was no shortage of real coins in the market; obviously he is attempting to give the same respectability to cowrie-shells as was given to the coins. The implication of this argument is clear: the use of cowrie-shells during the early-medieval times did not affect either the earlier money economy or the market system. In spite of his repeated exhortions it is difficult to accept that cowries and coins enjoy an equal status in a market economy. Moreover, Sircar’s arguments are once again weakened, for he cites an 18th century instance to corroborate his hypothesis pertaining to a very early period. At the same place, he himself inadvertently admits that the produce of field was used as currency in some areas. This unquestionably implies the prevalence of barter system and a general paucity of coins. Sircar asserts that there was always plenty of coins in the market, although he admits elsewhere that many of the rulers and ruling families of the early and medieval ages did not issue their own coins. When it comes to citing actual finds of gold issues, he has been able to list only a very few gold coins of Sasanka and Samacharadeva of Bengal as well as eight and thirty-one imitations of Gupta gold coins discovered from East Bengal and Assam respectively, which have been assigned to the 7th-8th centuries A.D. The number of coins which have been referred to is hardly enough to indicate a general currency of gold issues in the market. Moreover, these issues were highly debased, a fact coupled with their meager number makes one doubt whether these coins were actually meant for general circulation. Most probably such issues were meant for personal and private recording and they hardly circulated in the market. Even Devapala did not think it prudent to issue coins of his own, though it has been suggested that he issued a few coins. One such gold coin bearing his name is reported to have been found but that is doubtful. Even if he can be credited with its issue, it was nothing more than a token money to celebrate his victory over the Rastrakutas or the renewal of friendship with the Sailendras of Javadvipa. Thus, in spite of Sircar’s assertion to the contrary, it is clear that the post-Gupta phase is marked by a general absence of gold coins. This was certainly not a sudden phenomenon; in fact, an examination of the pure gold content of the coins of successive Gupta kings would show that shortage of gold started right in the 4th century and became acute by the middle of the 5th century. This situation becomes amply clear from the following chart prepared on the basis of S.K. Maity’s book:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coin Type and name of the King</th>
<th>Quantity of pure Gold Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Vasudeva Coin</td>
<td>118 grains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chandragupta I-Kumaradevi Coins</td>
<td>109 grains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Archer, Tiger and Lyrist Coins of Samudragupta</td>
<td>105.04 grains</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Standard, Battle-Axe, Kacha and Asvamedha Coins of Sumudragupta
And Archer Coins of Chandragupta II - 99.98 grains
The Archer Coins of Kumaragupta I - 92 grains
The Archer Coins of Skandagupta - 79.67 grains
The Archer Coins of Successors of Narasimhagupta - 73.54 grains

Thus, by the beginning of the 6th century, the gold content of the Gupta coins dwindled down to less than half of that of the gold coins of the later Kusana kings. Naturally, the gold content of the post-Gupta issues got reduced to such an extent that they could hardly pass for genuine gold coins. This progressive debasement and the ultimate disappearance of gold coins become very revealing if one keeps in mind their importance for and role in large-scale overseas trade. Generally the economists agree that international trade could not have been carried on without gold. This pattern of the scarcity of gold coins is almost repeated in the case of silver issues too. In his latest attack on the concept of Indian feudalism; Sircar has the following list of silver coins to corroborate his hypothesis:

1. Silver coins of Siladitya Harsavardhana and his father;
2. Silver coins of an early Kalachuri king Krsna (6th century A.D.);
3. Silver coins bearing the name Sri-Vigraha (ascribed to 8th-9th century A.D.);
4. 52 + 172 + more than a dozen coins of doubtful authenticity discovered at Mainamati.

Sircar’s reference to the coins of Harsha and his father is based on the identification of R. Burn. I gold, 522 silver and 8 copper coins were discovered at Bhitaura (Faizabad district, U.P.) in 1904. Out of these, Burn attributes 9 coins to Pratapasila (Prabhakaravarman) and 284 to Siladitya (Harsha). This identification is not universally accepted and Hoernle was the first to seriously challenge this formulation. Even in recent years, Burn’s identification has not been given serious consideration and scholars generally believe that whatever coins Harsha issued were too debased to pass for authentic money pieces.

Similarly the identification of silver coins of an early Kalachuri king, Krsna of the 6th century, is not very convincing. Sircar draws attention to Anjaneri (Nasik District, Maharashtra) plates of the 8th century A.D. speaking of prevalence of the silver coins of the Early Kalachuri king Krsna of the 6th century A.D. and then abruptly adds, without any apparent evidence or reference, that these coins have been discovered from several sites in Maharashtra. In the absence of proper documentation, this assertion loses much of its weight. Moreover, it is not very proper to push an epigraphic reference backwards in point of time to get corroboration for an otherwise lost case. Even an acceptance of Sircar’s identification will hardly make any difference; the Krsna coins belong to the 6th
century A.D., while Sircvar is supposedly providing evidence against the theory of
dearth of coins in post A.D. 600 period. The silver coins bearing the name Sri Vigraha
and ascribed to 8th-9th century A.D. are equally problematic. The identification of these
coins as well as their proper dating is highly hypothetical. Similar is the case with the
Mainamati coins. Not even a single coin has been either properly identified or dated. Such
a situation makes these evidences completely meaningless for our purpose. Thus, even
the analysis of Sircar’s latest set of evidences vividly brings into focus the paucity of
coins in the early medieval period. The same is also true of the copper coins referred to
by D.C. Sircar. Besides citing a very few copper coins of dubious authenticity bearing the
legend Srimad-Adivaraha, he has following to say on this subject,

“we have an extensive imitation Kusana copper currency, hoards of which have
been found in Orissa, Bengal, and U.P., the coins being mostly issued in the Gupta
age. We must also refer to the very extensive Naga copper coinage current during the
Gupta age in the western region of U.P. and M.P., a single hoard of Naga coins from
Kutwar in the Morena District having yielded as many as 18,659 copper issues. From
recently discovered hoard of 3000 Magha copper coins, we now know that the Magha
kings, who ruled over the area about Allahabad in the north and Rewa in the south with
the decline of Kusana hold on Eastern U.P. after Kaniska I (78-102 A.D.), had also an
extensive copper coinage, and these coins must have been in circulation even long after
their issue”.

We have quoted the whole passage in verbatim to indicate that even Sircar
realizes that there is hardly a sound basis to advocate the minting of copper coins in the
post-Gupta period. Moreover, there is hardly any positive evidence to accept a wide
circulation of copper coins from the Gupta period. Most of the cited pieces are pre-
Gupta in date and Sircar’s conviction about their later circulation is a mere hypothesis
without any basis. Thus even from Sircar’s own yardstick, who puts too much emphasis
on the actual issuing of coins by the merchants and traders, the only considerable money
issued by the non-state agencies were imitations of Kusana copper coins, which went out
of use after the 6th century A.D. Thus, there is hardly much evidence to buttress Sircar’s
theory of abundance of coins in the post-Gupta period; in fact, his own evidences very
much contradict this theory. He himself realizes that there was “scarcity” of money and
that “the great monarchs” of the Pala and Sena dynasties of Bengal and Bihar “did not
issue any coins”, but he exaggerates the role of cowries in trade transactions and goes to
the extent of apparently suggesting that the monetary shortage was made up by this
medium. But no one is going to believe in the utility of cowrie in the context of full-
fledged commercial transactions, especially foreign trade. Here it is pertinent to note that
epigraphic instances of the sale and purchase of land are generally lacking for about 400
years after the 6th century A.D. In spite of references to various types of metallic coins in
early medieval texts and inscriptions, to which Sircar draws our attention, the dearth of
coins in general and absence of gold coins in particular is indubitable. Apparently, Sircar
will not mind if we take no notice of his copious references to epigraphs containing the
details of various types of coins, for these references have not been corroborated even
partially in the absence of actual coin-finds.
Some of the recent detailed studies dealing with the coins and their minting support the theory of the dearth of coins in early medieval India. The study of mints and minting in India by Upendra Thakur makes it clear that coin moulds belonged to the early centuries of the Christian era and they became virtually extinct in post-Gupta times. Similarly K.K. Thaplyal’s analysis of the seals indicates that impression of coin-devices on the seals are not available after the Gupta period. What is applicable to northern India on the basis of these works is also true of southern India. One basic point which should be, however, noted in this context is the lack of any quantification as far as circulation of coins in any particular period is concerned. In the absence of such a study it is certainly difficult to make a precise comparison between the coin issues of different periods. Even then the present survey will clearly indicate that in early-medieval India there was a general dearth of coins which was in sharp contrast with the earlier period. The paucity of coinage will have to be accounted for and the obvious exploitation should be the shrinkage of trade, a point hotly contested by Sircar. He makes much of the references to guilds of merchants called svaest (local), paradesi (foreigners) and nanadesi (belonging to different countries) contained in very few south Indian epigraphs. The exact import of these references is not known and the most that one can say is that these guilds played some role in the marginal trade that was going on from the western coast during this period, a point which is universally accepted. But this is not to suggest, as Sircar does, that India had “very developed trade relations with distant countries like China, Persia, Arabia, Java, Borneo, Sumatra, Cambodia etc”. Special studies of trading relations in the early medieval times indicate that in India’s overseas trade with China and South-East Asia, earlier the Persians and then mainly the Arabs acted as middlemen and shippers and netted most of the profits, a fact which certainly indicates that this overseas trade was so marginal that it hardly affected the economy of the main-land. Sircar’s reference to the activities of Rajaraja I (A.D. 985-1016) and his son Rajendra I (A.D. 1012-1044) are certainly beyond our period (post-10th century A.D.) and do not make much sense. Similarly, it is not worthwhile to deduce on the basis of certain conquests and political intercourse the existence of trading connections as well.

In the context of international trade, Sircar unduly emphasizes the role and import of mission that passed between India and China. He refers to the following missions and individuals:

1. Four embassies sent to China, one each by Lalitaditya Muktapida (A.D. 724-759), his elder brother Chandrapida, Yasovarman (A.D. 725-53) and Narasimhavarman II (A.D. 700-725) respectively;
2. Bodhiruchi, Subhakarasimha, Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra, Dharmadeva, Anusri (all Buddhist monks) and 43 other Buddhist monks went to China in A.D., 693, A.D. 716, A.D. 720, A.D. 724, A.D. 974, A.D. 971 and A.D. 972 respectively,
3. Arrival of Indian monks in China in the years A.D. 1004, 1095, 1010, 1016, 1024, 1027 and 1036;
4. Two trade missions sent to the Chinese imperial court in the years A.D. 1015 and A.D. 1033 by Rajaraja I and Rajendra I respectively;
5. Presence of a Chinese envoy in an Indian court in A.D. 692;
6. Visit of 60 Chinese monks to India during the latter half of the 7th century A.D;
7. Arrival of a number of Chinese monks in India between A.D. 950 and 1039.

The chronological stratum of Indo-Chinese connections available from this list is very revealing. One can discern three distinct stages in this relationship in the early-medieval period. Altogether four embassies and an equal number of monks went to China from India during the first half of the 8th century A.D., while one Chinese envoy and 60 Chinese monks came to India during the same period. Then there is a communication gap of about 275 years. The connection seems to have been revived towards the end of the 10th century A.D., when 45 Indian monks went to China between A.D. 971-974, some other between A.D. 1009-1036 and two trade missions were dispatched during the first half of the 11th century, while a number of Chinese monks came to India during the same period. Even Sircar haltingly admits that the great period of Sino-Indian contact came to an end about the middle of the 8th century A.D. This picture of the Indo-Chinese contact is, however, incomprehensive; a fuller picture is more revealing. The contact, which started earlier, became meaningful in the 5th and reached its peak in the 6th century A.D. “From 68 missions from India to China in the 6th century, the number fell down to 15 in the first half of the 7th. It increased to 24 between 710 and 758, and then between 758 and 952 we have no evidence of contact whatsoever. When it revived in 952, only five missions from India to China are recorded between 952 and 996”, followed by a few others in the first half of the 11th century. Thus, in the Indo-Chinese relationship, the 7th century is a bleak period, followed by a relatively better situation in the first half of the 8th; then we have no evidence of any connection for more than 200 years, followed by very marginal contact for about 50 years; the closing years of the 10th century and the first half of the 11th, however, witnessed greater activity, followed by a reclosure of this contact. In fact, this situation is quite in consonance with the one emerging from Sircar’s data. This is further corroborated by Lallanji Gopal who concludes that by the 8th century, the most brisk period of Indo-Chinese intercourse had ended and a somewhat active intercourse was revived towards the end of the 10th century which did not last for more than 50 years. Sircar’s emphasis on Sino-Indian trade in the context of early-medieval Indian economy seems to be further misplaced in view of the absence of the discovery of Chinese goods and coins of the period on any noticeable scale in India; this argument will become more meaningful if viewed in the context of Indo-Roman trade and the discovery of Roman coins and commodities of the early Christian centuries. The limited nature of this contact becomes evident from the fact that only 15 coins representing almost the entire Sung period have been discovered at Tanjore. The Indian remains in China of the corresponding period are even more un-impressive. Sircar’s arguments in favour of a flourishing external trade, especially with China, require further corroboration. It can be asserted, therefore, that the external trade of India during the early-medieval period had virtually come to a stop. The only commercial connections of this period, which we can boast of, were very limited in nature, which was very marginal to the newly emergent economic pattern. This could neither boost internal economy, northern help earn much
bullion; on the other hand India may have suffered a drain on account of the import of horses.

That internal trade of India too fell on bad days in early-medieval times is evident from a number of recent detailed studies pertaining to this topic. D.C. Sircar, however, contests this formulation and refers to the aggressions of certain kings to assert the existence of contacts between different areas of the country. To quote him, “the invasion of the Ganga-Yamuna Valley by the Rastrakutas of the Deccan under kings Dhruva (783-94 A.D.) and Govinda III (794-814 A.D.), the advance of the forces of Rajendra-Cola (1012-44 A.D.) of Tamil Nadu as far as Eastern Bengal, the expansion of the Gurjara-Pratihara empire in the 9th and 10th centuries from the borders of the Arab Kingdom of Sind and Multan in the west to the eastern limits of North Bengal in the east, etc., are to be taken into consideration in connection with the question of the contact of one part of India with another”. Sircar seemingly realizes that the nature of these contacts was purely political as he refrains from talking in terms of commercial or trading connections. Apparently, he is aware of the limitations of his evidence, a point which discounts the necessity of detailed discussion on this topic.

As a final argument in favour of the continuation of flourishing trade and developed currency system, Sircar refers to the accounts of foreigners who visited India during this period. Hsuan-Tsang gets the maximum attention but the cited portions of his account hardly tell anything pertinent to the main line of argument. To begin with, the selection of areas referred to seems to be haphazard, and purely subjective, a point which is evident from the fact that not even a single area of Bihar has been mentioned. In all, Sircar, quoting Hsuan-Tsang, refers to 10 areas; these areas can be very broadly divided into two categories; rich area with their items of produce and the areas which were trading centres. Following is the chart of the areas prepared on this basis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1) Rich areas with their produce</th>
<th>(2) Areas having connection with trade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) Jalandhara</td>
<td>(i) Sthanvisvara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Satadru</td>
<td>(ii) Kanyakubja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Mathura</td>
<td>(iii) Tamralipti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) Varanasi</td>
<td>(IV) Charita (Udra)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v) Karnasuvarna</td>
<td>(v) Kongoda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vi) Dravida</td>
<td>(VI) Kalinga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vii) Kheta (Kaira)</td>
<td>(vii) Valabhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(viii) Surastra</td>
<td>(viii) Sindhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ix) Bhinmal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(x) Ujjayini</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(xi) Multan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 11 regions of the first category seem to be the typical centres of feudal economy. Hsuan Tsang repeatedly talks about their great wealth and their produce and in describing so, he invariably repeats his pet phrase: “houses/families are rich”. He uses almost the same phrase for Jalandhara, Varanasi, Karnasuvarna, Kheta, Surastra, Bhinmal and Ujjayini. Thus, out of 11 regions, 7 have been uniformly described, a point which might suggest that this was a traditional and orthodox system of describing the different areas and regions. Moreover, even if we blindly accept the descriptions, it is hardly going to make any tangible difference in our hypothesis regarding the prevalence of a feudal closed economy during this period. A closed economy does not mean either poverty or stoppage of all productive activities; individuals, especially the feudal lords and regions, especially fertile ones are bound to be rich and prosperous.

The regions of the second category seem to have contacts, mostly very indirect, with the outer areas. But even then it becomes very clear from Hsuan Tsang’s description itself that much cannot be made out of this possible contacts. About Sthanvisvara, Kanyakubja, Tamralipti and Valabhi, the only thing which might suggest a possible contact with the outside areas, is the reference to the collection of rare and valuable articles at these places. Here it should be noted that an important feature of a feudal economy is the pattern of conspicuous consumption, a point which might explain the emphasis on the collection of unproductive but rare and valuable objects. Thus, such a description is too flimsy to allure one to accept the prevalence of trade in those regions. But the references to Sindh as a salt-exporting area and to Kalinga as elephant-exporting region are more meaningful. But this hardly alters our basic formulations, for these commercial activities were very marginal in nature and hardly affected the economic pattern of the times. The reference to the town Charita in Udra (Orissa) is, however, more pertinent as it was, according to Hsuan Tsang, a centre of maritime commerce. But this place has been neither properly located northern other details are available, a situation which greatly reduces its relevance to our discussion. The second reference to towns is forthcoming from Hsuan Tsang’s description of the Kongoda area. He refers to several “tens of small towns” existing in that area, a point which deserves our attention especially in terms of the existing self-sufficient and closed economy of that period. The precise import of the dual references to towns will become pretty clear if viewed along with Sircar’s vehement opposition to the theory of urban decline in the Gupta and post-Gupta times. That the towns started decaying after the Kusana period is an indubitable archaeological fact. The material remains and structural evidence from the excavated sites belonging to the Gupta level unmistakably suggest an overall decline of urban centres during this period. This phenomenon is evident in northern India, western India, Pakistan, north Afghanistan, and the neighbouring areas of Tadjikistan and Ujbekistan in the USSR. In Central Asia numerous towns, subsisting on the busy traffic on the Silk Road, rapidly declined after the end of the Kusana rule and disappeared by the close of the 3rd century A.D. In fact, an over-all decline in trade was responsible for the decay of towns throughout India.

From a number of recent studies, it emerges that the economic basis of the early urban centres of northern India was an agricultural surplus generated by the introduction of iron technology and by the gradual crystallization of a power structure...
which ensured the production of surplus as well as its appropriation. A certain amount of commercialization of this surplus was necessitated by the presence of specialized labour and surplus appropriating social groups. Thus it would seem that trade and a power structure which needs it, and in turn promotes it, are essential factors in urban growth. We know it for sure that trade was languishing and that the feudalisation of political structure had undermined the central authority in this period; hence even if viewed from a theoretical perspective the decline of urban centres in post-Kusana times seems quite logical. An analysis of the specific instances of urban survival and prosperity cited by Sircar betrays the weakness of his data. To begin with, the town of Charita is neither known to us from any other source, northern can it be properly analysed, a situation which makes this evidence almost worthless. Similarly, the reference to “several tens of towns” in Kongoda region at a time when the whole of India was passing through a phase of de-urbanisation is surprising. This seems to be more so if one keeps in mind that the Kongoda region was not a commercial zone of such an importance as to sustain so many towns. The riddle, however, seems to be solved by Hsuan Tsang himself when he calls them “small towns”; apparently these were non-urban settlements of fishermen and coral hunters which were mistakenly referred to as “small towns” by Hsuan Tsang. This suggestion is corroborated by the fact that the only excavated urban centre of the Orissa region, Sisupalgarh, provides the unmistakable evidence of the desertion of the site from the 4th century A.D.

The same is also true of other areas referred to by Sircar. To illustrate this point, we select five important areas from his list: Jalandhara, Mathura, Kanyakubja, Varanasi and Tamralipti. To begin with, the Jalandhara region provides such archaeological evidence as implies the general decline and desertion of the urban centres of this area from the 4th century A.D. The exploration of ten sites in Phillour tehsil of district Jullundur has yielded Kusana red ware followed by “Muslim” glazed ware. Three sites out of these reveal only Kusana and “Muslim” ware and the remaining seem to be of much earlier origin, some of them yielding even Harappan pottery. It has been suggested that, at least, two of these sites may be regarded as urban centres. Apparently the picture that emerges is one of abandonment of these sites in the post-Kusana period for quite a considerable span of time and their reoccupation only when the Muslims came to India. Thus, probably all the urban centres of the Jalandhara region had declined in the post-Kusana times, a development which is indicative of the feudalism of the economy of that region. The Jalandhara pattern of urban decline is repeated at Mathura, Varanasi and Tamralipti, but Kanyakubja has a different story to tell. This is the only site of Sircar’s list which did not decline in the Gupta or post-Gupta times. This is hardly a sign of economic development; it prospered because it was a very important political centre of that period. Thus, in spite of Sircar’s objections, it can be asserted that trade, currency and towns had fallen on bad days during the post-Gupta times leading to the emergence of self-sufficient and closed economic units of production and distribution.

D.C. Sircar also rejects the view that ‘India exhibited the characteristics of feudalism involving payment of services in land instead of coins. But at another place he himself cites Hsuan Tsang who has the following to say about the salary of royal officials: ‘those who are employed in government service are paid according to their work......
Ministers of state and common officials all have their portion of land and are maintained by the cities assigned to them’. This is a clear evidence of payment of services in land instead of cash. But Sircar, who is not ready to accept this situation, goes on to add that Hsuan Tsang’s statement did not indicate the absence of coins and commerce because even the much earlier Manusmrti of a pre-Gupta date offered a similar prescription, an assertion which once again undermines the very basis of his hypothesis. Apparently the practice of remunerating the royal officers through land grants instead of cash payments had already come in vogue during the age of the Manusmrti but it became quite widespread by the end of the Gupta period. At one place, he himself admits that ‘early Indian rulers, often granted jagirs for the maintenance of their officers and dependents’. But he qualifies this admission by adding that they were not under the feudal type of obligation; he, however, fails to indicate the nature of these obligations.

The final argument of Sircar is purely theoretical in nature. He suggests that the class, caste and clan-ridden society of India left no scope for the development of feudal tendencies, a suggestion which is more conjectural than factual. In terms of the setting in of the early feudal complex in the context and within the framework of the dynamics of the ancient Indian social formations, one may refer to the commentary of Bharuchi (6th-7th century) on the Manusmrti. With a view to minimize the diminution of agricultural production, Bharuchi laid down that the Vaisyas and the Sudras (according to him, the only two varnas engaged in agriculture) should be forced to do their duty by the ruler, otherwise they should be punished. It has been rightly suggested that this injunction implies “not only the general compulsion on the Vaisyas and Sudras to do their duty properly (which appears to have been the import of the verse of the Manusmrti) but also an element of coercion which could go to the extent of the subjection of peasants to forced labour”. This evidence from Bharuchi along with a passage of the brhatsamhita clearly indicates that the relations of dependence were mediated through the varna division of society. This point is further strengthened if one refers to the various instances of the grant of villages together with their inhabitants recorded in different sources of the early-medieval period. These instances make specific reference to the people transferred along with land presumably as a means of recording the alienation of rights over them, which were of more than one grade; each corresponding to the status of people over whom they were to be exercised. Notwithstanding Sircar’s objection, these feudal rights must have existed within the framework of the varna-caste social hierarchy.

D.C. Sircar’s objection to the concept of Indian feudalism is blunt but primarily based on whatever fact he could collect in favour of his arguments; the same is, however, not true of Harbans Mukhia’s attack of the Indian feudal model. The latter, presumably arguing within the Marxist framework, refuses to admit the existence of feudalism in early-medieval India on the basis of his comparison of Indian situation with that of the West European. But his arguments and discussion are rather confined to the theoretical plane, a point which has not only waylaid him, but also led him to an over-reliance on the writings of such historians who refuse to admit of any change in the Indian society. The result is Mukhia’s advocacy for a model which is almost akin to the concept of Asiatic Mode of Production, a point possibly realized by him as he is apparently
forced to make an express denial of any adherence to this concept. His outright rejection of the concept of Indian feudalism is based on an over-reliance on his self-framed concept of the presence of free peasantry throughout the length and breadth of ancient and medieval Indian civilization and their dominant role in production, a formulation which helps him to assert that there was no change in the mode and relations of production from the earliest times to the pre-British days.

The main premise of Harbans Mukhia’s thesis is based on the alleged independence of peasantry in the early Indian context. He says that in India there was an absence of any extraneous control over the peasant’s process of production and, unlike Europe there was no diversion of peasant’s labour from his own process of production to that of the lord. To prove his point he asserts that in India forced labour was very rarely used for purposes of production, a point which is far from the truth. In fact, inscriptions indicate that visti (forced labour) levied mainly from the slaves and hired labourers in the Maurya period, brought all classes of subjects in its ambit and spread from Kathiawar to Gujrat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and South India by the 5th-6th centuries A.D. The most explicit reference to the use of forced labour in agrarian production is forthcoming from the Kamasutra. The relevant passage refers to occasions when sexual intercourse was permitted with women employed for visti such as filling up the granaries of the village headman, taking things into or out of his house, clearing or decorating his residence, working in his fields, spinning yarn of cotton, wool, flax or hemp for his clothes. G.K. Rai on the basis of the expression ‘tesu tesu characterized….’ used in the passage and the 13th century Jayamangala commentary on the Kamasutra by Indrapala, concludes that Vistikarma was different from other works enumerated in the passage. But as far as the expression ‘tesu tesu characterized….’ is concerned, it indicates the difference in various kinds of manual works enumerated in the passage and nothing else. Similarly, a 13th century commentary should not be cited to explain a ph which had occurred some 800 years earlier, especially so when Rai himself admits that by the 12th century A.D., this practice may have decreased or disappeared from various regions. Apparently the practice of visti was getting obsolete when the commentary under discussion was written and, therefore, it should not be treated as authoritative at least, not for the Gupta period. Hence, there is nothing wrong to adduce from this passage the use of forced labour for agricultural purposes. This development is further corroborated by the Vrddha-yavanajataka (4th-5th century A.D.). Making predictions on the basis of planetary positions, the text says that in case of a friendly sun ‘…’, the agricultural work is connected with rendering (agricultural) service to an evil ruler ‘…’, while in case of the sun influenced by malefic (papa) planet ‘this type of work is caused by direct coercion-corporal punishment and bondage or dependence (vadha-bandhajam)’. Rendering agricultural service to an evil ruler and that too caused by corporal punishment and bondage is a clear example of the worst type of agrarian forced labour. The prose narrative of the Mahasupina Jataka also provides similar information. This Jataka story refers to the exaction of forced labour from the harassed people-peasants and artisans (belonging to all varnas) – by petty rulers, for gathering more than one harvest annually on their farms, and for various agricultural operations. This is, undoubtedly, a clear evidence of the exaction of forced labour from both
dependent and non-dependent peasants suggesting extraneous control over the peasant’s process of production.

Further evidence of the exaction of forced labour for agricultural production, a point disputed by Harbans Mukhia, is forthcoming from the Brhatsamhita. In this text vistikarma has been deemed inauspicious for the start of such operations as ploughing, sowing, etc. This is a clear indication of the use of forced labour in production. Though Varahamihira never refers specifically to the use of visti in agriculture in his works, his substitution of vistikrts for bhrtijivins clearly implies the inclusion of forced labour in the ambit of visti. The existence of forced labour for agricultural production is also borne out by the evidence of the Bhagavata Purana, a text of early-medieval period. Moreover, the Amarakosa, listing visti under narakavarga and regarding it as a source of intense pain, implies its oppressive character.

The above evidences regarding forced labour are quite illustrative on two counts: they testify to the use of forced labour in production and indicate its oppressive nature. It is rather difficult to attempt any quantification in terms of the use of forced labour in agriculture in our period, but it is amply borne out by our sources that its incidence was not marginal and that ‘an extraneous control’ was exercised over ‘the peasants’ process of production’.

Harbans Mukhia’s main thesis rests on the faulty premise of the absence of a dependent peasantry in early-medieval India. Seemingly overwhelmed by the European feudalism, he makes a comparison between the medieval agrarian situation of India and that region to emphasis the dissimilarities of the two areas. He points out that the contemporary agrarian scene of India was characterized by the natural richness of the soil, relatively efficient tools and techniques including a developed irrigation system and use of manures, high agricultural productivity, a low subsistence level of the peasant (owing to climatic conditions and the particular social organization), and a process of production which did not create acute scarcity of labour or production. Obviously these agrarian characteristics could not have been the same in all the areas and in all the units of local agrarian economy, the latter being a more common feature in early-medieval period. Moreover, Mukhia’s assumption directly links feudalism with the fertility of the soil, for this seems to be the main thrust of his argument. Such a hypothesis will discount the possibility of the emergence of a feudal mode of production in an area which is fertile: this is a suggestion which can be certainly rejected. Infact, in India, where regional variations were acute, a particular form of economy with its corresponding political structure called forth such relations as may be called feudal. Mukhia’s arguments are, however, relevant in the context of the level and scope of feudality in India. His arguments indicating the dissimilarities between European and Indian agrarian situations do suggest certain differences in the European and Indian feudal patterns respectively but this should not be taken to suggest, as Mukhia does mistakenly, the very absence of feudalism in India. That feudalism differed in nature from region to region and, hence Indian feudalism need not fully tally with its West European counterpart, is a point which has not been properly comprehended by Mukhia. Infact, in the writings of Karl Marx, feudalism, unlike capitalism, is not viewed as a world system or a universal
phenomenon. But there is little doubt that historical research over the years has showed it to be a widespread social formation, notwithstanding the considerable variation in its precise forms in different countries. Thus, although the closest parallel to fully developed European feudalism may be said to have existed in Japan, in other countries the parallelism is less close. But this will not imply the absence of feudalism in countries other than West European. Moreover, in this connection one should not over-emphasize the role of the fertility of soil and climatic conditions unless one chooses to take the position of ‘geographical determinism’. Mukhia’s arguments are further exposed if one refers to the recent studies dealing with the peasant societies. It is now generally recognized that fertility of the soil is not the only criteria determining the productivity of agriculture and that the pattern of proprietary institutions under which land is owned and used is also an important factor in agricultural productivity. The social distribution of landed property in early-medieval India (especially in the context of the rise of intermediaries in land) was certainly significant as far as the growth of feudal institutions was concerned. Mukhia also questions the very basis of peasants’ dependence involving restriction on their mobility. He suggests that in an age when there was the absence of “a developed labour-or land-market”, the peasants themselves could not have left their localities and they were confined to their villages primarily by the economic, more than the legal, limitations on their mobility. This is a suggestion, which, however, fails to notice the basic structure of the contemporary agrarian structure. No doubt a particular economic condition did ordinarily tend to restrict the mobility of the peasants but this was primarily due to the sad realization on their part of hardly gaining anything better by migrating from their original habitation centres. But even then a hope for the better did encourage them to flee their own villages at times. The Brhatsamhita of Varahamihira together with Bhattopala’s commentary explain a planetary situation as the migration of the rural folk from the kingdom, apparently as a measure of protest against their exploitative conditions. That such migrations had to be brought into the orbit of astrological formulation clearly shows that they did actually take place and they were common enough to necessitate astrological formulations. A more explicit evidence on this point is provided by the bhannaradiya Purana which refers to mass desertions of peasants, under acute distress caused by famine and over-taxation, as a special feature of the Kali Age. That this text refers to the early-medieval situation is beyond doubt. The picture, however, seems to be slightly overdrawn, but even then it points to the depopulation of an area due to over-taxation and exploitation. Somadeva also views with horror the mass desertions of a kingdom on account of excessive exploitation. Similar instances can be multiplied and they, together with some inscriptions from South India revealing that peasants left their villages on account of their inability to pay the taxes, indicate the thorough exploitation of the peasantry, so much so that the peasants even deserted their fields. A story recorded in the Kathakosa, a text compiled after the 11th and most probably in the 12th century A.D., is more illustrative in this context. The story relates to the appearance of a deity before a halika (ploughman) who was tilling the fields of a Jaina temple. Not surprisingly, the only boon that the ploughman asked for was to get liberation from the set-up in which he was placed. That such was the fate of a common peasant is indicative of their thorough exploitation; at the same time it also
records that their only wish was to get freedom from that set-up. Thus, driven by desperation, the only course left for them was to desert their own locality. These examples are illustrative of the flights of peasants from their original regions on account of excessive taxation; but then we are not suggesting that such desertions and flights of peasants were very common. Even their limited frequency might have generated a fear of the crisis or at least disturbance in the local units of production-economy, which was bound to lead the landlords to devise ways and means to check it by resorting in varying degrees, to non-economic coercion primarily aimed at retaining the peasants by securing their dependence through restriction on their mobility. This coercion, as B.N.S. Yadav suggests, was sometimes direct, but often indirect - the former being, as it was, through the force of arms and the latter through ideology and legal regulations.

Basing his arguments on the presence of relatively small landholdings, Mukhia discounts the possibility of demand for large amounts of labour for agrarian production. But evidences are forthcoming from ancient literary texts to point to the contrary. It is clear that there were regions marked by labour shortage and the landlords of such areas enticed the bhaktadasas and artisans of one another, and at times, the petty chiefs even fought amongst themselves for the possession of dependent peasants. Medhatithi also notes that in some regions land was more abundant than labour and the landlords forced the unwilling peasants to till strips of virgin land, obviously as sharecroppers or temporary tenants, and this was regarded as a forced gift. The Devibhagavata, a Sakta Purana of 11th or 12th century Bengal, even goes to the extent of recommending that even a brahmana, devoid of Vedic learning, should be compelled to till the soil. These references indicate acute shortage of labour in particular localities, so much so that despite the age-old varna ascriptive, even the brahmanas could be compelled to till the soil like the sudras. Thus, it is apparent that an actual shortage of labour in relation to land/labour ratio in the estates of the rulers and landlords was instrumental in securing the dependence of peasants and to impose restriction on their mobility. Moreover, there are many instances of the enserfment of peasants in the early-medieval complex and this together with the evidence regarding the subjection of peasantry, implies that the peasants were even deprived of their control over their fields or plough or their labour, a point which Mukhia mistakenly disputes. The very fact that the peasant could be forced to till the landlord’s strip of land or he could be forced to live at a place is characteristic of the loss of his control over his means of production.

But in spite of these instances of subjection and enserfment of peasantry, it may be pointed out that the Indian situation was such that it discounted the possibility of any large-scale enserfment of peasants, involving intense subjection, a point so often repeated and emphasized by Mukhia; apparently, the free peasants counted in the production system. We do not have much evidence of very large landed estates and extensive direct cultivation by the landlords in the early medieval Indian context. But such a situation lends no credence to Mukhia’s assertions regarding the complete absence of large farms in India during this period. In fact, we have references to bhattagamas (bhaktagramas) as fairly large landed estates worked by slaves and servants in ancient times, but the same came to be tilled by dependent peasants in early medieval period. Moreover, the extent of land under the control of the temples during this period must have been considerable,
for it is probable that revenues from them were one of the chief sources of their fabulous wealth. Thus, it may be asserted that a large number of peasants, especially those belonging to the categories of ploughmen and temporary tenants in many localities could hardly be distinguished from a serf. This situation was more marked in the case of peasants donated to temples and other religious institutions. Though in early medieval India, serfdom did not acquire the model form of West European type, yet it did not lead to a complete absence of peasant subjection of all types. Undoubtedly the element of peasant subjection is an inseparable aspect of the early medieval agrarian system of India, though its form was less severe, involving widely prevalent exploitative relationship between the landlords and the peasants. And in this context, Mukhia’s argument that the entire “Indian agrarian history has been characterized predominantly by the free peasantry (in the economic rather than in the legal sense)” seems to be infructuous. This is a very general statement which becomes simply incomprehensible when used as an argument against the emergence and existence of the relationship of varying degrees of dependence created by the relations of production typical of early medieval India. The immobility and subjection of peasantry along with the emergence of relationship of varying degrees of dependence was a marked feature of the early medieval production system. In fact, there is ample evidence of the subjection of even non-dependent peasants to an ever-increasing burden of rent in kind and, to a marginal extent, in cash. Thus, any emphasis on the theory of “the peasant’s independent control over his process of production” becomes simply ununderstandable in the early medieval Indian context. Equally generalized and untenable is the following assertion: “The conflicts that characterize the economic history of pre-British India are conflicts over the distribution and re-distribution of the surplus rather than over a redistribution of the means of production, which had changed the face of medieval European economy”. In fact, if one is determined to negate/ignore some of the explicit developments/formation, he is prone to misinterpretation, a situation quite applicable to Mukhia’s position.

Negating the very origins of feudalism in the Indian context and by way of providing a rationale for this lack of the growth of feudal relations, Mukhia suggests that “the peasant’s independent control over his process of production eliminated the possibility of actual social tensions which might have necessitated significant changes in the entire system of production”. This point becomes more relevant when viewed along with Mukhia’s arguments regarding an alleged basic difference between European feudalism and its Indian counterpart: “.....in Europe feudalism arose as a result of a crisis of the production relations based on slavery on the one hand and changes resulting from growing stratification among the Germanic tribes on the other, the two coming into what Perry Anderson calls a ‘catastrophic collision of two dissolving anterior modes of production-primitive and ancient’. In other words, European feudalism developed essentially as changes at the base of society took place; in India, on the other hand, the establishment of feudalism is attributed by its protagonists primarily to state action in granting land in lieu of salary or in charity, and the action of the grantees in subjecting the peasantry by means of legal rights assigned to them by the state”.

Though in the ancient Indian context, we do not have any obvious evidence of a “collision of two dissolving anterior modes of production”, yet the beginnings of
feudalism are certainly marked by a crisis in the production relations. The accounts of the Kali age in the Mahabharata, the Brahmanical Puranas and some other texts may seem to be exaggerated, but the myth of the four yugas certainly provide a schematic framework for the expression and evaluation of the awareness of changes in the material conditions and traditional values. The social crisis is clearly reflected in the descriptions of the Kali age in those portions of the Puranas which belong to the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. One is tempted to believe that the emphasis laid down on the importance of coercive mechanism (danda) in the Santi Parva and delineation of the concept of anarchy (arajaka) in the Ramayana possibly belong to the same period and hint at the same crisis. The deepening social crisis is obvious, as a marked feature of the Kali age was varnasamkara, i.e., inter-mixture of varnas or social orders. The Mahabharata forecasts that the antyas will become madhyas and the latter will go down in the social scale. This is an apparent reference to the approximation of the sudras to the status of the vaisyas and the degradation of the latter as a marked feature of the end of the age. Similar ideas are repeated in the Visnu and the Skanda Puranas. These references hint at a crisis in production relations and imply that the vaisyas and the sudras, i.e., peasants, artisans or labourers, either refused to stick to the productive functions assigned to them or else the Vaisya peasants declined to pay taxes and the sudras failed to make their labour available. In fact, the socio-economic realignments going on in the contemporary society so badly disturbed the whole system that the accounts of the Kali age, viewed as an age of all-round degeneration, are badly jumbled up. Still the main events and tendencies seem to be the following: foreign invasions, the disturbances in the chaturvarnya, resulting in the rise of the sudras, the degradation of the vaisyas, the depression of the older ruling aristocracy and the priestly elite; natural calamities like famines and droughts; economic decline, including the decay of cities and the decline of trade, commerce and money economy; the heightened social conflict, etc.

The heightened social conflict was caused, on the one hand, by varna-samkara and foreign invasions, the latter disturbing the more orthodox sections by the incursions and eventual accession of the Greeks, Sakas and the Pahlavas to the brahmanical society, and by the economic decline after the 3rd century A.D. on the other. The declining money economy not only cut down the cash income of the kings but also made a change of occupation necessary in the case of artisans and traders. This made the collection of taxes from the peasants as well as payments to officials and priests difficult. This situation was primarily instrumental in forcing the rulers to take to the mechanism of land-grants on a large scale in order to make payments to officials and priests. Initially this development may have been limited to the less Brahmanised areas which lay outside Madhyadesa towards the south and the east, but once found useful in the marginal areas, they were also extended to the core area, especially in post-Gupta times. Thus, a deep social crisis effecting the mode of production was responsible for the origins of feudalism in India. In this context, the state action in granting land should not be viewed as a purely administrative and legal procedure, for it was necessitated by the changes at the most primary level. The theory of economic decline, including the decay of cities and the shrinkage of trade, commerce and money economy, pointedly referred to in the descriptions of the Kali age and elaborately discussed by a number of historians, fails to
get the approval of Mukhia, who has questioned even in terms of historical evidence, the extent of the decline of trade and urbanization in early medieval period. His reference to two important new contributions to trade and towns in early medieval times is not only pertinent to this discussion but also necessitates a thorough analysis of the trade-urban complex during the period.

M.R. Tarafdar, while making a comparative study of the different geographical/cultural regions of early medieval Bengal in terms of their economic viability, brings out the contrasting situation of south-east Bengal. To him, this was a region having all the attributes of a developed money economy supported by an elaborate currency system, prosperous urban centres and developed commercial links. The evidence that he cites in his favour is, however, dubitable. He refers to 350 coins in all belonging to Gupta and post-Gupta times, which have been discovered from the different levels of excavations in the Mainamati-Lalmai hills. He further suggests that these imitation coins were issued till the 11th century A.D. and the basis of this monetary system was trade with Arabia, import of gold and silver from southern China, Burma, Pegu and South-East Asia and commercial contact with China. He also refers to the urban centres of Mainamati-Lalmai regions which were “important” till the 8th century A.D. and apparently suggests their continuation till the 11th-12th century. Tarafdar’s evidence as well as arguments are hardly convincing. To begin with, much cannot be made of just 350 coins spread over (according to Tarafdar’s chronology) a long period of about 800 years. Tarafdar apparently realizes this limitation of his numismatic evidence, for he himself adds that the region had “a fluctuating money economy”. But this too is a statement which is completely out of tune with the cited evidence. On the basis of Tarafdar’s own chronological attribution it can be shown that the region had, on an average, only 44 coins for every hundred years, a situation which will hardly be an indication of even “a fluctuating money economy”. This is not only problem with Tarafdar’s thesis; even his suggestions regarding the dating of coins are highly hypothetical. Though he disputes the theory suggesting the issue of Gupta imitation coins in the 6th-7th century in this region, yet he fails to offer any worthwhile proof for his own theory extending the date of these issues to the 11th century A.D. Only a single gold issue of the Imitation Gupta Archer type may be said to have belonged to the 8th century A.D., presumably issued by a Deva ruler. And, this marks the end of the numismatic tradition in this region. Tarafdar’s attempt to link the Bull and Triglyph type, which includes the majority of Mainamati silver coins, with the Chandra rulers, who reigned in the Harikela-Samatata-Vanga region in the 10th and 11th centuries, is hardly convincing. This assumption is based on “numismatic traditions”, but archaeology has an altogether different story to tell. These coins cannot be dated to a period later than 9th century A.D. if one goes by the archaeological stratification revealed by recent excavations at Salvana Vihara on the Lalmai hills. On palaeographical grounds too these coins have been assigned to the 7th-8th centuries A.D. Thus, we have sufficient evidence to reject Tarafdar’s hypothesis of the continuation of a money economy in south-east Bengal till the 11th century; there is hardly much evidence of a currency system in the region right from the 9th century A.D. Obviously, Tarafdar begins with a faulty premise, a fact which has reduced to a considerable extent the very credibility of his subsequent arguments. The reason d’etat
for the continuance of a metallic currency in south-east Bengal has been sought in the trading connection of this region with international trade. The first area which attracts Tarafdar’s attention in this context is the Arab world, but his evidence is too scanty to warrant any positive conclusion. In fact, his whole discussion of the problem is based on the presumption of the existence of an Indo-Arabian trade confined to the Mainamati region. Thus, on the basis of the discovery of Abbasid coins, apparently belonging to the 13th century, from this region and the faulty dating of the Bull and Triglyph type of coins, he goes on to suggest the existence of an Indo-Arabian trading connection and the continuous existence of a metallic currency extending over centuries before the Muslim conquest. But Tarafdar too seems to realize that his conclusion, obviously based on his own interpretation of the data, his own dating of the coins and his pre-conceived notions regarding Indo-Arabian commercial contacts are not very convincing, because indigenous coins have come to light to represent the period between the 11th and 12th centuries. His explanation that the Abbasid gold and silver pieces belonging to more than one Caliph indicate continuity in the history of maritime trade of south-east Bengal is not only unconvincing but is also indicative of the purely conjectural nature of his hypothesis.

To top it all, as a corollary to the conjecture regarding the continuous existence of coins in the region till the 11th century A.D., Tarafdar talks of a continuous supply of gold and silver from abroad. He asserts, without any plausible evidence that as the Tippera-Chittagong region did not have deposits of gold-silver bearing ore, the same was being imported from southern China, Pegu, Burma and South-East Asia. It is needless to add here that the number of coins discovered from south-east Bengal is hardly enough to warrant the postulation of a theory suggesting any consequential and regular import of the metal from abroad, more so when we have no contemporary reference to indicate such a situation. To make his hypothesis of south-east Bengal’s trade with southern China, Perumpadappu, Burma and South-East Asia more plausible, Tarafdar refers to the production of pots and textile fabrics in the former area in the “pre-Islamic” period and their export to the latter regions. For the first part of his argument he once again depends on the sources which primarily belong to the post-12th century period, while for the second part of his argument, i.e., commodity exchange, he has no evidence at all.

Thus, an analysis of Tarafdar’s sources and arguments makes it clear that even if south-east Bengal had trading contacts with areas like southern China, Pegu, Burma and South East Asia; it was too marginal to appreciably affect the economy of that region. Tarafdar himself admits that epigraphic records prepared during Deva, Chandra and Varman rule give no indication of trade which renders impossible the determination of the extent of commercialization of the contemporary society. Though these inscriptions do not mention the existence of merchants and skilled artisans or their representatives such as sarthavaha, nagarasresthi and kulika, whom we come across frequently in the Gupta land grants, yet the conventional portions of the copper plates invariably refer to the high and low grades of government officials and their attendants showing that there was a stable bureaucracy, a point which suggests that a stable bureaucracy can exist even without any appreciable commercialization (reflected by sizeable number of coin issues).
of the society. In fact, the extensive land-grants made in favour of religious beneficiaries, who were to be served within the donated areas by social groups like malakaras (florists), tailikas (oilmen), kumbhakaras (potters), kahlkas (drum-beaters), sankhavadakas (conch-blowers), karmakaras (blacksmiths), karmakaras (artisans), charmakaras (shoe-makers), sutradharas (carpenters), sthapatis (architects or masons), napitas (barbers), rajakas (washermen), vaidyas (physicians) and others, the rent-free nature of these lands enabling the donees to appropriate a major part of both the surplus as well as the State’s income and the persistence in the epigraphs of the term pidam or forced, labour indicative of a typical feudal economic pattern, unmistakably suggest not only the feudal structure of the society, but also hint at the existence of a typical feudal economic pattern. Tarafdar too admits this situation when he says, “Even if it is presumed that the copper plates have left out several socio-economic groups, it is apparent that society was agriculture-based and that a long chain of intermediaries extended between the ruler and the cultivator. The bureaucracy noticed in the epigraphs of the time must have been a significant link in the chain of this feudal relationship”. Obviously, he has in mind the existence of a thoroughly ruralised society in the early medieval south-east Bengal, a point which completely undermines his earlier assertions regarding the continuance of coins, trade and towns during this period. Moreover, towards the end of the paper, he himself concludes that the immobility of the different groups of artisans resulting from their attachment to priestly estates could “at best encourage them to produce for local conception, not much for commercial exchange”. Thus, it can be asserted that south-east Bengal, like other regions of that area, was witnessing a typical feudal economic pattern and the discovery of a coin here or there, or a stray evidence of possible contact with one foreign region or the other, hardly makes any appreciable difference in this over-all pattern. Though Tarafdar barely refers to the urban centres of this region, yet a study of other regions of Bengal raises certain interesting problems touching upon the feudal-urban dichotomy necessitating a thorough analysis in order to clarify certain problems connected with feudal formation in early medieval India. Recent studies have shown that from the post-Kusana period, India entered a phase of “de-urbanisation”, a development which has gained considerable strength as well as importance on account of its indelible bearing on any discussion of Indian feudalism. From the archaeological point, considerable support comes from a survey of early Indian urban centres, almost all of which reached a state of decay in Gupta and post-Gupta times. But this is a hypothesis, which is certainly not of universal applicability, i.e., it should not be presumed that early-medieval India did not have even a single town at all. In this context it can be pointed out that not all urban centres of northern India declined though an overwhelming majority of them had certainly disappeared by the end of the Gupta period. And, as far as the Bengal region is concerned, we have unmistakable archaeological evidence suggesting continuation of urban tradition in the early medieval period.

A point which needs partial explanation before we begin discussing the urban scene of early medieval Bengal is connected with the problem of approach and methodology. It may be asserted in this context that the emergence of new urban centres or the continuation of the older ones, in no way seriously challenges the hypothesis of the emerging feudal pattern of the Gupta and post-Gupta times. In the context of Bengal,
as we have pointed out in an earlier paper, the feudal elements start asserting in the contemporary society by the end of the Gupta period. It is now being universally accepted that the self-sufficient economic units are the hallmark of a feudal society but at the same time this development should not be equated with a complete abandonment of the urban tradition. That towns existed in early medieval Bengal despite the feudalisation of the contemporary society needs thorough analysis in order to have not only a meaningful understanding of this development but also to resolve this urban-feudal dichotomy.

On the basis of archaeological excavations, we can refer to at least four such sites of Bengal which remained in occupation even after the Gupta period. The first of those sites is Khana-Mihirer Dhipi at Chandraketugarh (district 24-Parganas), situated at a distance of 37 kms, to the north-east of Calcutta. The site revealed remains of a fortified township whose period ranged possibly from pre-Mauryan to post-Gupta times. It is interesting to note that the remains of pre-Gupta levels indicate that the structures had been of mud, bamboo, and timber with tiles for the roof; it was the Gupta phase of occupation which witnessed the introduction of burnt bricks. In other words, the material remains of the pre-Gupta phase are poor when compared to the Gupta and post-Gupta survivals. While in other parts of the country the Gupta period marks the beginning of the phase of de-urbanisation, here at Chandraketugarh, this period is associated with distinct signs of improvement. The most important structure brought to light was the remains of stupendous polygonal brick structure belonging to the Gupta period. On the basis of a fully exposed building complex and the re-entrant angles, the excavator concludes that it had been a temple. Other structures of this period were also revealed and it is obvious that, unlike the occupational pattern of the sites of other parts of the country, the Gupta phase marked the beginnings of meaningful structural activities at this site.

The structural activities at Chandraketugarh continued during the succeeding phase of occupation. Thus, the Pala period has abundant signs of prosperous habitation. The upper part of the massive western wall of the polygonal temple built during the earlier period was repaired and renovated with bricks of different sizes, decorative bricks being sometimes used in place of ordinary ones, the latter being an obvious improvement upon the previous period. The construction of a rough and massive brick structure covering a building of the earlier period, with its foundation starting at a lower level was also exposed. Another important structural discovery was a small bricks temple, 5.94 metres square, with a central pit showing descending offsets to a paved floor 50 centimetre in area. Other Pala relics discovered from the site make it certain that it was an urban centre during the Pala period. In fact, remains of the post-Pala structures have also been noticed, but they are too few to suggest any large-scale habitation, but these are meaningful in nature. These post-Pala structures, though very few, suggest that the site was not at all abandoned even after the Pala period. The Chandraketugarh occupational pattern is further repeated at Raja badidanga (district Murshidabad). Excavations at this site suggest that at the time when urban centres in other parts of the country were decaying, Rajabidanga was shaping itself into an urban centre. Structural remains belonging to 6 distinct phases were discovered. It has been
suggested that while the two earlier phases belonged to the period from circa second to the 5th century A.D. and Phase III to the 6th-7th century A.D., other subsequent phases extended up to the 12th-13th century A.D. Surprisingly the first to phases are structurally very poor and in the case of Phase I even these structural activities are limited only to certain areas of the site. The only noteworthy structure of Phase II is the construction of a well designed to protect the inhabited area against inundation.

It is interesting to note that while the pre-Gupta and Gupta layers are structurally not so impressive; the post-Gupta phases are strikingly rich in terms of material remains. Besides a granary, the most imposing structure of Phase III is a panchayatana temple-complex consisting of a rectangular enclosure wall, four square shrines at the four corners, main temple of triratha plan, the rectangular mandapa on the north, surkhi-rammed platform, etc. This temple was in successive use during Phases III and IV. In Phase V all these structures were covered by a surkhi-rammed platform. In the deep diggings on the southern and northern sides of the compound wall and on the eastern, southern and western sides of the main temple structure, building remains consisting of walls, platforms, etc., were encountered. On the southern and eastern sides of the main temple structures were exposed surkhi floors of different occupational periods, the earliest occupational evidence not going before Phase II. Besides other structures, one part of the site exposed wall, floors, ovens, corridors, rooms, etc., belonging to phases II, III and IV. Phases IV and V revealed an oblong temple-complex with the ardha-chandra entrance-platform, walls, brick-bat platforms covered with surkhi-ramming, lime plaster, etc. A similar structure was also encountered at the site but it has not been properly dated. Phase V also exposed an enclosure wall with four square structures, while Phase village yielded enough evidence of structural activity including walls, floors, brick-bat platforms, a circular stupa basement and a platform with post-holes. The site is very rich in antiquity. Terracotta sealings and figurines, beautiful stucco moulding, pottery, bronze images, stone seals, etc., have been discovered in substantial numbers but except for pottery these finds are generally posterior to Phase III. On the basis of these antiquities and C-14 determinations the excavator tried to determine the chronology of the site. On palaeographical grounds the seals and sealings were assigned to a period between the 6th and the 10th century A.D., with a central date around the 7th-8th century. A D-14 determination of material from Phase III at 1200 = 80 B.P. confirmed this postulate. This implies that the most developed period of the site was the post-Gupta phase, and it remained in occupation till the 12th-13th century A.D. At Goswamikhandha (district Burdwan) too the occupational pattern indicates distinct signs of Gupta and post-Gupta habitation. The site revealed a massive structure of laterite blocks, showing different phases of repair. Initially the platform, measuring 8.40 metres x 6.25 metres, was built on a hard bed of cemented laterite nodules. Another contemporaneous structure exposed was an extensive floor of beaten pellety laterite with signs of large post holes. Thereafter, a smaller platform was added in the east and a group of four square pillars with slightly tapering bases were found lying between the two platforms. To this period of second structural phase belonged conical cups and moulded bricks with opposite stepped merlons. The last structural phase witnessed the addition of another dark-grey laterite nodules exactly above the earlier floor. The uppermost construction showed here and
there iron dowels beneath the debris of laterite rubbles mixed up with fragments of Brahmanical images assignable to about the 10th century A.D. Among the pottery from this last phase mention may be made of conical cups, vases with outcurved and undercut rims and grooves at the neck, and lids with inner grooves. It is improper to build up any hypothesis on the basis of the scanty remains forthcoming from the site of Goswamikhandha, but it can be suggested that the site was associated with religion. Moreover, on the basis of the available dating of the Brahmanical images it can be further suggested that the site remained in occupation till the 10th century A.D. Though it is difficult to focus on the urban nature of the site (mainly because of the very limited nature of the excavation), it is beyond doubt that this place was a religious centre during the Pala period and it was only after the Palas that the site was abandoned.

The site of Banagarh (district Dinajpur) too presents a somewhat similar pattern of habitation. Altogether five structural phases were identified, dating from the Maurya to the “early-medieval” period. Period III covering the Kusana and Gupta times, yielded various impressed decorative designs. During this Period IV, when the Palas had appeared on the scene, the rampart wall was raised higher indicating distinct structural improvement as well as the increasing importance of the site. A small but unique lotus-shaped tank, originally covered with a pillared canopy and belonging to Period IV, was also exposed. With the tank at the centre, the primary plan of the buildings to which it pertained was cruciform, a chamber on each corner communicating with the tank. Other relics of this period included stone sculptures and carved bricks. The post-Pala period represented by Period V was rather poor in material content, for no structure was encountered in this Period. Thus, it appears that the most prosperous phase of the site was the Pala period, after which decline set in. But this pattern of post-Gupta habitation is hardly universal in the context of Bengal. It is interesting to note that an important site of the region, Tamralipti, conforms to the general pattern of decline and desertion during the Gupta and post-Gupta times noticed in other parts of the country. Period IV of this site, covering the Kusana and Gupta times, revealed better signs of habitation than the post-Gupta times, represented by Period V. While typical Gupta terracottas along with other relics were discovered from Period IV, only pieces of sculptures were forthcoming from the Pala and Sena times. Though the site seems to have remained in occupation during the Gupta period, its prosperity had declined, a fact also attested by Hsuan-Tsang’s description of this place. The Chinese pilgrim failed to notice any mercantile and commercial activity of this place implying a general loss of trade in this area and the subsequent undermining of the importance of this urban centre. That Tamralipti which was earlier a very famous urban centre completely lost its importance after 7th century A.D. is also indicated by the absence of any reference to this place in contemporary sources for about five hundred years.

Khana-Mihirer Dhipi, Rajabadidanga, Goswamikhandha and Banagarh are important instances - more so because of their chronology of the continuity of urbanization in early-medieval period, but by themselves they can hardly provide any meaningful answer to the problems related with the gradual crystallization of feudal pattern during this period. The type of information that one necessarily needs for such analysis is not forthcoming from the limited nature of excavations carried out at these
sites. To top it all, the Tamralipti evidence very convincingly contradicts the occupational pattern of these sites and presents the type of evidence which is perfectly in tune with the hypothesis of feudal formation in early-medieval India – more so in the light of the unassailable archaeological evidence relating to the decline of towns in different parts of India in the Gupta and post-Gupta times. Thus, the major problem with the Bengal region is to deduce some sense out of the seemingly contradictory sets of evidence – evidence of deurbanisation as well as evidence of urban continuity. The problem becomes more baffling when viewed from the perspective of the general framework of early-medieval feudal pattern. One is at once faced with an important question: Was the Bengal region unaffected by the general developments taking place in other parts of the country in early-medieval India? But in a recent study, of early medieval Bengal it has been demonstrated that this region, like other parts of India, witnessed a thorough feudalisation of the society, leading to a stagnant economic situation. Thus the material factors responsible for the decline of towns in other parts of the country were already present in the Bengal region, yet a majority of urban centres of this area continued to thrive; only Tamralipti declined and conformed to the general pattern. The reason for this development may provide a vital clue in the context of the survival of other towns of this area. It is well-known that Tamralipti was a port town which derived its rationale for existence from the commercial and maritime activities of the area. That the emerging feudal pattern led to the stagnation of economy and decline of Tamralipti is fairly clear. This will seem logical from the theoretical point also. From a number of recent studies, it emerges that the economic basis of the early urban centres of northern India was an agricultural surplus generated by the introduction of iron technology and by the gradual crystallization of a power-structure which ensured the production of surplus as well as its appropriation. Without seriously challenging the validity of these arguments here, it can be concluded that a certain amount of commercialization of this surplus was necessitated by the presence of specialized labour and surplus appropriating social groups. Thus it follows that trade and a power-structure are essential factors in urban growth. We know it for certain that trade was languishing during this period and hence such urban centres which derived their basic justification for survival from trade were bound to decay. The decline of Tamralipti, therefore, was quite in the logic of contemporary developments.

From the above discussion it follows that even in a feudal milieu, urban centres having no commercial or mercantile association can flourish – more so in the case of early-medieval Bengal because in spite of the feudalisation of political structure, the Palas continued to provide a semblance of political authority over this region. This brings into focus the nature of towns that continued to thrive even during the post-Gupta period. At the outset, it may be pointed out that, unlike Tamralipti, we do not possess enough evidence, archaeological or otherwise, to indicate any connection between the four early-medieval towns of Bengal and commercial or mercantile activity. The antiquities discovered at these sites are almost meaningless in this context and a few available objects of this type are too marginal to tell us anything tangible. The structures and antiquities of the sites, however, indicate the nature of these towns vividly. At Khana-Mihirer Dhipi, the most dominating structure was the remains of a stupendous
polygonal temple originally built during the Gupta period. During the Pala period not only this temple was renovated but other ecclesiastical structures were also built. These structures are sufficient indications of the religious significance of this place. Some of the important finds also bear out this aspect. Besides a serpent deity and a bronze image of a female deity with a mirror in her left hand and an indistinct animal indicated on the pedestal as her vehicle, numerous other cult objects have been discovered. Thus, a stone Visnu plaque, belonging to the early 8th century A.D., was recovered from the debris covering the ambulatory passage of the main temple. A lotus-medallion made of carved brick with a semi-precious stone bead placed in the centre, was found at the bottom of the square kunda at the centre of the miniature shrine of the main temple at the northeast corner. A miniature bronze image of a standing Maitreya, a rare iconographic type, was also picked up. The importance of the temple complex can be gauged from the discovery of the furnaces, used for burning shells for making lime together with troughs packed with burnt shells. It is a peculiarly significant complex and it was in the service of the temple. The lime thus produced was used as mortar and for moulding decorative stucco-panels for the niches, mutilated remnants of which were found during the excavation. The conclusion about Khana-Mihirer-Dhipi’s close association with religion is unassailable; it was a religious town with distinct Brahmanical manifestations.

The Rajabadidanga evidence projects a similar nature of the site as far as its broad association with religion was concerned. The most imposing structure of the site, belonging to the late Gupta and post-Gupta times, was a panchayatana temple-complex which was also in use during the succeeding period. The antiquities forthcoming from this site make the picture more clear. Besides other finds, the site has yielded a copper chakra of circa 8th century A.D., terracotta figurines of votive nature together with a substantial quantity of seals and sealings from deposits posterior to the Gupta period. Except for a few, legends on them are illegible. The commonest type consists of a small circular disc containing inscriptions. Besides, spherical sealings with impressions were also available. Amongst them the most important one was a circular flat sealing with the usual dharma-chakra flanked by two deer and two lines of inscription below. A stone seal containing a beautiful representation of dharma-chakra with a legend was also discovered. Four bronze images; three Buddhist and one of Ganesa were also picked up. On stylistic grounds, all the four images have been ascribed to 8th -9th century A.D. Thus, the Rajabadidanga evidence is very clear about the religious nature of the site. It was primarily a Buddhist site with clear Brahmanical associations.

The exact identification of Rajabadidanga has been facilitated, however, by the discovery and decipherment of some of the available seals. Many of the decipherable ones bear the legend Raka-mrttika-mahavihara, and refer to its acharya-bhiksu. One of the seals contains the legend; Sri Raktamrttika Mahaviharakarabhisuk Samghasya. On the basis of the combined evidence of structures, antiquities and inscriptions it has been reasonably suggested that the site of Rajabadidanga was the locale of the famous Buddhist monastery Raktamrttika-vihara of Hsuan-Tsang’s accounts, which stood in the neighbourhood of Karnasuvarna, the metropolis of the Gauda kingdom of the 7th century A.D. That the site had certain Brahmanical associations too is clear from the discovery of a bronze Ganesa as well as from seals bearing impressed sun-symbol and representation of...
a bull – the latter being significant for the inscription reading Atyugrakkasya, i.e., belong to the sect of Atyugra (Siva). It is interesting to note, however, that the Brahmanical seals have been attributed generally to the period ranging from circa 5th-6th to 7th-8th centuries A.D. This will imply the gradual decline of Brahmanical influence over that area after 7th-8th century A.D. The Goswamikhanda evidence is equally explicit about the nature of the site. The massive structure of laterite exposed at the site seems to have been a temple. The addition of a smaller platform to the original structure together with a group of four square pillars with slightly tapering bases in the later phase of construction is quite meaningful in this context. Though the site is not very rich in antiquities, it has yielded a few important pieces of Brahmanical images. This certainly indicates the religious nature of the site more so because the images are amongst the very few available objects. The Banagarh evidence is similar in nature. The most important structure of the Pala period was a small but unique lotus-shaped tank, covered with a pillared canopy. With the tank at the centre, the primary plan of the buildings to which it pertained was a cruciform, having a chamber on each corner communicating with the tank. Although it can not be asserted but it can be suggested that the structure seems to be quite similar to a shrine, a suggestion which is strengthened by the discovery of sculptures of Brahmanical deities and carved bricks from the site. Thus, the most striking feature of Khana-Mihirer Dhipi, Rajabaddidanga, Goswamikhanda and Banagarh, is their explicit religious association and significance. The natural deduction following from this situation is the religious basis of the survival of these towns. Here it may be noted that a few seals of Rajabaddidanga bear legends connected with merchants. Thus, we have two seals bearing the legends Vani (?) kasya and Sri Vanika Varendrasya respectively. This will indicate that even purely religious centres were engaged in limited economic activities.

Another point which needs attention is the process of transformation noticeable in their nature. It is archaeologically clear that Khana-Mihirer Dhipi, Rajabaddidanga and Banagarh had secular origin. There is nothing to associate them with religion in the pre-Gupta times. The Khana-Mihirer Dhipi evidence is most explicit on this point. The pre-temple phase is, in fact, remarkable for the use of cast copper coins, a situation which will indicate the possible economic significance of this site in the pre-Gupta times after which its nature was transformed. Not surprisingly, Itkhola, another site at Chandraketugarh, having a contemporaneous origin with Khana-Mihirer Dhipi, declined after the Gupta period. The reason is obvious: the feudal economic formation that was becoming dominant at that time did not allow Itkhola to survive, but Khana-Mihirer Dhipi survived because it was now no longer dependent on economic activities for its sustenance.

There is another dimension of the problem already touched upon and it relates to the relationship between trade, towns and political authority. The role of a political structure in the formation of early historical urban centres had been emphasized in various degrees. Taking their cue from the sociological theories of Gideon Sjoberg and Lewis Mumford, both A. Ghosh and D.K. Chakrabarti take political authority as of prime importance in generating the urban process. This point has been stressed to such an extent that Ghosh even agrees with G. Sjoberg’s following formulation “It is the primacy of political power in providing the social stability necessary for maturation of commerce.
and manufacturing that is responsible for our de-emphasis of the role of purely economic or commercial factors in the rise (and diffusion and decline) of cities. These forces are significant on their own account; yet they can operate only under the aegis of a broader societal power structure. Without criticizing this lopsided analysis in detail it would suffice to say here that even the growth of a political structure is basically linked up with economic changes at the primary level. Nevertheless, Ghosh’s emphasis on political authority in this context bears out the importance of a power-structure in the emergence of towns. The problem of urban continuity or decline in early medieval Bengal should also be viewed in this light. Here it is significant that the exit of the Guptas from the scene did not mean political dismemberment of Bengal for any substantial period. The Palas who subsequently appeared on the scene might have provided the basis of sustenance to such towns which were not purely economic or commercial in nature. Interestingly, one of the towns, Rajabaddidanga, which survived the Guptas, was probably the capital of an intermediary king of Bengal, Sasanka. Much cannot be made of this evidence but the fact that the most prosperous phase of all the four sites correspond with the Pala rule over Bengal hints at the role of political organism in the sustenance of towns. Thus Khana-Mihirer Dhipi, Rajabaddidanga, Goswamikhana and Banagarh are all examples of non-commercial townships surviving under the aegis of a political authority; but they have the obvious limitations of a non-commercial urban centre. They were essentially centres of conspicuous feudal religious consumption and hardly served any positive economic interest of the contemporary society. The feudal economy, as inaugurated by property transfers and indicated by closed economic units, was bound to preclude the possibility of the growth of trade and commercially viable and, therefore, materially rich urban centres supported by a standard currency, for the administrative centres of the feudatories had hardly any potentiality to grow into commercial centres as in the contemporary economic set-up, these were basically the epitomes of regional exploitation. It is needless to add that in the contemporary exploitative gang-up, both the state and religion, represented respectively by the feudal lord and the priest or temple, were equal partners. Like administrative centres of important ruling dynasties of the period, important religious centres too emerged/continued to thrive as urban centres, epitomizing in the latter case the religion-based unproductive and exploitative consumption. The four urban centres of Bengal – Khana-Mihirer Dhipi, Rajabaddidanga, Goswamikhana and Banagarh – fully correspond to this pattern and are typical examples of urban centres surviving in a feudal milieu. It can be asserted, therefore, that the very existence of urban centres in a feudal society is not enough of a proof to contradict that social formation itself rather the nature of such urban centres is of crucial bearing on this discussion.

B.D. Chattopadhyaya, however, suggests the continuation of trade and towns in early-medieval India, apparently on an impressive scale. His arguments are based on a few documents pertaining to three distinct geographical reigions: (i) the Indo-Gangetic divide, (ii) the upper Ganga basin, and (iii) the Malwa plateau. On their basis he tries to establish the existence of four urban centres in the early-medieval period: Tattanandapura, Prthudaka, Styadoni and Gopagiri and their trading contacts as well as commercial viability. But all the interpretations of Chattopadhyaya cannot go
unchallenged, a point which will become clear if we have a look at his sources. Apparently, Tattonandapura, identified with Ahar near Bulandshahar in the upper Ganga basin, has yielded the best set of evidence (a set of 10 inscriptions dated between A.D. 865 and 904) vis-à-vis its urban nature. It has been suggested that the urban character of the settlement emerges from a number of indications in the record, the first being the suffix pura in its name and the fact that it was called pattana which distinguishes it from grama, palli or agrahara by which village settlements of the period were known. Here it is interesting to note that the suffix pura did not exclusively denote a town in the early-medieval context, for we have a number of villages of this period having this suffix in their names: Haripura, Matapura, Pavanahapura, etc. The term Pattana too loses much of its earlier import and in the early-medieval period its use for a particular place should not be taken as a positive proof of the urban character of that place. This is not to suggest that Tattonandapura was a rural settlement, for it was intersected by a number of roads, Kurathya (small or narrow roads), brhadrathya (big roads) and hattamarga (road of the market area) and they probably had some functional differences between them which makes the site more than a village. The records imply that the eastern market zone (purvahattapradesa) was the nerve centre of the settlement, but at the same time it is illustrative that none of the records refer to other market areas. Chattopadhyaya’s assertion that the reference to eastern bazaar implies the existence of several other such centres located in different parts of Tattonandapura, is not very convincing. It is noteworthy that out of ten records, seven refer to the different areas of settlement and amongst them five refer to market areas – all the five references are to the middle central portion of the eastern bazaar, the other two records refer to south-eastern and the middle of north-eastern area respectively, both being purely residential areas as is evident from the surroundings. One fails to understand the complete absence of any reference to the so-called other market areas of the settlement, a point which should not be ignored especially in view of the fact that the other areas referred to in the records were not commercial regions. This certainly precludes the possibility of the existence of market areas other than the eastern bazaar. And even this eastern market area was not an exclusively commercial zone, for there were a number of residential structures in the area. Not only the grhas, mentioned in the records, were residential buildings but even the avaris (snops and enclosures) seem in some cases to have combined the functions of a shop and a residential building. Moreover, at least six temples belonging to different Brahmanical divinities (those of Kanchanasridevi, Nanda-Bhagavati-Devi, Vamanasvami, Gandhadevi, and Sarvamangaladevi, constituted an important segment of the settlement pattern and all of them not only owned property in the eastern market area but some of them were even located in that zone.

Prthudaka, modern Pehoa (or Peheva) in the Karnal district of Haryana, a site in the Indo-Gangetic divide, however, hardly yields anything tangible to qualify it as an urban centre, a fact which Chattopadhyaya realizes when he says that “if at all it has to be given the label urban, it may at best be called an incipient urban centre”. The Prthudaka evidence only refers to an occasional horse-fair at this place which has been called an adhisthana. The horse dealers came from different directions and each group had a leader which was very natural as they came from “distant” areas. Chattopadhyaya,
however, erroneously suggests that all the horse dealers were headed by a foreman suggesting a guild of these merchants. Moreover, an adhisthana did not necessarily mean an urban centre in the early-medieval context; it generally meant the seat of an administrative unit, and unlike the pre-Gupta and Gupta times not all adhisthanas were urban centres in this period. Here it is interesting to note that the record does not contain anything which might suggest the administrative nature of this place. Chattopadhyaya’s suggestion that “Prthudaka was a focal point in the network of north-western horse-dealers...” And was “...a market centre occupying a somewhat intermediary position between a village and a developed township”, is therefore hardly tenable. He seems to have overplayed the commercial importance of this site. From his own count, Prthudaka was an administrative town and moreover it was religiously important. To top it all, even the horse-fair seems to be a part of a religious festival, for the word used in the record for fair is yatra, which usually means ‘pilgrimage’ or ‘religious festival’. Thus, the horse-fair which was connected with religious festival/pilgrimage (and this may explain the congregation of horse dealers from different and distant regions at Prthudaka) was a purely occasional and temporary phenomenon and could hardly impart to the site any permanent commercial significance, more so in the context of its so-called crystallization into an urban centre.

The evidence forthcoming from Styadoni, near Lalitpura in Jhansi district in Malwa plateau, is, however, more impressive. The records range between A.D. 907 and 968 and relate, as in the case of Ahar and Peheva inscriptions, to the Gurjara-Pratihara period. It has been called a pattana and a variety of roads, rathya, hattarathya and in one case a road belonging to merchants, i.e. vanijarathya, intersected it. The records refer to five market regions, i.e. Dosihatta, Prasannahatta, Chaturhatta/Chatuskahatta, Kallapalanamasatakahatta and Vasantamahattakahatta. Though it is difficult to precisely bring out the nature and functional scope of these hattas, yet it is apparent that their nomenclature has nothing to do with their nature. Dosihatta and Prasannahatta were certainly named after the two respective individuals, Dosi and Prasanna. Similarly Vasantamahattakahatta seems to have been named after a chief Vasanta, who was possibly a rural functionary. The fact that one of the market areas was named after a village chief suggests the not very distant rural antecedents of Siyadoni. Another market area, Kallapalanamasatakahatta belonged to the Kallapalas. More revealing is, however, the nature of Chaturhatta or Chatuskahatta. If one takes the cue from Tamil inscriptions which refer to the chaturalaya in the sense of a hall or pavilion attached to a temple, it may be suggested that Chaturhatta or Chatuskahatta may mean a hatta attached to a temple, i.e. a temple-market. Thus, the market centres clearly imply a rural pattern of trade and commerce – one area exclusively owned by the Kallapalas who were segregated on account of their place in the social hierarchy as well as the nature of their profession, one market zone probably attached to the temple and a third apparently connected with a rural chief. And this is a picture which is at complete variance with the Tattanandapura situation. The latter site can boast of a typical market zone, i.e. the eastern bazaar, but the same is not true of Styadoni which had no composite commercial area but just a few clusters of shops. Thus, it will be wrong to suggest that in terms of spatial dimensions, Styadoni was larger than Ahar. Moreover, like the habitational
pattern and layout at Ahar, there was absolutely no distinction between commercial and residential areas, for with this on the one hand, and aparasa (houses with porch or a portico), avasana (dwellings) and grhabhiti (house site) on the other, lay side by side. To top it all, even religious shrines could be a part of the market complex. As at Ahar, the temples seem to dominate the habitation pattern of the settlement; there were several of them at Siyadoni dedicated to Narayanabhattarka, Sivabhattarak, Bhailvasvami, Sigakiyadeva, Vamanavsi, Ummahesvaram, etc. A reference to Sivabhattarakavithi is, however, interesting. Apparently, it refers to a shop owned by the temple of Sivabhattarak and further existence of similar ownership pattern of commercial installations cannot be ruled out. Chattopadhyaya’s assertion that Siyadoni was primarily a commercial centre, therefore, seems to be stressing the point too far. To make his point more impressive he not only refers to the hattas but also refers to the existence of a custom house attached to it besides the location of a mint there. But the word mandapika cannot be taken to signify only a custom house, it also means a structure in front of a temple, a porch or hall, the hall in a temple, a temple or public building, etc. Moreover, the context in which the word mandapika has been used in the Siyadoni records does not rule out the possibility of its religious association. And, as far as Chattopadhyaya’s suggestion about the location of a mint is concerned, one is at a loss to notice a complete lack of any evidence in the cited record. Thus, the two suggested urban manifestations of Siyadoni – the existence of a custom house and the location of a mint – seem to be too weak evidence to need such attention. It should be asserted that in the present state of knowledge, Siyadoni’s religious association seems to be more significant than its commercial connections.

The two records date A.D. 875 and 876 forthcoming from Gopagiri, situated in the geographical region of Siyadoni, hardly suggest the “urban” nature of that complex. Though the second record refers to the presence at the fort of a Kottapala, appointed by the Gurjara-Pratihara ruler, and a baladhikrta (commander of the army), yet the settlement was administered by a chief of the boundaries (maryadadhurya), also appointed by a Gurjara-Pratihara king. The analysis of these two records unmistakably suggests that the settlement was a fort and the presence of a baladhikrta bears out temple military importance of the site in the contemporary set-up. This should not imply that the settlement was devoid of all economic activities. Infact, the second record counts a sresthi and a sarthavahapramukha among its residents and as members of the local council. Guilds of oil-millers and gardeners have also been mentioned in the same record. There are references to two hattikas, Chachchhika and Nimbaditya, besides the residential areas of Srisarvesvarapura and Srivatsasvamipura. It is, however, interesting to note that in all the cases only the chiefs of different professional groups have been mentioned - sresthi, sarthavahapramukha, tailikamahattaka and malikamahara, and in the last two cases a host of chiefs of both the professions have been mentioned. This may probably suggest that there were hardly any guilds and in tune with the contemporary feudal ideas practices all professionals acquired titles giving a false impression altogether. Otherwise, how can one explain the service requirements of seven chiefs of various gardener-guilds just for the supply of fifty garlands per day; at the same time, it will be foolish to say that in a small area, i.e., on the top of Gopagiri, so many guilds of
gardeners could survive side by side and carry on their profession. That the settlements of Tattanandapura, Prthudaka, Siyadoni and Gopagiri do not qualify to be labeled as developed urban centres is obvious from the epigraphical records. Only in one case, i.e. the site of Ahar, do we have excavated materials to supplement the epigraphical references, but it is difficult to correlate them. The five trial trenches laid out at Ahar are scattered over a stretch of nearly one and a half miles and their sites are termed as A, B, C, D & E, only first three being meaningful in terms of archaeological excavation. Sites B and C lie on the south and north of the village respectively, while A lies to the east. But A and C belong to the “late Mohammadan period” and only B dates back to about the 9th century A.D. Thus, the actual area of occupation pertaining to the early medieval period was appreciably limited. Moreover, site B had four strata of buildings, of which the first and the fourth are poorly represented. The antiquities include burnt brick structures, specimens of pottery and five silver coins, whose identification is certainly a matter of debate. The religious association of the site is obvious from the discovery of several stone sculptures pertaining to an earlier period from Site A and a number of “carved Hindu bricks” from Site D. Moreover, the strange circular brick structure placed on a sort of temporary platform two brick deep, which is the most important structural remain at Site D, was certainly religious in nature. The same is true of the Site B structure consisting of a series of oblong chambers on either side of a wall running east and west, and yet another series across the chambers to the north.

Chattopadhyaya has emphasized the commercial nature of all the four settlements to prove that they were all developed townships. The following table of the merchant groups residing at these places is, however, revealing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tattanandapura</th>
<th>Prthudaka</th>
<th>Siyadoni</th>
<th>Gopagiri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Vanik Varkkatajati</td>
<td>Horse-traders</td>
<td>1 Nemakavanika</td>
<td>1 sresthi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Lambakanchukvanik Jati</td>
<td>2 Kumbhakara</td>
<td>2 Sarthavaha</td>
<td>2 pramukha</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Sauvarnikavanikmahajana</td>
<td>3 Kollapala</td>
<td>3 Tailika- mahattaka</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Mathurajatiya Gandhi kavanik</td>
<td>4 Kanduka</td>
<td>4 Malika mahara</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Ksatriyavanik</td>
<td>5 Tambulika</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6 Tailika</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7 Silakuta</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8 Lohavana</td>
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</table>
If any conjecture can be made from their recorded activities, none of them played any substantial role in the economy of the respective settlements; the horse-traders of Prthudaka seem to be the only exceptions. Moreover, the association of the different sites with their respective merchant/artisan groups hardly indicates an urban economic pattern. Thus, at Tattanandapura though we have five mercantile groups, the functions of only two of them can be comprehended; these were the gandhikas and sauvarnikas, whose presence is hardly indicative of an urban economy. Similarly at Prthudaka we have reference to just one group of traders, i.e. those dealing in horse, and their trade activity too seems to be quite occasional. At Siyodoni, however, we have evidence of a more developed economic pattern. The records refer to potters, distillers of liquors, oil-millers and stone-cutters along with traders in salt and betel leaf. But the point to be noted is the lack of any evidence, positive or negative, forthcoming from early medieval India that may suggest the typical urban association of these artisan and mercantile groups. Siyadoni was, no doubt a large settlement and, hence the evidence of increased exchange activities. The Gopagiri evidence is more confusing. The records refer to sresthi and sarthavahapramukha but do not hint at their activities; they might have been local merchants and traders. The two specific activities mentioned are oil-milling and garland-making and they do not betray the urban nature of either the site or the economy. In this context it is interesting to note that only chiefs of different professions have been mentioned – the heads of oil-millers numbering more than 20 and the heads of gardeners numbering more than fourteen. This may suggest, that guild was hardly a wide based organization of specific professional groups; they were rather the family units of production and the respective heads of different families have been designated the chief of a guild.

Similarly much should not be made of the external contacts of these settlements. It has been suggested that all references to outside regions made in the records imply commercial relationship as if non-commercial contacts do not exist at all. An analysis of long-distance contacts of the four sites is quite illustrative. At Tattanandapura we have two references of this type. The first tells about the Varkatavanik community from Bhillamala (Bhinmal in south-west Rajasthan) who settled there and got involved in local property transactions. The second similarly refers to the merchants from Apapura (not yet identified). Obviously these references do not tell us much about external commercial contacts, rather they suggest group migrations in early medieval India which might have been precipitated by the feudalisation of the economic pattern of the migrants’ original places of residence. Similarly the sarthavahapramukha at Gopagiri may have been performing some mercantile functions, but it will be wrong to presume, especially in the absence of any relevant reference, that they headed long-distance commercial ventures. In this context, it may be noted that the term sarthavaha, which stood for the leader of the trade-caravan in earlier texts, came to mean in medieval texts village headman or head of the assemblage of the people collected on the occasion of village festivities. It is interesting to note that even the meaning of the term vithi underwent a significant change. In ancient Sanskrit and Pali texts, this term denoted rows of stalls and streets mainly connected with shops and artisans, but in inscriptions of the fifth century, it
indicated the smallest rural, fiscal and administrative unit comprising a group of villages; in literary texts it also signified art gallery.

The prthudaka evidence regarding the congregation of horse-dealers from different regions at that place should also be properly analysed to indicate the nature of this external contact. The word used in the Pehoa record for the fair is yatra, which certainly means a religious fair or pilgrimage. Thus, the congregation of horse-dealers should be viewed in this background; in the course of pilgrimage or to attend a religious fair, which was not a permanent fixture, people from different regions were bound to assemble at the place and some of them brought their merchandise too. These records, therefore, hardly “testify to the existence of a network of trade routes cutting across boundaries of local commerce”, as suggested by Chattopadhyaya. A point which should be duly appreciated in the context of these settlements was the dominating role of the temple in their respective economic patterns. Thus, the Ahar inscriptions not only refer to the temples of six Brahmanical deities, Kanchanadevi or Kanakadevi, Nanda Bhagavati Devi, Vamanasvami, Gandhasridevi, Dasavatara Deva and Sarvamangaladevi, but also provides interesting insights into the pattern of donations. As many as seven of the documents included in the inscription record acquisition of land or houses with the revenues of a temple of the goddess Kanakadevi which was situated at Tattanandapura. Six of these purchases were affected by the sauvarnika-mahajana, while the seventh was accomplished by a certain gosthi, presumably the managing committee of the temple, which controlled the mahajana. The uttara-sabha, mentioned in two records seems to have been identical with the gosthi or the general controlling body. The object of these purchases appears to have been the safe investment of the income of the temple. This discussion raises two pertinent queries regarding the role of the temple in the economy of Tattanandapura and the economic viability of the temples. That the temples were economically viable is beyond doubt, for in a span of just 37 years, only a single temple made as many as eight investments and it had a board of control too to look after its affairs, which were primarily financial in nature. It is, however, difficult to evaluate the role of temples in the local economy mainly due to the lack of relevant information. But if one goes by the records, it will be seen that the whole economy centred on the temple. That temples played a dominant role in the economic set-up is a well-established fact of medieval Indian history and the possibility of a similar pattern at Tattanandapura should not be completely ruled out. Moreover, through investments the temple was also distributing a limited patronage, which, in turn, may have affected to some extent the local economy. The Prthudaka pattern is more revealing. The contributions from the itinerant horse-dealers as well as the purchasers were in the form of a dharma, which suggests distinct religious affiliation. That the horse dealing was a part of the pilgrimage/religious festival speaks of the nature of the fair. Undoubtedly the temple was of prime importance in the context of the fair and it is plausible that the temple even managed and regulated all exchanges, obviously because it was in its own interest. This may partially explain the contributions of horse-dealers to the temple in the form of a dharma. That Prthudaka was a religious centre, is reflected from the fact that one share of the contributions was earmarked for the “sacred place Prthudaka” itself. At Styadoni too the situation was not much different. The records refer to the temples of as
many as ten deities: Sri Narayanabhattacharaka or Sri Visnubhattacharaka, Sri Vamanasvamideva, Tribhuvanasvamideva, Uma-ahesvara, Bhailasvamideva, Sri Chakrasvamideva, Purandara, Sri Sivabhattacharaka, Sigaiyadeva and Murari. The donation pattern is similar to that of Ahar, which might indicate the importance of temples in the contemporary economic set-up. Here at Siyadoni though unclear references to purchases of the Ahar type are lacking, yet houses and shops were assigned in large numbers to various deities of the town. If the boundaries of the assigned houses/shops are any indication of the habitational pattern, then it can be asserted that the temples controlled a substantial part of the market area. More revealing in this context are the references to vithis owned by various deities. Thus, the records refer to one Vamanavithi, one Sri Visnubhattacharavithi, at least four Sri Sivabhattacharavithi and four Sigadevavithi. Apparently, these are references to shops owned by the different temples at Siyadoni and the possibility of the existence of a similar ownership pattern on a substantial basis cannot be ruled out. This might give an idea of the nature of control exercised by the temples over the local economy.

The Gopagiri evidence, however, explicitly suggests the dominant role of temple in the local economy. There are references to two temples – Visnu temple constructed by the maryadhrurya (chief of the boundaries) Vaillabhatta and the Navadurga temple constructed by his son Alla, the kottapala. Altogether there are references to four endowments: a piece of land by the whole settlement to the Navadurga temple, a cultivated field to the Navadurga and Visnu temples by the whole settlement, perpetual endowment to the two temples for a regular supply of oil, perpetual endowment to the two temples for regular supply of garlands. Thus, the two temples mentioned in the records were built by the royal officers, not merchants. Moreover, though merchants and traders are mentioned in the board, unlike Tattanandapura, Prthudaka and Siyadoni, here we do not have reference to donations made by them. Again, one is hard pressed to explain the conglomeration of so many gardener’s guilds and oil-millers guilds at one particular place and that too at a military-cum-administrative settlement. It may be suggested, however, that the presence of so many gardener-guilds at least, was due to the importance of local temples, a situation which may provide an insight into the working of a temple-based economy.

Two major points emerge from the above discussion. First; all the four settlements had distinct religious association, which, in turn, was the basic factor behind their relative importance. Secondly, all the transactions recorded in the inscriptions revolved round the temple establishments at these places. In fact, it is the pattern of donations and more generally the activities centering round these temples that suggest the commercial ethos of these settlements. If one goes only by the records, it will be apparent that the very economy and the commercial viability of these centres depended on the respective temple establishments. Thus, even if one accepts Chattopadhyaya’s assertion regarding the urban nature of these settlements, it should be emphasized that they owed this position to their respective temples, not to their commerce. Much should not be made of the references to mercantile activities irrespective of their nature, volume and role in the contemporary economy. Trade and other related economic activities are not completely absent even from a closed economic pattern, their scope is generally restricted, a point
which should be kept in mind while discussing the economic pattern of a feudal society. This does not imply that the discussion of an economy characterized by feudal formations should begin with a pre-conceived notion; but this certainly desires an open option in this context. Naturally, indications regarding depreciation of trade have to be emphasized instead of over-playing the role of a very limited trade in such societies. In any given period and in any specific society one cannot preclude the possibilities of an exchange system, but at the same time its nature and scope should be properly comprehended within the framework of the general economic pattern obtaining in that society.

Chattopadhyaya who is apparently convinced of the continuation of an unbroken and undisturbed urban tradition in early medieval India, tries to fit in the Tattanandapura, Prthudaka, Siyadoni and Gopagiri evidences into this pattern. A perusal of his arguments, however, suggests the weakness of his evidences and, therefore, the unconvincing nature of his hypothesis. To prove his contention regarding the uninterrupted continuation of urban pattern, he has referred to some of the places visited by Hsuan-Tsang as well as some of the excavated sites. In the first category he puts Kanyakubja, Varanasi, Thanesvara, P’o-lo-hih-mo-pu-lo and Kiu-pi-shwang-na, without least realizing that his references to the decline of an overwhelming majority of urban centres indicate the general pattern of de-urbanisation. Moreover, Hsuan-Tsang’s description of these areas, as indicated in the first section of the present paper, in no way suggests the continuation of a strong urban tradition. In the second category, Chattopadhyaya has placed the excavated sites of Ahichchhatra, Purana Qila, Atranjikhera, Rajghat, Chirand and Sankara. But archaeology suggests unmistakable terms their decline and diminution in area. It has been suggested that Ahichchhatra in Bareilly district, reveals an unbroken sequence in the early medieval context, apparently without taking into consideration the nature of material remains belonging to the late Gupta and post-Gupta layers. No doubt, the site continued to be occupied till c. A.D. 1100, but the prosperous period of building activity came to an end after the Kusana period. Recent excavations have failed to expose any worthwhile object that can be ascribed to the post-Gupta period. That the site had definitely declined is also indicated by the concentration of habitation in one part of the settlement. The available archaeological evidence suggests that the post 4th century A.D. phase was marked by the decay of Ahichchhatra.

One can notice a similar pattern of urban decline at Purana Qila in Delhi. Though the evidence suggests in unmistakable terms the continuous occupation of the site till the present day, yet the earlier prosperity started waning from the Gupta times and became more marked after the Gupta period. The post-Gupta layers had only few structures, some with sagging walls, and generally made of re-used bricks. It was only in the “Rajput” period that five structural phases of both re-used and mud-bricks along with a fortification wall were revealed. The site of Atranjikhera (district Etah) is also devoid of Gupta antiquities and it declined after the Kusana period. Although during the course of an exploration of the site, minor Gupta antiquities were noticed, but the excavations did not expose any Gupta occupational layer. In the post A.D. 300 phase the site was deserted and came to be re-occupied only during the medieval period. Thus, the
occupational pattern at Atranjikhera is in tune with the general pattern of decline and desertion of the urban sites from the Gupta times. At Rajghat, Varanasi, although Period IV lasted from A.D. 300 to 700 and Period V from A.D. 700 to 1200, yet the post-Kusana decline of the site is quite marked. The decline which set in during the Gupta period became more explicit after A.D. 700. In fact, structural activity completely stopped during Period V and the material remains of this Period were very poor. Though the site remained in occupation up to A.D. 1700, yet from the Gupta period it started losing its earlier importance and by the post-Gupta times, it had lost all its urban characteristics.

At Chirand in Saran district, the post-Gupta layers are devoid of meaningful antiquities. It is interesting to note that an occupational stratum representing the early medieval period is limited to one area of the site suggesting a diminution of the habitational area by that time. Moreover, the evidence forthcoming from most of the trenches indicates the desertion of the site after the Kusana or Gupta period. Undoubtedly, Chirand was no longer an urban centre in the early medieval period. At Sankara, in Aligarh district, there is a continuous occupational evidence from the PGW phase to the Gupta period. This was followed by a temporary desertion of the site. Though the excavator suggests the reoccupation of the site in c. 9th-12th centuries, yet he fails to refer to any worthwhile structural activity of this period. This silence becomes more intriguing in the light of his reference to the remains of a fort, made of lakhauri bricks, in the eastern part of the mound representing the latest phase of occupation of the site, assigned to c. 14th-15th centuries. Moreover, the excavator does not refer to any antiquity of the early medieval period. Thus, the evidence for the occupation of the site during 9th-12th centuries is too weak to suggest a meaningful settlement pattern during this period.

The above discussion clearly bears out the decay of urban centres in these areas. Chattopadhyaya, however, realizes this point in the context of other urban centres of this area and tries to explain away this phenomenon, especially in the context of Ganga basin and adjoining areas along the Himalayan foothills, in terms of stoppage of trade through a number of important trade routes intersecting this stretch in early times. But he has not answered why the trade routes themselves had dried up, for he possibly realizes that any attempt to analyse this development is bound to link this newly emerging economic pattern with the contemporary feudal development.

In spite of this unassailable archaeological evidence to the contrary, it has been recently suggested, from a purely theoretical and hypothetical point of view, that town did not decline in early medieval India. It has been argued that political fragmentation, which was a marked feature of this period, would inevitably lead to the growth of a number of seats of political power with an overwhelming producing population, constituting the administrative functionaries, the court and retinue, these then will bring in to being the urban centres. Apparently, the argument is based on the premise that all politico-administrative centres are urban centres. This betrays a lack of a thorough comprehension of the process of urbanization. Political factor, no doubt, aids the urban process, but it is not the only factor or even the most crucial factor responsible for the emergence of towns. We have references to a number of early medieval seats of
government which had hardly any urban pretension. These were generally the centres of exploitation and the final instrument through which the prince or the chief could perpetuate his power over the peasantry. In some cases, they were even transitory as far as their occupational pattern is concerned. Thus, any hypothesis which suggests a natural development of political centres into urban centres or makes no difference between a seat of administration and a town is purely hypothetical. Equally unacceptable will be a holistic theory based on very limited evidence. One can not and should not talk in terms of a general development in industrial technology just on the basis of certain stray finds – an extent even from Nalanda or bronzes from Kurkihar. And even if there is evidence for development/continuation of Indian industrial technology during this period, where is the evidence for either undisturbed continuation or increase in industrial production?

An equally hypothetical and unacceptable theory has been put forward in the context of the extension of trade, both internal and external. Just on the basis of certain hypothetical formulations in the context of Indo-Arab trade, it has been argued that the non-discovery of gold coins at this stage need not lead us to conclude contraction in circulation of money, and therefore, one should not talk in terms of decline in trade as an integral element in the rise of Indian feudalism. It has also been suggested that lack of political fragmentation and easy accessibility through different river systems helped trade. A few points need consideration in this context. It should be asserted at the outset that shrinkage of trade or decline in commodity exchange in terms of a money economy does not mean the death of trade or commerce; it refers to a situation in which they are not the consequential partner of the over-all economic pattern. Thus, Indo-Arab trade or trade with other regions of the world which were not in a position to appreciably affect the over-all economic pattern, should be neither unduly emphasized northern overplayed. More striking is the fact that in spite of the use of gold by Indian merchants, as suggested, why do we notice a dearth of gold coins? This point should have been explained to make a meaningful contribution to the discussion. Actually, more pertinent is the explanation of the phenomena of “the non-discovery of gold coins at this stage”. The only plausible deduction from this situation is the absence of large-scale transactions based on money economy during this period. That there was political fragmentation, which was a serious impediment to trade, is beyond doubt. River systems too cannot play a meaningful sole in internal trade by themselves, for this will imply that in riverine areas trade existed in all periods of history; will it not be a funny situation in terms of known historical facts?

The formulation seeking to establish a correlation between the process of feudalisation and the emergence of regional languages has also been challenged on the ground that such a view neglects the processes of change and development specific to languages and fails to distinguish them from the “laws” of social change and development. And this is followed by a contradictory statement. “A theoretical position which subordinates language to society or discards the role of society in language does not deserve encouragement”. Thus in spite of deliberate attempt to divorce linguistic developments from the contemporary socio-economic milieu, the impact of society on linguistics has been conceded. That socio-economic formulations decisively influence linguistics is a historically established fact. In the Indian context too, the early medieval
period is characterized by the slow and steady emergence of North Indian regional languages and mutually distinguishable regional scripts. Thus, talking in terms of feudalism influencing linguistic developments does not mean subordination of language history to social and political history or will it?

That literary styles and linguistic composition were also influenced by feudal developments is an indubitable fact of early medieval Indian history. No doubt, this age produced Banabhatta, Rajasekhara and Bhavabhuti, but significantly enough there was not much original and creative activity in the literary field; the period can be characterized as an age of commentaries and digests. The literatures of the period seem to be more concerned with the preservation and explanation of the existing fund of knowledge. This attitude is explicit in legal writing, philosophical literature and works on astronomy, medicine and other technical branches. In fact, in the feudal society the average Sanskrit poet wrote for the patrician, hence within certain personal limits which precisely meant sex and religion. Even in dealing with the gods, it is their sexual exploits which get the prime attention. Not surprisingly even the monastics enjoyed and wrote erotic poetry. It has been suggested that between literary styles and social structures intervene many variables and the more significant of these variables relate to particular literary traditions, conventional habits of thought and expression, preferred or prevailing notions of propriety and decorum, elegance and aesthetic pleasure—a whole complex of social and aesthetic considerations. Two points need emphasis in this context. The first point has been very poignantly summed up by D.D. Kosambi: “The professional writer before the machine age was a member of the leisure class, which in turn includes and is appended (as is the priesthood) to the ruling class. Hence literature may be viewed in two aspects. The first would be as a closed preserve of the class in power, private literature not accessible to the common herd. This is typical of all Sanskrit, so that its patronage may be called (following Thorstein Veblen) a method of conspicuous consumption. At its broadest, this type of writing marks the unity of the upper classes, as the Sanskrit language unmistakably did till A.D. 1200. There is secondly the broader literature which serves all society; this too becomes saturated with the idea of the ruling class, taking on the appearance of a tool for domination. But the development and technique have to be different here. The theme or approach must be traditionally familiar to the people at large, accepted by society as a whole, thus suitable for embroidery with special class glorification. That society has progressed by the development of successive classes to a position of dominance implies that the progressive writer is oriented towards the needs of some rising class; his greatness derives from the inevitable tendency of the class to look upon the interests of all humanity as its own. It is corollary that the great writers come far oftener at the beginning of their period than at any later stage; they are the ones whose appeal outlasts their times and society. This is why we do not dismiss great writings because it is class literature. When the class in question has gained in power, there follows a neat inversion whereby its own special interests are proclaimed to be those of all humanity. Then writers set themselves in a far narrower mould”. From this passage it follows that the literatures of our period did not have an independent existence; they were virtually the spokesmen of the class in power. Secondly, it should be understood that it was the ruling class which determined the social and aesthetic
considerations. Thus, the “personal vanity of the landed classes” was of prime importance in the scheme of forces shaping the literary style characteristic of the feudal period; the personal “vanity” of the literatures hardly had a place in their literary compositions. And the new literary styles and compositions together with their exclusive class utility made the language ornate and even verbose. In the changing set-up, the language refashioned itself and in the course of time lost its earlier simplicity. Gopal and others have, however, raised some interesting and important questions, without making any apparent attempt to answer them. They want to know about the religious aspects of feudal order, the changes that occurred in the social relationship due to landed intermediaries, the characteristic life pattern that emerged in the village, the social institutions that came to being and the dominant attitude pattern that prevailed in society. These queries are not crucial in the context of feudalism per settlement, but they relate to the social manifestations of feudal formation. That religion had an important place in the feudal mechanism of exploitation is indubitable. The growing popularity of the two theories of bhakti and karma during this period is indicative of this situation. Similarly, the changing social relationships of the period is too marked a feature to miss anyone’s attention. Not only the erstwhile professional groups were emerging as distinct castes and later branched off into equally distinct sub-castes, but some major new castes like Rajputs, Kayasthas, etc. were also the product of this period. The villages certainly came to have a characteristic life pattern which was in tune with the feudal formation. The period witnessed the emergence of certain typically feudal social institutions, the mathas, the panji system, etc. Naturally, the dominant attitude pattern of the society was moulded by the feudal spirit. Reason came to be subordinated to faith and the general social outlook degenerated into a sort of preoccupation with the supra-natural and the emergence of a fatalistic attitude towards life. From a study of anthropology and Sociology it can be gathered that such an outlook can obtain nourishment and sustenance only in a society which is pre-eminentely rural and agricultural, non-industrial, feudal and priest-ridden. Thus, all the queries are connected with the social dimension of feudalism and it should be admitted that these are central to any discussion of a feudal society.

The feudal mode of production, therefore, seems to be an indisputable development of early medieval India. But at the same time it has to be emphasized that it was not a uniformly universalistic phenomenon; all feudal societies should not be evaluated in terms of developments obtaining in the contemporary West European society. An overemphasis on a standardized feudal society of West European type will be tantamount to going along with the bourgeois legal historians in describing the feudal system as Lehnsweise. For example, J. Calmette’s Laterite societe’ feodale, in the popular Collection Armand Colin, states on its first page that feudalism is peculiar to the middle ages in Western Europe, and denies the reality of feudalism in other regions of the world. This is obviously a historical formulation, which has been effectively countered in recent years. That feudalism appeared in many other regions is now a historically well-documented fact. In this context, the basic point which needs emphasis in the lack of a standardized feudal model for all such areas; it was a mode of production which had local variations. Obviously, every feudal region had its own peculiarities;
though they all admitted of a basic unity at the primary level. Any discussion of Indian feudalism will have to take point into consideration. An excessive reliance on West European feudal model for analyzing the contemporary Indian situation is bound to be an exercise in self-deception.

Another persistent problem with the writings on Indian feudalism is the alleged antagonism between feudalism and external trade. Such a formulation stems from an over-reliance on the works of Henri Pirenne. No doubt, his theory of the rise and decline of feudalism has an overwhelming grand canvas and logical consistency, but at the same time, it puts undue emphasis on an external factor as an agent of internal change. His theory explains the rise of feudalism in Europe as a consequence of the decline of foreign trade and therefore of urban life in the classical period. There is a striking similarity between Pirenne’s reconstruction of the origins of feudalism in Europe and the attempt of D.D. Kosambi and R.S. Sharma to explain the beginning of Indian feudalism in terms of the decline of foreign trade and consequent growth of local self-sufficient economy. Pirenne’s analysis of the origins of European feudalism is now seriously challenged on account of its excessive emphasis on an external factor, i.e. foreign trade, as the prime-mover in the feudal formation. This naturally has laid bare the theoretical weakness of the Indian feudal model, which seeks to explain feudal developments in terms of foreign trade whose decline mainly depended on the factors external to the Indian situation. Such a formulation not only tries to link all internal changes with extraneous factors but also implies the denial of any in-built potential for change in Indian society. The dynamics of change in a society needs better appreciation for a proper understanding of successive modes of production. In fact, the internal contradictions of a social system are of prime importance in the emergence of feudalism which manifests itself in terms of shrinkage of trade, paucity of coins and the growth of closed economy. The Kali age descriptions in various texts of the 3rd 4th centuries A.D. point to this deep social crisis presaging the feudalisation of Indian society. This point needs a fuller discussion, and a more logical correlation between the Kali age and beginnings of Indian feudalism might help a better theoretical formulation in the context of Indian feudal model.

The place of trade, town and currency system has to be properly comprehended in the Indian feudal context. When one talks about their relative absence, one is only indicating a general pattern; they did not disappear altogether. The antagonism between trade, town and currency system on the one hand and feudalism on the other hardly suggests a complete incompatibility of one with the other. Production for use is the more common feature of such societies, and production for exchange is marginal to the general economic pattern. Thus, in the early medieval Indian context, the evidence for an urban centre in a region or the discovery of a very few coins or proof for a limited commodity exchange should not be projected as counter to the Indian feudal model, for a thorough analysis of such developments generally unravels the feudal framework within which they were operating.

Feudalism has to be understood as a general social formation having all-round ramifications. But in the Indian context, the political and economic aspects have attracted
attention, at times at the cost of other contemporary developments. Though some primary work has been done in this direction, yet a proper correlation between feudal developments on the one hand, and social, religious, philosophical and literary changes on the other is still a desideratum. Such a state of studies on feudalism might give an altogether wrong orientation to the Indian feudal model by implying the comprehension of only political and economic forces within the framework of feudal formation. But, feudalism is synonymous with a distinct mode of production which almost uniformly affected all aspects of contemporary life. This point needs better appreciation in studies on feudalism in order to provide a comprehensive account of Indian feudal society.

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CHAPTER – III

POTENTIALITIES OF CAPITALISTIC DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

By now you must have become intimately familiar with the many facets of Medieval India during the 16th-18th centuries. Here we do not intend to give a resume of the subject-matter of the foregoing Blocks. Instead, we will raise an important question and try to respond to it. We have dispensed with the formal mode of structuring in this chapter so that you read the entire argument in a flow. The question we are going to address here relates to the economic structure of Medieval India. It has often been asked why India failed to industrialise and evolve a capitalistic economy before the British conquest. In other words, was there any potentiality of emergence of capitalism in Mughal India along the lines of what happened in Europe? This query was casually probed by W.H. Moreland and Brij Narain. However, since 1960s there has been a regular debate on this question beginning with Morris D. Morris and Toru Matsui and followed by Bipan Chandra and Tapan Raychaudhuri. But their views largely dwell on the 19th century India. It will, however, be more fruitful to us if we focus attention on the status of the Mughal economy. A pioneering enquiry on these lines was conducted by Irfan Habib in ‘Potentialities of Capitalistic development in the Economy of Mughal India’. This was followed by A.I. Chicherov’s India: Economic Development in the 16th-18th centuries, Moscow, 1971. In fact what we are concerned for this Unit is not why a capitalist structure did not emerge during the Mughal period; our query is whether we can see signals of capitalist development within the Mughal economy. Significantly Europe did not possess capitalist economy in the 17th century. Capitalism started emerging, for example in England, from the second half of the 18th century only. It was, by and large, merchant capitalism that prevailed in England at this time, not industrial capitalism.

To begin with, we must be clear about what do we understand by the term capitalism. Thereafter we may begin to investigate the presence or absence of its features in Mughal economy. Let us list the most important features of early capitalism:

1. Control of capital over production-processes;
2. Money or market relations;
3. “Immense accumulation of commodities” (Karl Marx); and
4. Breakthrough in production-technology.

That the merchants of Medieval India possessed considerable capital cannot be questioned. Estimates of their wealth come from European records. We told that in 1663 some merchants of Surat owned more than 5 or 6 million rupees. Mulla Abdul Ghafur of Surat had assets worth 8 million rupees. He also owned twenty ships (between 300 and 800 tons each). The English factors testify that the volume of his trading transactions was no less than that of their company. Another Surat merchant Virji Vora is reported to have held an “estate” of the value of 8 million rupees: Manrique (1630) was amazed by the immense wealth of the merchants of Agra; he saw money piled up in some merchants’
houses that “looked like grain heaps”. Besides, the merchants put their money into commercial circulation. The wealth of the non-mercantile groups too was invested in trading ventures. This included the Mughal Emperors, royal ladies, princes and nobles – many of whom had their own ships. True, their investment was less than that of the merchants, but the important point here is that their involvement increased the size of “money-market” in its own way.

The system of credit and banking in Mughal India was well developed. You have already read about the role and functions of the sarraf who acted as a banker remitting money and issuing bills of exchange called hundi. The sarraf also discounted the hundis of merchants thus enlarging the volume of money for commerce. Another well-developed financial practice related to the insurance of goods in transit (both inland and marine). Moreover, institutions of money lending (and interest), for commercial purposes including bottomry and respondentia, were also prevalent. Clearly then the basic financial and economic institutions were in operation in good measure during the 17th and 18th centuries. This may have put the Medieval economy on to the road to capitalism. Again, commodity production was taking place on a vast scale, especially of textiles, saltpeter, indigo, etc. Procurement of these commodities was made easier both for the Indian and foreign merchants by the institution of brokery. Means of transport too were fairly well-established keeping in view the constraints of medieval times. True capitalist relations may develop only when capital would dominate and control large areas of production process. This is the principal difference between industrial and merchant capital. The latter is not directly involved with manufacture. In other words, production was not controlled by merchants: it was carried out by independent artisans who owned the tools, invested their money in buying raw material, worked at their respective homes (Domestic Craft System), owned the finished goods and sold the latter at the market. Capitalism destroys all these features, turning the independent artisans into wage-workers. As an upshot, industrial capital takes over gradually the means of production and controls the entire system. But the changeover from merchant to industrial capitalism was not abrupt or sudden. There was a transitory stage that arose within merchant capitalism itself. It is called putting-out system. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine the nature and extent of this transitory phase in Medieval India, that is, the progressive control of labour and production by capital.

The penetration of merchant capital into the existing artisan-level mode of production could occur through the putting-out system (dadni) which seems to have been quite an established practice, though on a small scale, even prior to the 17th century. The brokers come into the picture because the advances to the primary producers by the merchants were made through them. Let us first set out the economic structure of the putting-out system. The Indian economy during the 17th century was a sellers’ (i.e. producers’) market. There was tremendous demand and the large number of competitive buyers flooding the market. Thus, from the merchants’ point of view, especially of those engaged in foreign trade, the putting-out system excluded his rivals and secured him timely delivery of stipulated quantity of commodity in accordance with his specifications at previously agreed rates. On the other hand, the primary producer accepted advances since he had to cope with extensive orders for which he may not have
adequate money to buy raw materials. (The next stage was the supply of raw materials, too). Thus, the putting-out system rendered economic services to both the merchant and the artisan. In this context, the degree of penetration of merchant capital into the production-process through the putting-out system could be assessed by examining whether the merchant advanced cash or raw materials (or both) and the tools of production to the artisan. Taking the textile industry, we have adequate evidence for advance being given in cash to infer that it was an established practice. But evidence for raw material is quite insufficient to show its wide use, while that for instruments of production is almost negligible.

Here it must be pointed out that the need for giving raw material (yarn) to the weavers arose from the consideration that the yarn obtained by weavers themselves was often of inferior quality, even when granted cash advance. It appears that some profit accrued to the weaver when he himself purchased yarn or raw silk of a quality questionable from the merchants’ point of view. Thus it may be reasonably assumed that the weaver did not always welcome the supply of raw material from the merchant as this possibly wiped off the little “cut” they could otherwise get. This partly explains the scarcity of data on this particular practice, that is, the advance being made in raw material. That the predominant form of the putting-out system was cash-advance is evident from what Streynsham Master says about Bengal in the later decades of the 17th century: “The most proper season for giving out moneys for cossuss; Mulmulas etc., made in and about Dacca is the month of January. Dellolls or Broackers……..take four monethes time for its delivery, and within sic monethes or thereabouts doe usually bring in the same browne (unbleached, as it comes from the weavers. The said Broackers, having taken money, deliver it to the Picars (Paikar) who carry it from Town to town, and deliver it to weavers…….” Here Master does not mention at all the practice of giving yarn to the weavers. Other accounts also point to the same conclusion. We find only one reference in the English factory records to this practice, but that is in connection with raw silk. The reason assigned was that the weavers, out of poverty, could not buy raw silk of the requisite quality.

The same could be said about Gujarat with the difference that probably this practice was adopted on a comparatively large scale than in Bengal. But there is no evidence to convince us that it ever acquired a very dominant form of the putting-out system there. Even Chicherov, despite his strong advocacy of the development of capitalistic relations, is struck by the scarcity of data on the advancing of raw material, that is, yarn, to the weavers. He himself explains that “the supply of raw materials never posed a problem” is the rural areas because “cotton-growing, which was extraordinarily extensive and in some areas almost universal, was a typical economic-geographical feature of India; cotton could be grown on every farm or bought on the nearest market”. He adds, “Spinning, widespread not only in the so weavers’ home but also in ordinary peasant families, created a constant and vast source of raw materials for the weaving trade”. Thus, it may safely be concluded that the most distinguishing feature of the putting-out system during the 17th century was the practice of cash-advance.
From this point we can pass on to the part played by the practice of cash-advance in transforming the relations of production. Considering the prime motive of giving cash-advances to the artisan, we do not notice any distinct tendency on the part of the merchants to intervene deliberately in the production process in such a manner as to bring about a radical change in temple relations of production. True, the producer was “tied” to the merchant in the sense that now he was under an obligation to fulfill his commitment, that is, to provide the merchant with the commodity produced by him in accordance with the merchant’s specifications within a limited time and at an agreed price. But the artisan still retained the ownership of the tools or production and in this case raw materials, too. What really happened was that he had merely sold off his produce in return for advance payment out of his free will. There does not appear to exist any extraordinary economic compulsion (except poverty) for him to accept such orders from the merchant; northern does the latter appears to have employed non-economic coercion to compel him to enter into such a deal. Instead, the merchant had to induce the producer to accept the advance payment in his own interest. For example, in 1665 the English factors wrote from Surat: “Calicoes are soe bought up by the Dutch etc. that we are forced to pray and pay for what we have and take it as a courtesy (italics ours) that the weavers will vouchsafe to receive out money 8 and 10 months beforehand, which is the only thing that tyes them to us”.

Here, the merchants felt obliged to the weavers for their acceptance of the advance money. But even this “tie-up” was very slender. In 1647 the English factors at Thatta wrote to Surat: “Besides, those weavers are a company of base rougues, for not with standing we given them money aforehand part of the yeare, and that in the time of there greatest want, yet if any pedling cloth merchant comes to buy, they leave us and work for him, though he gives not money aforehand; being the ordinary base make is more facile and easy to weave then ours, with which they must take some paines”. Again, in 1622, they wrote from Broach: “we must give out our money beforehand, and receive the proceedes of it at the weavers and brokers pleasure”. Thus, it is indeed incongruous and Chicherov talks of “economic bondage”, “economic dependence”, physical coercion” and “merchant monopoly” with regard to the relations between the merchant and the producer during the 17th century. The artisan had merely turned into a “contract-producer” from and “independent” one. True he was no longer the owner of his produce, but he was not yet alienated from the ownership or raw material and tools of production.

As long as the artisan worked within the domestic system of craft-production, real capitalistic relations of production could not be generated. That the putting-out system did not deprive the producer of his tools and often raw material clearly indicates that the control of labour by merchant capital was indeed very weak. Until this alienation took place, commodity-production manufactory or, in other words, assemblage of large number of workers at one place at the same time for the production of the same commodity under a superior capitalist direction could not emerge. But at this stage the putting-out system itself, along with the brokers, would ultimately disappear, yielding place to new relations of production.

Northern do we find any evidence for the creation of surplus value, say, through
“depression of wages”, during the 17th century so that a part of the labour time could remain unpaid for. Quite obviously in the absence of the exercise of non-economic coercion by the merchants, this was not possible so long as the tools of production were retained by the artisan, working within the domestic system. Since the tools were simple and cheap to be made or purchased and no technological breakthrough was achieved rendering them costlier, beyond the means of an average artisan, the latter was not alienated from them. Here we may recall the observation of Marx: “The process, therefore, that clears the way for the capitalist system, can be none other than the process which takes away from the labourer the possession of his means of production; a process that transforms, on the one hand, the social means of subsistence and of production into capital; on the other, the immediate producers into wage-labourers”.

However, we do not propose to hold that merchant capital did not exercise any influence on the organization of production. The putting-out system through which it operated did encroach on the “independent” status of the primary producer, transforming him into a “contract-worker”. It also cut him off from the market – a process which was inherent in the system itself. Again, the sporadic examples of karkhanas maintained and the dyeing and refining “houses” erected by the foreign merchants in Gujarat and Bengal do indicate the direction of change during the later half of the 17th century. Yet these changes were not fundamental northern so widespread as to compel us to discover in them elements which could promote real capitalistic relations. After all these were changes within the existing mode of production, wherein merchant capital had a very feeble hold over the production process. Therefore, it will be incorrect to say that merchant capital “broke through the traditional bonds of production” in 17th century India; it had only nibbled a small part of it, of not much consequence.

It is pertinent to ask why merchant capital, operating through the putting-out system, failed to exercise any worthwhile control over labour. That the failure did not spring from a lack of its development has been examined by Irfan Habib. We have already suggested that the enlargement of demand and the flooding of the market with a large number of competitive buyers had put the primary producer in a favourable situation; the absence of any extraordinary economic compulsion or non-economic coercion left the artisan free to strike a deal with whomsoever he considered best. Another important reason was the coexistence of the independent artisan-level production with the putting-out system (which turned the artisan into a contract labourer) probably on a scale larger than the latter or at least on equal footing. Besides, territorial and occupational mobility of the artisan was yet another factor which often may have rescued him from falling into “economic bondage” or “dependence” as a result of his poverty, on which Chicherov lays so much stress. Finally, as we have shown above, the interests of the broker and merchant did not always coincide. The former tried to seize upon and opportunity to get some irregular income through underhand mechanism: his victims were both the producer and the merchant. Thus he did not always act in a manner which could promote the interest of merchant capital; rather he worked sometimes in collusion with the artisan. All this actually strengthens the opinion of Marx: “The independent and predominant development of capital as merchant’s capital is tantamount to the non-subjection of production to capital and hence to capital
developing on the basis of an alien social mode of production which is also independent of it. The independent development of merchant’s capital, therefore, stands in inverse proportion, to the general economic development of society”.

Perhaps it would not have been difficult for some merchants, especially for “broker-contractors” (middlemen merchants) who were in close proximity with the production-process, to evolve into manufacturing entrepreneurs: the examples of karkhanas maintained by the Mughal emperors, nobles and occasionally by the foreign companies should have served as models. But a mere change in the organization of production unaccompanied by basic changes in technology could not cut much ice.

PRE-CAPITALIST ECONOMIC FORMATIONS AND DIFFERENTIAL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY: A TENTATIVE HYPOTHESIS

Irfan Habib has contributed greatly to our understanding of pre-capitalist economic formations. His magnum opus, ‘The Agrarian System of Mughal India’, is a towering landmark in the Marxist historiography of pre-capitalist India. More generally, it is a classic in the writing of Marxist history anywhere. His collection of papers, Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception (1995), the most recent of which was published in 1988, reveals the penetrating insights he provided into both pre-colonial India in the quarter century after the publication of that great work. In a succession of papers, he extends our knowledge and deepens our understanding of the ‘economic law of motion’ of pre-capitalist India, both before and after the intrusion of colonialism. He, and those other outstanding Marxist historians of pre-colonial India, D.D. Kosambi and R.S. Sharma, have left us much in their debt.

We address an aspect of a theme that has attracted the powerful attention of Irfan Habib. That theme is agricultural productivity; and my concern is land productivity (output per unit of land), in particular pre-capitalist economic formations. The aspect that we wish to explore is that of differential agricultural productivity by class, i.e. the possibility of an inverse relationship between land productivity and size of holding in such formations; with size of holding seen as a proxy for class. That has not attracted Habib’s attention. Whether particular kinds of holding have been more productive than others has exercised a fascination and generated controversy with respect to many different epochs and land systems; in the Roman Empire, latifundia versus peasant holdings; in European feudalism, demesne land versus peasant holdings; under capitalism, large capitalist holdings versus small, or capitalist holdings versus non-capitalist; and, within peasant agriculture, rich versus poor peasants. That fascination has usually translated into a comparison of size, although size per se is hardly ever the essential issue. Size is usually a proxy for something else. That may be different systems of agriculture, with their differing relations of production (class relationships), say latifundia, or demesne or capitalist agriculture, vis-à-vis peasant agriculture; or, where comparisons within peasant holdings are made, on a basis of size, it is a proxy for class. The inverse relationship debate in post – 1947 India is simply the most recent
manifestation of such a fascination, albeit the most thorough and comprehensive of all controversies in pursuit of that fascination.

We can suggest a hypothesis that may help link three disparate and historically distinct levels, or discourses: Irfan Habib’s magisterial treatment of pre-colonial India, the agrarian history of colonial India, and the inverse relationship debate that has preoccupied economists in post-1947 India. We can take as a central point of reference Irfan Habib’s essay, ‘The Peasant in Indian History’. In so proceeding, and in pursuit of a comparative perspective, we will draw briefly upon a recent essay by another remarkable Marxist historian – of Europe – Robert Brenner; his ‘Property Relations and the Growth of Agricultural Productivity in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe’. If the titles of these essays are not strictly interchangeable, they are close to being so. Much, if not all, of what Habib writes, in a paper of awesome historical sweep, a veritable tour de force – taking us from 6,500 BC and the pre-history of settled agriculture in India to the middle of the eighteenth century and the end of the Indian medieval period, the eve of colonial conquest – might be subsumed under the rubric, ‘Property Relations and Agricultural Productivity in Pre-modern India’. Equally, much of the Brenner paper might be captured by the title, “The Peasant in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe”.

There are two powerfully recurring themes in Habib’s essay that relate to my theme. The first is the development of the productive forces in agriculture: the course of agricultural technology, and the ultimate technical endowment of Mughal agriculture. The second is peasant differentiation, and the impact upon a differentiated peasantry or relations of appropriation: and especially the impact of taxation by the Mughal state. We will do so without venturing into any of the areas of dispute that, inevitably, exist among scholars of Mughal India, and that Irfan Habib enters in characteristically courteous and measured fashion, and always learnedly and firmly (often, indeed, in disagreement with other Marxist scholars). Our aim is to suggest how, if one accepts Habib’s reading of the relevant evidence, that reading might be related to a possible inverse relationship. This will entail a careful treatment of Habib’s conclusions.

The suggested articulation of technical change, surplus appropriation and peasant differentiation – of the forces of production and the relations of appropriation and production – We will suggest, makes an inverse relationship likely. The debate on the inverse relationship to which is one of the many in debates conducted largely in the pages of The Economic Weekly and the Economic and Political Weekly. An elegant paper by Amartya Sen initiated that debate in 1962, and, nearly four decades later, the debate is not yet spent. But even before Sen, the possibility of an inverse relationship had attracted the tan of, for example, the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee (All-India Congress Committee, 1949), and of Charan Singh (1947; Charan Singh would return to it after the Sen article had been published (1964). If, immediately after Independence, an inverse relationship existed in Indian agriculture, then it must have existed in the final stages of the colonial era. We can suggest that it must have existed throughout the colonial period.

The inverse relationship is nowhere mentioned in the scholarly literature on either Mughal India or British India. It is ironic that while historians of the country in which by
far the most extensive and the highest-quality debate on the inverse relationship has taken place have ignored the inverse relationship, a recent much-praised economic historian of enclosures in England, Robert C. Allen, has noted it and fruitfully raised questions prompted by it. It is, perhaps, especially surprising that no discussion of the inverse relationship has taken place with respect to colonial India, since it clearly existed in Indian agriculture at the end of the colonial era. We hope to persuade economic historians of Mughal India and colonial India that it might be illuminating to extend the Indian debate backwards to those eras, just as Allen did for England. In so doing, economic historians of India might render a double service. They might, firstly, cast light upon the implications of the particular set of forces of production and relations of production and appropriation that existed in the countryside of Mughal and of colonial India. The, secondly, the one important weakness, one might suggest, of the inverse relationship debate has been the absence of an adequate historical dimension. Perhaps historians of Mughal and colonial India might now rectify that. To that extent, past and present might usefully commingle: with the present suggesting a powerful hypothesis for the past, and the past giving a contemporary debate some historical content and meaning.

Our general concern is with the ‘moment’ at which the forces and relations of production interact to make likely a transition to capitalism in the countryside; with the conditions that sustain that likelihood, and with the influences that might prevent it. That theme is implicit in ‘The Peasant in Indian History’, while Habib had addressed it explicitly, earlier, in his ‘Potentialities of Capitalistic Development in the Economy of Mughal India’. We may note that such a transition, were it successful, would, in the course of its realization, be neither brief northern smooth; its gestation period, in the ‘womb of the old order’, would be prolonged; and the outcome would be uncertain and subject to false alarms. Whatever the primum mobile that drives transition, such a transition requires, and will be defined by, a variety of ‘systemic’ or structural changes. One such change relates to a dramatic increase in agricultural productivity, both the productivity of the land (output per unit of land) and labour productivity (output per person), as well as the productivity of seeds (the seed/yield ratio, to which Habib draws our attention). A second related change is the breakdown of the inverse relationship that is likely to be a characteristic of pre-capitalist economic formations. It is the likelihood of such an inverse relationship in pre-capitalist economic formations that is my focus here.

A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE AND SOME HYPOTHESES:

Pre-capitalist Europe and Certain Analytical Propositions

We start by giving some comparative perspective, with the aim of suggesting certain analytical propositions that may be relevant to Mughal India and colonial India – and, indeed, post-1947 India. Nevertheless, the exposition may serve a useful analytical function. To begin, then, with medieval England, in the thirteenth century, during the full flowering of English feudalism, and proceed from a fairly high level of generality to a rather lower one. That first level of generality is a comparison of likely yields on demesne land by comparison with peasant land. The second level is that of comparative yields
within the peasantry. It has been suggested that ‘it is unfortunately not possible, and never will be, to calculate yields of peasant holdings, simply because no documents exist enabling us to do so’. This notwithstanding, there has been some speculation among historians of medieval England as to whether land productivity was higher on demesne land or on peasant land. There are those who argue that output per acre must have been higher on the former. As Fussell observes succinctly: ‘this is mostly supposition’. It may, nevertheless, be correct. But is it? What are the circumstances that might determine the outcome?

Postan, one of the most eminent and imaginative economic historians of medieval English agriculture, and the most articulate of those who argue thus: In view of what we.... know about the shortage of village pastures and livestock and what we can guess about the lower quality of their land, we would not expect their [villagers’] output per acre to equal that of a well-managed demesne in the same locality. On the few thirteenth-century manorial demesnes still ploughed and sown by compulsory labour services the work may have been inefficiently organized and grudgingly performed; and the lord’s yields may have suffered accordingly. On some manors demesne fields lay interspersed with the tenants’ strips and were cultivated by tenants’ ploughs and even sown with tenants’ seeds: their yield must also have been as low as that of peasant acres. But on many demesnes in the thirteenth century fields were ploughed and sown by permanent manorial servants; and demesne fields frequently lay apart from the villagers’ holdings and were cultivated separately from them. On these demesnes the higher quality of the lord’s land, his superior command over capital, equipment, pastures and folds, was bound to tell, and his yields were bound to be higher. Therefore according to Postan, on some manorial demesnes – the tiny minority using compulsory labour services and those among the majority that were less well-managed – yields must have been as low as on peasant land; while demesne yields must have been higher on ‘well-managed demesne’ land. Granting the second of these suppositions, the question arises of what proportion of demesne land came into the category ‘well-managed’. It is by no means clear that it was the preponderance of such land. But even on such land one may express doubts. There would appear to be a certain plausibility in the argument: in the postulated superior management, higher quality of land, better access to capital, and ‘superior command over equipment’ on at least some demesne land. Peasant land, moreover, worked under the disadvantage of inadequate pastures, and, very important, a subsequent smaller supply of manure per acre. But is Postan necessarily correct, even for ‘well-managed’ demesne land?

Let we suggest another possibility, which seems equally plausible, and which, on reflection, may be more so. That possibility hinges upon the operation of two crucial elements: surplus appropriation and technology. If the proposition emerges as doubtful for ‘well-managed’ demesne land, then it must be a fortiori so for land that is not ‘well-managed’. We may assume, first, that, in the absence of surplus appropriation (i.e. with owner – cultivators unburdened by taxation), and with the given technology and holding sizes, most peasants would have been able to secure acceptable levels of subsistence, by applying family labour up to a point well before the marginal product of such labour was zero. But surplus appropriation did exist. If, with the given technology and holding
sizes, surplus appropriation had been sufficiently heavy to make it difficult for peasants (the great majority of peasants) to achieve tolerable levels of subsistence, then, in the absence of any other means of raising income, they may well have applied labour very intensively on their ‘peasant acres’ to achieve that end. As Postan stress, ‘he [the peasant] was certainly not short of manpower’. Other possibilities, indeed, were few: whether work as wage labour either in agriculture or other activities, or pursuit of domestic manufacture. The impulse towards applying peasant labour, whose opportunity cost was close to zero, on peasant land, until its marginal product approached zero, would have been very strong. Thus, with a given technology, would output, and, therefore, income maximized on peasant land.

Clearly, where heavy labour rent existed peasants would have been powerfully constrained in this respect; quite simply because of their labour being substantively preempted for use on demesne land. But Postan is at pains to stress how rare this was in thirteenth-century England. Such heavy application of labour on peasant plots, then, may have compensated for the advantages which the supposedly ‘better managed’ demesnes had. But it may have done more than simply compensate. How? That would depend on the existing technology and access to the technology. If, further, differences in the technology used were not significant, i.e. if there were no qualitative differences, villagers (i.e. peasants) may have secured yields as high as, or higher than, those achieved on better-managed demesne land. Postan, as we have seen, suggests ‘superior command over capital, equipment, pastures and folds’. He, further, implies more dung per acre on demesne land (because of superior access to pastures). But did the ‘superior command’ amount to qualitative differences in technology that would have given the demesne land a significant advantage?

That seems doubtful; we suggest that Postan himself presents enough evidence/argument to allow another possibility? Postan notes the technical stagnation of the 12th, 13th and most of the 14th centuries. He tells us that ‘methods and implements changed very slowly’: that there had been change at the very beginning of the medieval era (at the time of the Anglo-Saxon settlement) and then stagnation until the later middle ages. The essential change, at the very outset, was the introduction of the heavy plough, the carruca, with an iron share and requiring a large ox team. So what would the ‘superior command’ have amounted to with respect to technology? It would seem that the one significant difference would have been ‘bigger and better ploughs’; that allied to, perhaps, bigger and better animals, and more animals, relatively (this suggesting more dung per acre). The question is whether the heavier application of labour per acre might have outweighed this advantage. It may well have done. It was not, indeed, that peasant land lacked the application of the carruca, with its need for a team of 6, 8 or 10 oxen; this being achieved by ‘several families working together’. But not only that, if we are seeking to establish relative performance with respect to output per acre, then we must also note that peasants, as well as their strips in the open fields, commonly worked ‘small pieces of land adjoining the peasant houses’. Postan notes: ‘We know very little about the crops grown on them and the ways in which they were managed, but judging from contemporary testimony of continental villages it seems highly probable that [these]……were cultivated very intensively…..[and were] lavishly manured’. Here,
indeed, may have been the most significant site of heavy, peasant labour — intensity. Yet Postan appears not to consider this, possibly very significant, contribution to output per acre on peasant land. An illuminating analogy is with private plots on collectivized agriculture, in, for example, the Soviet Union and China: upon which peasants lavished their labour and to which they diverted manure (in China, vast amounts of pig manure). The outcome was very high yields period unit of land. The figures are, indeed, quite startling. It has been estimated that in 1939 in the Soviet Union, while some 4 per cent (or rather less) of the sown area was devoted to such plots, an astonishing 45% of total farm output and 20% of all marketed food supplies came from them. Even if there is some exaggeration here, and even if medieval garden plots did not contribute so markedly to total agricultural output, the likely contribution of these plots may have been substantial.

Postan may be wrong in his positing higher yields on demesne land (or some demesne land). It seems to us that, in the absence of data, the hypothesis which we have suggested with respect to differential yields has as much warrant as that put forward by Postan. One notes, indeed, Postan’s own argument that even where peasants were subject to compulsory labour services the outcome with respect to relative yields is at best ambiguous, because of the work on the demesne being ‘inefficiently organized and grudgingly performed’. A hypothesis suggesting higher yields on peasant land, the, continues to have some credence, even where heavy labour rent existed.

The foregoing assumes that yields on all ‘peasant land’ were, ‘in the same locality’, more or less uniform. It assumes, indeed, an undifferentiated peasantry was differentiated: with size of holding, in a particular area where particular crops were grown, a good proxy for class (poor peasants would have had relatively small holdings and rich relatively large). The classic treatment of such differentiation among the English peasantry in the thirteenth century is surely, still, that of Kosminsky; while Hilton provides a brief but cogent treatment of European peasants more generally, but including the English peasantry. So far as we know, there has been no speculation on whether there was an inverse relationship within a peasantry that was clearly differentiated. There may well have been: where all peasants were using more or less the same technology; but where poor peasants were subject to greater pressures of surplus appropriation than rich peasants, and would have found it especially difficult to meet their subsistence needs on their relatively small holdings. We are again in the realm of supposition: of a possibly untestable hypothesis. But it does seem to be a plausible one.

Brenner has recently brought this issue to the surface. Postan’s argument relates to England. With Brenner the level of generalization rises. He is concerned with Europe; with European feudalism, and not with any specific country, although he does draw heavily on English evidence. Let us turn to the European experience, as depicted by Brenner. We need to exercise care, however, in distinguishing those feudalisms where labour rent was common and heavy, and English feudalism, where, as we have seen, it was not. Brenner is both cogent and plausible in his depiction — up to a point. He argues that those technical changes ‘that would constitute “the new husbandry” or the “agricultural revolution”’ [were] apparently well-known in several parts of Europe in the
medieval epoch’. The ‘medieval epoch’, of course, covers a very broad stretch of time. It is unlikely, indeed, that Brenner’s observation would have held in thirteenth-century England. We would suggest that these techniques must have been fairly uniform; or, at least, that there were no significant differences in technology. Brenner postulates that feudal lords in Europe had no incentive to reinvest their surpluses in those new techniques (whenever they were known): given their dependence on the labour of peasants ‘to work their estates under coercive pressure’; and their inability to find a means of ensuring that peasants ‘make effective use of advanced means of production that lords might provide’; and given that they ‘found the supervisory costs of securing satisfactory work too high to justify much agricultural investment or innovation’. Here, clearly, he has in mind the heavy labour rent situation.

In this instance there was no likelihood of superior yields on demesne land on the grounds of superior techniques. If such an avenue for increased income were blocked, an alternative that was indeed reached for, was ‘increased squeezing of the peasantry’. The ‘growing weight of lordly exactions of peasant agriculture’ meant that it became increasingly difficult for a large proportion of the peasantry ‘to provide fully for their subsistence’. Clearly one survival strategy would be for peasants to inundate their plots with family labour: to apply the maximum amount of labour per acre, and so maximize output per acre and therefore total output. We have no date to support this, but it seems a plausible hypothesis. But what of English agriculture? There is nothing to suggest in the thirteenth century any significant qualitative difference in the technology used on demesne land by comparison with peasant land. If further we may postulate heavy exactions upon peasants, then again with intense application of labour on peasant land, output per acre may well have been higher on peasant than on demesne land.

Let us turn more intently to the peasantry. It is pointed to the existence of a differentiated peasantry in medieval England. The same was true of other parts of Europe. It is a curious feature of the Brenner exposition that he has surprisingly little to say about this for the medieval era. This is the point up to which he is plausible. When stressing the importance of differentiation, he focuses upon the 16th century, and tells us that ‘with the generalization of competitive pressures and with the end of subdivision, there ensued a classical process of social differentiation leading to the rise of a class of substantial commercial farmers’. That is surely so, and was crucial to the development of capitalist agriculture in England. But, equally surely, its roots lay in prior differentiation, and cannot be adequately grasped without reference to that prior differentiation. In a happy formulation, the French Marxist historian Albert Soboul, pointing to the existence of a differentiated peasantry and with possibilities for capitalist transformation in mind, says of the French peasantry at the end of the old regime that the differences that existed within it were quantitative rather than qualitative; in the sense that they ‘did not entail a modification of the relations of production’. We have, then, a second quantitative/qualitative distinction. It seems clear that such differentiation existed in England along before the 16th century, and, indeed, throughout feudal Europe; and that it provided, in England, the basis for the subsequent ‘classical process of social differentiation’ to which Brenner refers. What, then, of that differentiated peasantry, pace Robert Brenner?
He resists, perfectly properly, the idea of any innate conservatism among peasants. The evidence does not support that. It is not, he says, that 'peasants were resistant to technological change per se. For example, over the course of the medieval period European peasants adopted progressively larger and better ploughs.' It should not be left at that, however. It was, surely, within the peasantry, richer peasants with larger holdings that must have adopted such ploughs. It would have been beyond the means of poorer peasants to do so. Even such richer peasants, however, resisted 'the high degree of specialization and market dependence......entailed' in the technical improvements that were part and parcel of the 'new husbandry'/farm revolution'. So, then, we may suggest, there was no marked qualitative difference in the means or instruments of production used by different strata of the peasantry. That being so, and if we can further suggest that lordly imposts fell far more heavily on the mass of poor peasants than on richer peasants, then we have the conditions necessary for an inverse relationship within the peasantry of medieval Europe. Brenner, further, makes a critical distinction when he argues that an important condition exists for the final emergence of capitalist agriculture: It is only where the direct producers are not just involved in the market (participate in trade) but are also dependent upon it for their economic inputs – thus required to sell successfully in order to survive and thereby made subject to competition in production to maintain and improve their position – that they can be counted onto find it in their interest and necessary to adopt the Smithian rule for reproduction of maximizing their price – cost ratio by specializing, accumulating and innovating. That, of course, requires further conditions, which we cannot discuss here. Clearly, however, such dependence did not exist in medieval Europe. It was established first in England, in the 16th century. One might generalize the foregoing argument into a proposition about all pre-capitalist economic formations and a proposition about the transition to capitalism.

The first proposition is that a defining characteristic of pre-capitalist formations is that although they may experience certain kinds of, perhaps significant, agricultural technical change, there is a limit set by the existing relations of production: by existing property relations, defined in terms of surplus appropriation. That being so, and given maximum appropriation by dominant classes (via rent, tax, interest and unequal exchange), and a differentiated peasantry, the pressure upon the bottom layers of the peasantry and their desperate struggle to survive will be such as to generate particular 'survival strategies'. We may next assume that size of holding is a good proxy for class in such pre-capitalist formations. One crucial strategy will be to intensify labour application per acre, in order to maximize output per unit of land. Although richer peasants and bigger farmers, working their larger holdings, may have access to superior instruments of production (rather better animals, better ploughs, etc) it is likely that the intense application of labour by poor peasants will show up in an inverse relationship between size of holding and output per unit of land. This is a likely pervasive phenomenon in pre-capitalist formations of the kind considered, which may persist over long stretches of time.

The second proposition is that if capitalist relations are to emerge in the countryside this will require unprecedented technical change: a technical revolution,
embracing a new, powerful technology. Such a technology may have both biochemical and mechanical manifestations. Such a technology will be commoditised in a way that previous technologies were not. Both components will be commoditised. We move from market involvement to market dependence. It will have to be bought on the market, in both its forms, and it may, initially, be expensive and beyond the means of poorer peasants. Larger farmers, therefore – capitalist or proto-capitalist farmers – will have unequal access to it. Its superior productiveness is likely to eliminate whatever ‘advantage’ poorer peasants had through intensive application of labour in application that has probably been carried to its limit, within the old technology. That being so; the inverse relationship will break down. If, further, the mechanical components have clear economies of scale associated with them, then even if poorer peasants were to gain access to them, a clear advantage would remain with the larger farmers, which continuing intensive application of labour, along with the new technology, could not compensate for. The inverse relationship is unlikely to reappear. But, even if it did, a transitional period would be likely to be characterized by its disappearance. Let us now turn to India.

**MUGHAL INDIA:**

**Productive Forces and the Course of Agricultural Technology till the Mid-18th Century**

Let us start with the course of agricultural technology in India up to the middle of the 18th century, as represented by Habib on the basis of a careful assessment of the available evidence. He considers the ‘pre-history’ of settled agriculture during the period 6,500 to 4,500 BC, but starts in earnest with the agricultural revolution and the first urban revolution in India during the Indus (Harappan) civilization (c. 2600-1800 BC). That urban revolution was based on a surplus appropriated from agriculture. The ox had been converted to a draught animal, to pull the bullock cart, and evidence of ploughed furrow has been discovered. During that era, place Kosambi ‘The fabric of Indus agriculture rested…….on plough cultivation’. Indus agriculture was widely spread, in the north-western plains and into Gujarat. Wheat, barley, rice, bajra millet, pulses, sesame, oil seeds, and, most remarkably, cotton (ushering in the ‘industrial’ crops), were grown. Settled agriculture was well and truly established. The Indus culture is well-known for giving India its first cities – in Harappa and Mohenjodaro. As important, it gave India its first peasantry. The Indus (Harappan) urban civilization would have been impossible without a peasantry and the surplus it produced. Habib, prior to this part of his treatment, has been at pains to define a peasant as a person who undertakes agriculture on his own, working with his own implements and using family labour. He has also emphasized that peasantries are seldom homogeneous: almost always, and even at their birth, they display stratification/differentiation. He identifies clearly the criteria by which one might classify such differentiation; while stressing, too, the likely importance of a class of landless labourers.

The Aryans took over the Indus culture from about 1500 BC onwards, and the Vedic period (1500 BC – 600 BC), as seen in glimpses in the Rigveda, was characterized by Chalcolithic technology (i.e. the concurrent use of stone along with copper or bronze implements) and continuing use of the plough; barley being the chief foodgrain, and
with rice grown. But wheat, cotton, and the other crops of Indus culture are not mentioned. Dyke-based agriculture, based upon a system of seasonal dams that allowed the retention of silt, was treated with scorn. Cities disappeared and pastoralism became dominant. But a surplus still came from peasants. During this period there was clearing of extensive tracts of the Gangetic basin. In northern India, there was an immense acceleration of change from c. 500 BC to about the beginning of the Christian era: ‘which universalized peasant production and also simultaneously created a caste-divided peasantry’. We return to the relations of production. As far as the productive forces were concerned, two factors were instrumental in this universalizing of peasant production. The first was iron, which ‘democratises agriculture’ (Gordon Childe), as iron became plentiful and cheap, and iron ploughshares and iron axes became common. Any peasant could now afford an iron axe to clear fresh land and an iron ploughshare to plough with. Secondly, there was a growing multiplicity of crops – sugar, cotton, indigo, as the growth of urban markets, through the rise of towns, stimulated industrial crops. New methods of production were introduced: including rice transplantation, possibly. More intensive and more skilled labour was required. Habib takes southern India separately, because there was an independent line of development down to the Mauryan conquests (in the 3rd century BC). But there is no evidence of technical stagnation. The plough was in use in the south in the 2nd millennium BC, with a basically Neolithic culture. Ragi millet, wheat, horse gram, and green gram were grown; and rice and bajra millet began to be cultivated after the coming of iron c. 1000 BC. Habib argues that ‘Agriculture of this kind implied the existence of a peasantry from the late Neolithic times’. There was a large pastoral sector.

If we consider, next, the first 1000 years after the birth of Christ, the record, argues Habib, is of some technical advance. The Kosambi thesis of stagnant technology and declining agricultural productivity (presumably in the sense of declining output per acre) and the Stein thesis for the South of constant technology are denied. The evidence adduced is that of the introduction of bajra (the bulrush millet), and the great millet (jowar), these reinforcing kharif cropping in the dry zone of the north-west; of fine varieties of cotton and the coconut; the development of tank and bund irrigation, which ‘must have greatly extended cultivation and improved cropping’; and, very important, the use of cattle power for continuous rotary motion. Habib concludes: ‘Agriculture, then, did not remain stable during the first thousand years after Christ; and over this long span productivity probably increased considerably’. There was technical advance, and an increase in productivity (presumably both land productivity and labour productivity, and perhaps, also, the seed/yield ratio), consistent with dominant existing relations of production – i.e. peasant production. That technical advance, far from subverting those relations of production, reinforced them.

We come, finally, to the Indian medieval period. Which Habib dates from roughly the beginning of the 13th century to the middle of the 18th century, ‘the eve of the British conquests’. He concludes, after a judicious consideration of the evidence, that the progress of agricultural technology did not constitute a process calculated ‘to disturb the social structure of the village’. There were some improvements in agricultural tools and methods (brought through the gates opened by Islam): for example, improvements in
the water wheel (the development of the geared wheel), cementing lime which was important for indigo (water-proof indigo vats), liquor distillation, sericulture, new crops such as maize and tobacco, improvements in orange growing. But while such changes dispel the myth of a ‘static agriculture’ they ‘would not amount even remotely to a technological revolution’. This, then, was the technical state of the ‘agrarian system’ that the conquering colonial power confronted. In his paper, ‘Potentialities of Capitalistic Development’, he argues plausibly that in the 17th century ‘it is.....very likely that in per capita agricultural productivity Mughal India was not in any way backward when compared with other contemporary societies, including those in western Europe’. That, presumably, would hold for the end of the medieval period. He also argues that it was likely ‘that the seed/yield ratio in such crops as wheat was generally higher in India than in western Europe before the 19th century’. It seems likely, one might further suggest, that there were no significant differences output per acre. What would have happened in the absence of colonialism we cannot possibly tell. What did happen, we will consider presently. But while, as Habib argues, we need to put to rest ‘the myth of static agriculture’, we need also to note his insistence that there was nothing like a technical revolution in evidence. There is nothing here to suggest any dynamic role, at the level of the productive forces that might have been associated with a capitalist transformation. There was no obvious contradiction between the forces and relations of production in Mughal India. The existing relations of production ‘contributed to the extension and reinforcement of peasant agriculture not to its subversion or transformation’. No pressure upon the existing social relations came from this source.

The Relations of Production and Appropriation and Differentiation of the Peasantry until the Mid-18th Century

Turning to those relations of production, in the era of the Indus (Harappan) civilization, as we have seen, India’s first peasantry came into being – a surplus-producing peasantry that made possible an urban civilization. Habib postulates that control over bronze ‘could give a small town-based class an effective sway over a mass of stone-tool-using peasantry’. That might be taken to imply a clearly differentiated society, or social formation, in the broad sense, but a non-differentiated peasantry. Yet he has already insisted that, wherever there are peasants, ‘consideration of the extent of use of hired labour and control over land.....[indicates that] peasants seem to fall into different strata’. It seems likely that the existing archaeological evidence has nothing to tell us on this; or, indeed, on the mode of surplus appropriation, since Habib is silent on both. Yet where access to the means of production (including land) is important, and where surplus is being appropriated, a thoroughly egalitarian peasant society seems unlikely. The earlier Vedic period is also shrouded in some mystery, in the absence of useful evidence. Yet a surplus-producing peasantry remained and Habib points to the existence of ‘free’ peasants belonging to the superior tribes, but a larger population of subjugated peasants ‘compelled to part with grain and cattle’. It was ‘a class-divided society.....[within which there was] a deep division of the peasantry into its free vis and the servile dasyus’. In the late Vedic era and into the early Maurya period (i.e. between the 7th and 4th centuries BC), when significant forest clearance was under way, there is
evidence of 6-, 8-or 12-ox ploughs, which suggests ‘masters working with servile labourers’. There is evidence, also, of large, private landowners having their land cultivated by slaves or day labourers; of ‘cattle magnates’ owning as many as 30,000 head of cattle, with as many as 1,250 ‘slaves and hirelings’ under one magnate; and of the ruler having his own land worked by slaves, wage-earners and convicts, and leasing some of it out to sharecroppers. By 500 BC ‘the long period of agricultural penetration eastward had created a complex social formation marked by peasant communities created within tribes, interspersed with settlements of servile or semi-servile labourers working under landowning masters, while hunting groups enjoyed a fresh though passing economic importance. By that time, too, the tax-levying powers of the king had become considerable, with a levy in grain imposed exclusively upon peasants: a levy so great that the king was referred to as ‘the devourer of peasants’.

The stage was set for ‘a transition – a long transition certainly, but one leading ultimately to a quite different structure of social and economic relations’. We have already referred to the universalization of peasant production and the formation of a caste peasantry, posited by Habib as the major features of the 500 years following the middle of the 1st millennium BC. The technical changes noted above required close decisions on a basis of knowledge of soil and crop. It now became more convenient, and presumably more profitable, to lease out the land rather than till it under direct management (although exceptions were found). So it was that extensive agriculture controlled by the ‘magnates’, i.e. direct cultivation by large landholders, became obsolete. Only peasant agriculture could have the capacities now in demand. A greater efficiency of peasant agriculture was established, presumably showing up in rising productivity; higher per capita output, higher land yields, and higher seed-yield ratios. Once that greater efficiency of peasant agriculture was secured, the pressures of surplus extraction grew, via either tax or ‘rent’: in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, and in the Mauryan empire. That reinforced agriculture’s expansion. Tribes were replaced by jatis, and a large number of peasant jatis emerged. There emerged, too, the menial castes, ‘the ancestors of the later untouchables, [who formed] an ostracized proletariat that was henceforth to remain a specific feature of the Indian social order’. With this universalization of peasant agriculture it seems clear that the stratification/differentiation postulated by Habib to be characteristic of peasantries must have emerged, although he does not here provide any evidence. Such differentiation was likely to have manifested itself according to the criteria he identifies at the outset of his essay on ‘The Peasant in Indian History’: in terms of hired labour and control over land, with some, those with the largest holdings, using hired labour quite extensively, some using only family labour, and some with holdings too small to absorb all their family labour or to enable survival; in terms of property relations, with peasant proprietors, peasants with claims to long-term occupancy, and sharecroppers without security of tenure; or in terms of wealth, with ‘ownership of more expensive and productive devices, better cattle, more fertile land’ at one extreme, and very limited access to the means of production at the other. The extent and precise forms taken by such differentiation we do not know. That it existed at this period seems a plausible working hypothesis.
Of the 1st millennium after Christ he insists that: ‘None of the improvements [in the productive forces] were, however, of a nature to subvert peasant production; on the contrary some tended to make agrarian slave labour superfluous’. There was a completion of the great divide between the peasantry and landless labour. There was need for a constant reserve of accessible labour, and this was met through the creation of a proletariat our of food-gatherers. There was severe repression of manual labourers by peasants, and peasants themselves were sorely repressed. Habib confidently points to the existence in this era of considerable stratification within the peasantry and ‘the sub-exploitation of peasant by peasant in the ancient Indian countryside’:manifested in large numbers of sharecroppers who worked in the fields of others; a class of possible serfs; and an upper stratum, able ‘to domineer over the rest’, employing wage labourers and accumulating some wealth. There were ‘peasants with seed, reserves of grain, cattle, even possibly slaves, and others bereft of these’. Villages were dominated by ‘The Great Men of the Village’; a phrase that recurs throughout India and these would often be rich peasants. In brahmana villages, they might otherwise be ‘non-peasant landowners’; although even in such villages, presumably, peasant differentiation would exist – although perhaps less markedly than in non-brahmana villages. In his treatment of ‘the medieval peasantry’, Habib, having denied any technological revolution, takes an equally firm’s stance on production relations: ‘Northern did the fundamental social relationships within the village undergo any visible change’. But if essential social relationships in the countryside did not change, ‘the surroundings in which the structures stood’ did. He notes a fundamental shift ‘in the nature of the ruling class and the pattern of distribution of the surplus, which, by its effects on the conditions of the life of the peasantry, provides the justification for demarcating the medieval from the ancient’. He identifies the ‘urban orientation of Islam’ and the possibly connected considerable growth of commerce and craft production all over west and central Asia: this accompanied by the formation of large polities unified under a strong despotism. In India, there was a crucial shift in favour of town against country and significant urban growth which rested significantly on surplus extracted from the countryside via the land tax. This crucial land tax (kharaj or mal) came into its own with Alauddin Khalji (1296 – 1316). Half the produce was taken by application of an estimated crop rate on measured land, and ‘approaching the limits of economic rent’. The burden was probably the same as that borne previously, but now it was expressed in one single claim.

There were, in fact, two distinct modes whereby surplus was extracted from the countryside in medieval India. The first was via intermediaries, in zamindari areas. The second was more direct, in peasant-held (raiyyati) areas. In both kinds of village there was significant peasant differentiation. In the zamindari areas, the new ‘centralization expressed itself pre-eminently in the organization of transferable territorial revenue assignments… a system borrowed entirely in its fundamentals from the Islamic world’. This had crucial implications. It prevented the formation of a permanent hereditary class of notables; and implied concentration of nobles and troops in towns, whence they exercised control over rural territories ‘within which they themselves possessed no independent or customary ties’. The new appropriators, indeed, were different in class terms from the old. The bulk of the surplus was now claimed for the king and his
assignees. The fiscal claims of the previous aristocracy were not permitted. It was a tax assessed, in theory, on each name-by-name; a claim, indeed, on the peasant’s person. The peasant, therefore, was bound to the village. If there was failure to pay the tax, peasants were subject to raids and possible enslavement. It was the tax-gatherers who would receive ‘the universal designation zamindars in the Mughal empire’. They would retain between 10 per cent (in northern India) and 25% (in Gujarat) of what they gathered and in practice had the right to impose other levies. There was, then, a triangular relationship between peasantry, zamindars and the ruling class. In the raiyati areas, it was the muqaddam, or village headman, who would come from the ranks of the richer peasants (in peasantries which are clearly differentiated) – and who would use the headship as ‘an instrument for establishing their domination over the rest of their brethren’ – who was held responsible for paying the revenue assessed on the village. He would be remunerated either by being assigned 2.5% of the assessed land of the village, to be held free of revenue, or being given 2.5% of the revenue which he collected.

In both kinds of village processes of differentiation were hastened and intensified in this period. Habib observes that peasant production almost always implies stratification, and that because of the need for capital ‘in the form of seed, a pair of oxen, tools and implements’; while in multi-caste villages caste reinforced stratification. Habib argues that the heavier land-tax intensified stratification, because, firstly, it was by its very nature a regressive tax; and, secondly, notwithstanding the person-by-person assessment, the burden was pushed disproportionately further on to the poor by the ‘great men of the village’. Then, thirdly, the land tax was almost always taken in cash, even where the tax was fixed in kind. It would be high-value crops (wheat, sugar cane, cotton, indigo) that would be sold to realize this cash. But only the richer peasants could have the resources to grow such crops. Poor peasants, therefore, were driven into the hands of the usurer. Here we have another turn in the differentiation screw. That differentiation, as told in a Persian manual on Mughal land-revenue of the early 19th century, and in other documents, took the form of a three-tier structure of ‘headman’, cultivating with wage labour, a mass of ordinary cultivators, and a class of wage labourers. We have stratification – increasing stratification – furthered by the land tax and ‘intensified……by commodity production’. A document from the late eighteenth century describes a village of thirty-eight peasants, two of whom are patels (village headmen) and clearly rich peasants, growing seven crops during the kharif season, including cotton, and presumably employing wage labourers, and ten of whom are poor peasants growing only one ‘coarse food crop’. We are not given information by Habib on the remaining twenty-six peasants, but are told that each of the two rich peasants in question cultivated more acreage than the ten poor peasants put together. Habib refers to the cultivation pursued by rich peasants of this kind as ‘superior cultivation’, which he distinguishes from ‘small-peasant cultivation’, observing that the costs per acre of the former would always be higher than those of the latter. One might assume that such ‘superior cultivation’ would have higher yields – higher output per acre – than ‘small peasant cultivation’ although Habib does not comment on this. The terminology propels one in that direction. But my argument so far has suggested caution in this respect.
There is then, a medieval peasantry subject to the dual explanation of ruling class (king and muqtis/jagirdars) and zamindar, and subject also to ‘an intensified pace of internal differentiation from fiscal and market factors’. Habib stresses: ‘the source of these twin developments was essentially external, namely the flow of the surplus to the towns forced by the medieval land tax’. For medieval peasants there was a recurring battle for survival, and recurring cycles of famine with massive mortality. The heaviest burden borne by the peasant was the land tax. This, therefore, was the source of all major social conflicts: ‘The land tax represented the principal contradiction; all other conflicts of interest seemed secondary’.

**MUGHAL INDIA : The Inverse Relationship Hypothesis**

We would now like to suggest a tentative central hypothesis, and some related hypotheses, that historians of Mughal India might find fruitful to test. We emboldened so to proceed by Irfan Habib’s providing a detailed treatment of Mughal India that makes this hypothesis seem plausible. At least, they would seem not to be inconsistent with his treatment. Habib has indicated the implications for the productivity of agriculture in general of agriculture’s technical endowment. We now pause to relate the particular set/sets of productive forces that Habib identifies to utilization by different strata of the differentiated peasantry/peasantries he distinguishes, and consider what this implies with respect to the productivity of individual strata of the peasantry, in particular, in land productivity: output per acre.

We stress that the categories ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ (and, if you like, ‘middle’) may in the given context be represented by the categories ‘large’ and ‘small’ (and ‘medium’): on the whole and generally, rich peasants have the largest holdings and poor peasants the smallest. That is to say, in the kind of agriculture we confront, size of holding is a good proxy for class. It is a good stratifying variable. That seems clearly to be Habib’s position. It appears to me to be a valid proposition for pre-capitalist agriculture of the kind we have here. It might be worth pursuing this, as a hypothesis, and considering it rigorously. Next, it is a characteristically pre-capitalist set of productive forces, in two senses, that are relevant: The first is that, if it is not the case in a precise literal sense that there are uniform techniques in use, we do have an approximation to that. There is no true qualitative difference among different kinds of biological inputs: there are no high-yielding as opposed to ‘traditional’ seeds – all cultivators use the same kind of seeds for particular crops; no inorganic as opposed to organic fertilizers – all cultivators use organic manures. The one substantial difference would be between simple, rain-fed agriculture and irrigated agriculture. Equally, there is no essential qualitative difference among mechanical inputs – all cultivators use animal-drawn ploughs, all harvest manually. Moreover, there are no obvious economies of scale associated with either biological inputs or mechanical, or any combination thereof. Secondly, and closely related to this, the means of production are not highly commoditised: they do not, to any significant extent, have to be bought on the market. There is not, then, a division between a non-commoditised set of ‘traditional’ inputs and a commoditised, more productive set. Following Brenner’s distinction (noted above), peasants were not dependent for their inputs upon the market. Again, one might pursue these propositions as hypotheses.
Any peasant who wishes to cultivate, one may say, must first have access to the available means of production: land (whether as owner or tenant), the various biological inputs (seed, manure, water) and the mechanical instruments of production (a plough, draught animals). Secondly, cultivation requires the application of labour, whether family labour or wage or of various degrees of freedom (or, indeed, slave labour or serf labour). There was, Habib stresses, pressure on all peasants to grow high-value crops: poor peasants were forced into this by the need to obtain cash to pay the land tax. But, he says, those poor peasants might not have had the resources to do so, thus being driven into the clutches of the usurer. In addition, at one extreme, rich peasants might own more expensive and more productive instruments of production, better cattle, and more fertile land; while poor peasants might have very limited access to the means of production at the other. There is involvement in the market among peasants (in this instance, compulsive involvement) – the commodity market as sellers – but this has not become dependence in any total sense. But is this inconsistent with an inverse relationship?

Poor peasants, extreme representative of ‘small-peasant cultivation’, would have had their surplus appropriated to the maximum extent possible: by the land tax, rent (often sharecropping rent), and usury. Their survival, the, would have depended on application to the maximum of the only resource they had freely available: family labour. The rich peasant, by contrast, the exponent of ‘superior cultivation’, could not have had labour so freely available – would have had to pay for heavy labour input; and, therefore, would not have applied labour so intensively. We may say that, in spite of richer peasants being better able to grow high-value crops and having access to superior means of production (although not to a qualitatively different set of productive forces), the heavy application of family labour on the smaller holdings may have resulted in a higher output per acre among poor peasants than among rich: that is to say, where size of holding is a good proxy for class, in an inverse relationship between holding size and land productivity. That is my central, tentative hypothesis. It is worth testing.

Finally, for so long as the foregoing holds there is another sense in which the quantitative / qualitative distinction is useful. Again, this might be pursued as a hypothesis. Following Soboul’s distinction (cited above), one may say that the very real, deep and abiding stratification/differentiation in the Mughal countryside is essentially quantitative inasmuch as it continuously reproduces itself over long stretches of time: perhaps deepening and widening, but maintaining more or less the same form. It would become qualitative only when it contained the possibilities of a true social transformation: a new set of universalized social relations. Capitalist transformation would be such a change. With it would come the breakdown of the inverse relationship. There is no evidence of such a possibility in Mughal India. Irfan Habib’s analytical power and formidable scholarship allow one to confront that problem in an informed way, even as one departs the certainties of that scholarship.
THE AGRARIAN SYSTEM OF BRITISH INDIA AND THE INVERSE RELATIONSHIP

If, on the eve of colonialism, Indian agriculture, although in no way backward by comparison with Western Europe, did not exhibit any technical dynamism, colonialism did not bring any significant advance. Habib suggests that ‘the agricultural technology in 1600 differed in no significant respects from what it was in 1900’: large-scale canal irrigation in the Indus basin and the upper Gangetic region, the railways, and certain new crops (maize, tea, coffee) notwithstanding. The outcome, in terms of per capita agricultural output, was dismal: ‘it would hardly be possible to consider per capita agricultural output as being lower in 1600 than in 1900’. Between 1900 and 1947 per capita agricultural output fell. It was probably lower in 1947 than in 1600. Clearly, the ‘agrarian system of British India’ could not be said to have shown any technical dynamism. Indeed, a 17th century peasant in Mughal India, had he experienced a vision of the countryside in 1947, would not have suffered from technological shock. He would, on this score, have felt perfectly at home. We know of no data would tell what proportion of India’s arable acreage was irrigated in the middle of the 18th century. The British, those indefatigable collectors of statistics, began to record irrigation figures in a complete way only in 1908–9) Government of India. At Independence, despite the much-vaunted irrigation introduced by the British (limited by and large to north-west India), more than 80% of the total cropped area did not have the benefit of irrigation. Biological inputs, other than water, were essentially ‘traditional’ and non-commoditised – traditional seed strains, manures rather than inorganic fertilizers, etc: for example, in 1947 less than 1% of the total arable acreage had inorganic fertilizers applied. Methods of production were similarly ‘traditional’: the ‘Japanese’ method of rice cultivation, for example, Mechanization was notable by its absence: it was essentially a plough-and-bullocks agriculture, with ‘country’ ploughs (ploughs with a wooden frame and an iron share), rather than iron ploughs (larger ploughs, with an iron frame and iron share, capable of deeper ploughing, and, of course, more expensive), vastly preponderant.

All in all, as in Mughal India, the individual items of the forces of production in use were largely non-commoditised. One might further say that there was no true qualitative difference in the techniques being used and no obvious economies of scale available. This, as with Mughal India, is important to my argument. Here was a distinctively pre-capitalist set of productive forces. There was no pressure from this source towards social transformation. We turn to the relations of production that were created in colonial India. By 1947, the dominant means of surplus appropriation in the countryside had long ceased to be the land tax. Northern, indeed, was it any form of taxation. Now surplus was appropriated, by dominant classes in the countryside from subordinate classes, predominantly via rent. Rent, however, was not the onyly form of exploitation. There was appropriation of an interest surplus and, to a certain extent, appropriation via the wage relationship. Moreover, if as in Mughal India, the means of production were largely non-commoditised, so as in Mughal India, peasant producers had surely been sucked into commodity circuits. If, further, as in Mughal India, while there was involvement in the market, that had not become, in any full sense, dependence,
nevertheless exploitation was further compounded by price relationships: poor peasants being forced, by their circumstances, to sell immediately after harvest, when prices were at their lowest, a ‘distress surplus’, often at less than market prices: buying back, later in the season at far higher prices. Northern did forms of exploitation exist independently of one another. Rather, they often existed as inter-linked modes of exploitation, that served to maximize exploitation: with consequent downward pressure on wages (where labour was supplied as part of an inter-linked agreement) and product prices (where disadvantageous prices, lower than market prices, might be agreed in advance), and upward pressure on interest rates (where borrowers might be tied to a single lender). Both poor peasants and landless labourers were subject to relentless pressures that drove them to the barest form of existence.

The relations of production that obtained in the Indian countryside by the end of the colonial era were those of a pre-capitalist mode of production. At their apex stood a landlord class; landlords were clearly ‘master of the Indian countryside’. They extracted a surplus via rent from a differentiated peasantry. Some rich peasants, indeed, themselves ‘occupancy tenants’ with ‘superior’ rights in land, might themselves extract a surplus in the form of rent from ‘lesser tenants and sub-tenants’. The landlord class existed in two ‘modal’ forms. The first was a class of large, usually absentee landlords; often with land in more than one village, to be found in zamindari or jagirdari areas: the former, the descendants of the zamindars of Mughal India (if not quite literally by 1947, then certainly in principle), whom the British had attempted, without success, to make a kind of Whig landed aristocracy, in West Bengal, eastern UP, Bihar, Orissa, northern Madras; and the latter in princely states like Hyderabad and Rajasthan. The second was a class of smaller landlords, often resident, typically holding land in a single village, and common in raiyatwari and mahalwari areas, that had emerged quite independently of any colonial intent; the former in, for example, Bombay (later Maharashtra and Gujarat), southern Madras, parts of Madhya Pradesh and Assam; the latter in, for example, the Punjab and western UP. The combination of these landlords and their possibly sub-letting richer tenants secured from poorer peasants a heavy rental surplus. Some landlord, and some sub-letting rich peasants, might also extract an interest surplus in an interlinked relationship: indeed, antecedents of the class of smaller landlords had sometimes been moneylenders in the nineteenth century who had become landlords by purchase or by foreclosing. If they did not appropriate an interest surplus, there was a class of moneylenders that did. Some landlords, and some rich peasants, might use hired labour to work the land that was not leased out, drawing the labour from the ranks of poor peasants and landless labourers in a range of often unfree relationships, and again, frequently, in an explicitly interlinked relationship.

By Independence, rather more than 15% of all rural families were completely without access to land: that is to say, survived simply by selling their labour power. The survival of many poor peasants also depended upon sale of their labour power. What, then, of the peasantry? Among the peasantry, differentiation was evident, varying in extent from region to region and being most marked where commercialization/commoditization had penetrated furthest and in raiyatwari and mahalwari areas. Size-holding data are a fairly crude way of capturing and analyzing the characteristics of
social differentiation, but as in Mughal India, size is an acceptable proxy for class. On that basis, at Independence on most operational holdings up to 5 acres we find poor peasants; in most holdings between 5 and 15 acres, middle peasants; and in the majority of those above 15 acres rich peasants. Clearly, there will have been significant variation between regions: depending on quality of soil, pressure on land, extent of irrigation, etc. Yet these figures, for that time, would not lead us too far astray.

**Rich peasants** constituted a class of proto-capitalists that still bore the stigmata of a pre-capitalist order. They were part-owners and part-tenants, and quite a high proportion of the land leased in was on a sharecropping basis (30-40% for most areas of India). Yet, there were rich peasants who also rented their land out to poor peasants. Throughout India, there was widespread fragmentation on their holdings. At the same time, rich peasants accumulated capital, were market-oriented and were substantial users of wage labour (although, as with landlords, the relationship with labour was of a pre-capitalist kind). They were clearly involved in commodity circuits, but on a voluntary basis. They marketed between 30% and 50% of their output (the proportion rising steadily as size of holding rose), and that marketed surplus was what has been identified as a true ‘commercial surplus’ i.e. they set out to market it on a regular basis. Their holdings represented about 9% of total cultivating household in India, operating 52% of the cultivated land. **Middle peasants** made up 19 per cent of families with operational holdings, working 31% of the total cultivated area. They were part-owners and part-tenants, owning, for the most part, a larger proportion of the land they worked than poor peasants, and less than rich peasants. They were however tenants to a significant extent, on the whole renting-in more than 20% of the land they worked, often as sharecropped land, while rich peasants rented-in less than 20% and poor peasants more 25%. Like all peasants in India, they held their land in several scattered pieces; were decidedly not market-oriented, marketing between 23 and 27% of their output; and employed only small amounts of wage labour at peak periods. They enjoyed a somewhat precarious existence, aspiring to the status and material success of rich peasants, but aware that they might be swept into the ranks of the poor peasantry.

**Poor peasants** seem to have constituted around 72% of families with operational holdings and worked only 17% of the cultivated area. They were part-owners and part-tenants and tenants to a far greater degree than other peasants. They were very likely to be sharecroppers – far more so than other peasants – and especially so in eastern India (Bihar and West Bengal). Land fragmentation was rife; access to credit was via the village moneylender, or the landlord, at usurious rates of interest, and levels of indebtedness were very high; they were likely to be locked into a set of interlinked modes of exploitation; and they would be forced to sell their labour power in order to survive. 15% of all rural families were those of poor peasants – with access to a small amount of land – who worked for others as agricultural labourers; whilst 50% of agricultural labourer families were, in fact, poor peasants with some land. They marketed 34% of the output they produced, by value: a significantly higher proportion than middle peasants, and more than some rich peasants. But theirs was not a ‘true commercial surplus’. Rather it was what Narain has termed a ‘distress surplus’, arising from the compulsions to which they were prey: a surplus sold immediately after harvest, when prices were at their lowest.
lowest, in order to meet certain money obligations, some of which, if it were foodgrains, would be bought back later in the season at higher prices.

As in Mughal India, rich peasants would have had superior means of production: more fertile land, perhaps, higher quality bullocks, better ploughs, more manure, etc. But these differences were not between qualitatively different technologies: each stratum of the peasantry had access to essentially the same technology, some to superior and some to inferior variants of that same technology. Northern were there any obvious economies of scale to be reaped. It may be suggested for the same essential reasons even more strongly for colonial India, although as with Mughal India there is a lack of evidence to support the proposition. Certainly, the inverse relationship was shown to exist with a vengeance throughout Indian agriculture in the 1950s. Its systematic demonstration survived the various attempts to demonstrate that it did not exist. Indeed, if the argument developed here has any merit, a political economy explanation of its existence is at hand. It is clear that the conditions that gave rise to it were those inherited from the colonial era, which we have just identified; and that it must have existed at the end of the colonial era. They did not suddenly spring up in the 1950s. We would further hypothesis that it must have existed throughout the colonial era. As we indicated, a great debate took place in post-1947 India around the causes and implications of the inverse relationship: a wide-ranging debate, in which considerable virtuosity was displayed by the Indian participants; in which the relationship was subjected to close analytical scrutiny; and in which a wide spectrum of possibilities were considered, including a vigorous questioning of the relationship’s very existence. Its one weakness, perhaps, was the absence of adequate historical dimension. Perhaps historians of Mughal and of colonial India might now rectify that. We would, however, observe that it is especially curious that no discussion has taken place with respect to colonial India, or that it is even mentioned in passing in the relevant historical literature. After all, there it was at the end of the colonial era; and therefore, eventually, were a host of possibly illuminating hypotheses in the inverse relationship debate. Take for example the volume published, after the debate had raged long and hard, in the Oxford in India Readings series, Themes in Indian History, edited by Sumit Guha, Growth, Stagnation or Decline? Agricultural Productivity in British India (1992). That the debate is not mentioned anywhere in the volume indicates eloquently the lack of concern among economic historians of colonial India. Yet, the inverse relationship debate, after all, was decidedly a debate about differential agricultural productivity.

The lack of evidence for colonial India is, perhaps, surprising. One might have thought that a careful trawling of the colonial Settlement Reports could yield some such evidence of yields by holding-size. No such trawling seems to have been pursued. One such Settlement, Report, that for Gonda District, in Oudh, in the 1870s does seem to posit its existence, strongly, if somewhat tortuously. It was very likely to have existed throughout the colonial era. Assuredly, by the end of the colonial era it did. It would be of considerable interest if historians of colonial India were to pursue the issue.
CHAPTER - 1V
THE DE-INDUSTRIALISATION DEBATE

De-industrialization

In the context of India, ‘de-industrialization’ is a well-known argument about the historical roots of underdevelopment. It is an argument that British India, which started with a large and well-developed manufacturing tradition, saw a decline in its traditional industry during the colonial period, and that the modern industry that grew in its place did not compensate for the great loss in employment and income. This essay criticizes the argument and suggests an alternative perspective. According to this alternative perspective, traditional industry in colonial India changed due to two processes, and not one. The first process was a partial decline in textiles due to obsolescence. Outside these spheres, there was another dynamics at work, change in organization driven by increasing market-exchange. These latter changes, it is argued further, shaped the character of Indian industrialization in the long run.

The experience of the ‘handicrafts’ in colonial India has been a lively topic of debate, mainly because this case is used to illustrate the adverse impact of colonialism on India. Apart from that reason for choosing to discuss it, the subject has a special relevance for the present occasion. Daniel Thorner made a brief but influential contribution on this theme. Thorner was a historian. One of his main interests was the expansion of western European capitalism in Asia. He wrote the first major study on the railways and steam shipping in India, he is known for works done singly or with Alice Thorner on occupational structure, land reforms and rural development, and on the peasantry. Several of these works became famous for their unconventional but well-argued views about the long-term trends in the Indian economy.

The De-industrialization Thesis.

At 1800, India had a significant presence in the world as a manufacturing country. Possibly about 15 – 20% of its working population, or 15 – 20 million persons, were engaged in some form of manufacturing at that time. Important industries were spinning and weaving, manufacture of leather and leather goods, a range of metal work, carpets and rugs, and so on. These industries did not use machinery, were not organized in large-scale factories, and were not regulated by any law. In fact, most of the production units were family-labour oriented or ‘households’. We can call such activities as ‘traditional industry’. By contrast, any unit that used machinery and the large-scale factory, and was more or less regulated, can be called ‘modern industry’. By this definition, modern industry was obviously a product of the Industrial Revolution, since machinery, regulation and the large factory were all relatively new inventions.

The industrial Revolution in the 19th century deeply affected traditional industry in India. Trade between India and the world increased dramatically, and products of the mechanized textile industry in Britain began to compete with handmade yarn and cloth
in the Indian market. What was the net effect of this ‘globalization’? The de-industrialization thesis suggests that the net effect was negative. Traditional industry declined. Closer economic relationship with Britain did create some modern industries in India. But the creative role of globalization did not compensate for the destructive one. One of the reasons why modern industry did not grow enough is that it was a kind of implant rather than an extention or evolution of traditional industry. The term makes an explicit contrast between Britain, which experienced industrialization, and her major colony India, which experienced de-industrialization, at the same time and due to the same set of causes, namely, trade and technological change. Britain too experienced a decline in its traditional industry, but modern industry played a compensatory role there. In India, on the other hand, while foreign economic penetration intensified ruin and pauperization of the artisans, arrested industrial development put sharp limits to their Conversion into an industrial working class.

In what sense did traditional industry ‘decline’ in India? It is necessary to be careful about the definition of ‘de-industrialization’. For, writings around the theme of an industrial decline are notoriously vague about points of detail. Four points specifically need to be clarified: whether the decline in question was a relative or an absolute one, why it happened, whether it was restricted to industry or part of a general economic regress, and when it happened.

A Relative or an Absolute Decline?

There are two senses in which there was a relative decline in Indian industry in the 19th century. First, India fell back in relation to the world. At 1750, India supplied nearly a quarter of the world’s manufacturing output. By 1900, India supplied less than 2%. Second, industry fell back in relation to agriculture. In fact, most authors now seem to use ‘de-industrialization’ to mean a rising share of agriculture in employment, or a ruralization of employment. The term can be used in these senses, but then it will not necessarily connote any kind of serious economic loss or retrogression. A relative decline in the world does not mean an absolute decline as well, for between 1750 and 1900 the total scale of world industrial output had grown enormously. Ruralization as such is no disaster in terms of incomes or welfare unless it is assumed that agricultural resources were already fully utilized when the shift occurred. Such an assumption cannot be made for the 19th century. The only sense in which ‘de-industrialization’ signifies a serious economic loss is that of a large absolute fall in the scale of industrial activity, however measured.

Why Did It Happen?

Why was there a decline, if there was one? In writings sympathetic to the idea of an industrial decay, two sets of causes are discussed. The first is political and the second economic. The political factor is colonialism. Nationalist writers sometimes alleged direct or indirect suppression of Indian enterprise by British policy. The economic factor is technological obsolescence, a result of competition between machinery and hand-tools.

Now, all historically significant examples of industrial decline are examples of
technological obsolescence and not of direct intervention. This essay, therefore, considers only the former cause of industrial decay. A case can be made that this competition was sustained by a commitment to free trade, but it will not be a strong case for a number of reasons.

**Industrial or Economic Decline?**

De-industrialization is not an argument about industrial transformation only. In different contexts, it has been suggested that the decline in traditional industry was part of an overall economic deterioration. The idea had two distinct roots. The first is an Indian nationalist tradition represented by R.C. Dutt, Dadabhai Naoroji and somewhat later by Jawaharlal Nehru. The second root is the Marxist theories of imperialism. In the post-war period, both these schools were revived in history, development studies and Indian historiography. In this last scholarship, de-industrialization became a part of what can be called the left-nationalist view of the impact of colonial rule on India. It has not only been the most popular world-view among historians working in India but has also become a kind of unquestioned official ideology, and in that capacity, shaped the average Indian's sense of history in an overwhelmingly powerful way. All these schools hold the perfectly acceptable view that economic and political changes from the eighteenth century led to decline in some activities and growth in some others. The left-nationalist view can be defined in terms of two propositions: that the decline outweighed the growth, and that both decline and growth derived substantially from colonial strategies.

In more details the story is as follows. Pre-British rural India consisted of self-sustaining egalitarian ‘village communities’ that produced their own subsistence. British rule, by its revenue policy, forced production for the market and thus broke up these communities. Production for the market was not profitable enough, leading to widespread rural indebtedness. Many peasants lost their land and turned into tenants or labourers. On the other hand, the moneyed people who came to control or own land were averse to productive investment. The net result was stagnation along with increasing poverty and inequality. De-industrialization added to rural poverty by pushing many former artisans into agriculture.

There is so far no significant quantitative or qualitative data that support the thesis of an overall economic regression at any time in the 19th century. To be sure, there were regressive forces at work, especially in the early 19th century. But there were expansionary forces at work as well. The best available national income and export figures suggest that the latter outweighed the former for the period 1870s to 1914. We cannot measure the net effect for earlier periods. Furthermore, on points of detail the left-nationalist paradigm has been repeatedly questioned in recent historical scholarship. Finally, in itself a decline of the crafts does not necessarily mean economic decline. When more efficient and more productive suppliers drive out less productive ones, there is usually not only a decline in employment but also an increase in welfare and purchasing power because of a fall in the price of the good or service in question. This point holds especially in the case of hand-spinning, an industry that probably lost several
million workers, for machine-spun yarn was capable of reducing cloth prices by at least half. ‘De-industrialization’ is meant strictly an industrial decay.

When Did It Happen?

When did de-industrialization take place? Underdevelopment theorists who cite India to illustrate the bad effects of colonialism make no fine distinction on timing. Their thesis should hold for British rule as such, which spanned most of the 19th century and half of the 20th century. Indian nationalist writing, on the other hand, dealt with the 19th century. It is only recently that scholars have become rather scrupulous about dating. There is a reason for this caution. As we shall see, available statistical data question the existence of a general industrial decay. But relevant statistical data start from the last quarter of the 19th century. Responding to this adverse evidence, some writers suggest that there was decay, but it occurred before the periods of these data-sets. By implication, the process slowed down after 1880 so that the post-1880 data-sets are irrelevant to testing de-industrialization. Such an argument, however, is not acceptable either on empirical or on conceptual grounds.

Direct statistical data on the first half of the 19th century – either on industry or on overall economic performance – are not just thin, but non-existent. Indirect evidence is contradictory. There were undoubtedly regressive forces at work during the early part of the British rule. These arose from the loss of a world market for Indian textiles, decline of cotton spinning and weaving, early revenue policy in some regions, political instability, etc. But the early nineteenth century also saw strong expansionary forces at work. There was dynamism in north India, and export trends from the second quarter were significantly positive. These facts hint at some rise in demand for artisanal goods. Given that we cannot measure the net effect, the question of the experience of industry as a whole in the early 19th century can have only one answer: ‘we do not know’.

In terms of logic, the suggestion that there was obsolescence in traditional industry as a whole until about 1880 and a revival thereafter raises a big problem. Scholars who hint at such a reversal have not been aware of that problem. It invites scholars to show how the crafts could resist obsolescence in the second period. How did the parameters influencing competition between machinery and tools change in such a way that the crafts suffered obsolescence in the first period and resisted obsolescence in the second? This question is not answered, not even asked, by those who believe in a more remote dating of de-industrialization. If the parameters of competition changed at all, they must change adversely for the crafts, for the pace of technological progress is always faster in the machinery-using industries compared with the tool-using ones. Technological obsolescence is an irreversible and advancing process. If the crafts survived, the very notion of pervasive competition and competitive decay is called into question.

Having said that, periods did matter. This essay will suggest further on that it mattered in the following way. First of all, the notion of pervasive competition is discarded. Second, there were two almost parallel processes at work in the colonial period – obsolescence in segments of the textile industry, and commercialization in a
wide range of crafts that were never threatened by obsolescence. The former process dominated in the early 19th century, and the latter from the late 19th century.

On the basis of the above discussion, ‘de-industrialization’ in this essay is defined to include two basic propositions.

1. Traditional industry declined in India in absolute terms.
2. It declined mainly because of competition between Indian hand-tools and British machinery, a competition that may have been partly sustained by politics.

Proposition I represents a stylized fact and proposition 2 suggests explanation for it. To briefly state the critique that follows, the causation in proposition 3 needs to be qualified, devalued, and supplemented with another causation. These steps follow from re-examining the evidence, to which we now turn.

**Evidence**

Two types of evidence have been discussed most often in relation to proposition 1 above. These relate to the textile industry, and to employment statistics.

**The Textile Industry**

Foreign trade data, as well as estimates of employment, establish that a decline took place in cotton textile industry in the 19th century. The major field of decline was cotton-spinning by hand. The employment loss in hand-spinning was unquestionably very large in scale (possibly several million), but the loss of income per head was very small. Spinning was so labour-intensive that if it were to employ specialized workers cloth prices would have been prohibitively high. Spinning therefore, necessarily involved domestic workers. The opportunity cost of spinning labour was near-zero and the earnings, correspondingly, positive but trivial.

Spinning by hand, furthermore, is more or less the only significant example of traditional industry becoming extinct due to competition from British goods. Other examples exist, such as indigenous shipping and ship-building that declined in competition with steamships. But their scale is uncertain or small. Further, these cases were associated with significant gains in efficiency. If spinning and weaving are excluded, such obsolescence for the crafts was an exception than the rule.

Within textiles, handloom-weaving presents a curious case. Handlooms declines in the 19th century. In 1840 India imported about 100 million yards of British cloth. In 1912 – 15 India imported on average 2,600 million yards, which was the maximum scale that imports reached. Assuming constant market size, the latter figure and estimated mill output suggest a fall in handloom supply by about 3,300 million yards in 75 years. Assuming the maximum output of each loom was about 2,700 yards per year, this implies unemployment for well over a million looms. This figure will need to be adjusted marginally upward if we have reliable estimates of the size of cloth export from India in the earlier dates, and substantially downward if we can estimate the domestic market that seems to have grown rapidly in the pre-war period. Realistically, there was net loss of about 400,000 looms.
The fact of a decline in weaving is neither disputable nor surprising. What is surprising is that after the 1880s, handloom cloth production was stable until the First World War and steadily rising in the inter-war period. Interestingly, this was precisely the period when mechanized weaving in the Indian mills expanded rapidly, from less than 400 million yards of cotton cloth to about 3 billion. The productivity per hour of a throw-shuttle type handloom was only about 10 per cent that of a power-driven loom. Why was any handloom cloth being sold alongside mill cloth despite such a wide gap in productivity?

In modern historical scholarship, Morris D. Morris first offered an explanation for the survival of handlooms. Morris suggests that the handlooms survived because total market for cloth expanded in 19th century India. This suggestion has been attacked, somewhat awkwardly, on the ground that total market for cloth did not expand during the colonial period, among other reasons because inequality increased. Morris was probably right on the scale of demand. There is evidence that real national income grew significantly in the late 19th century. Moreover, the empirical basis and theoretical relevance of rising inequality are questionable. However, without some reference to relative competitiveness, and growth of markets by itself does not explain the survival of the handloom.

A.K. Bagchi suggests another answer. More accurately, other writers have seen an answer in Bagchi’s discussion of the subject. The answer focuses on changes in relative costs of production, and attributes the survival to several new improved tools that became available to handloom weavers from about 1900. This line of argument, again, is inadequate, because it can be shown that the new options did not anywhere near bridge the productivity gap assuming realistic wages.

A recent scholarship on the industry has explored a third possibility, market segmentation. Hand-and power-weaving had comparative advantages in different types of cloth. There was continuing preference for the traditional garments that the handlooms were better able to make. It has also been suggested that these ‘niche’ markets experienced increasing commercialization or market transactions, in both product and labour. In turn, there was capital accumulation by merchants and master-weavers, the appearance of new organizations such as the factory in place of the family unit, and new investments. In this view, technological change in handlooms was an effect, and not the cause, of survival. If we generalize from this example, handloom-weaving suggests that consumption and specific skills not easily reproducible in machinery ensured the survival of many traditional industries. The competition between British machinery and Indian crafts did occur, but in special cases (spinning and a segment of weaving). Outside these, there was no general obsolescence.

**Trends in Employment.**

Census data on aggregate employment have been used as the major and clinching evidence supporting de-industrialization. The censuses tell us that industrial employment declined steadily and sharply between 1881 and 1931. It declined from about 20 million to 13–15 million, while at the same time employment in agriculture increased from 71 to 100 million. The percentage of workers in agriculture increased from 62 to 71, and that in
industry declined from 18 to 9. A.K. Bagchi finds a similar trend for Gangetic Bihar. Does this suggest a big decline in traditional industry and a ruralization of employment? There are two sets of critique suggesting that it does not. The first questions the statistics and the second questions the interpretation to be drawn from it.

Detailed work by Daniel and Alice Thorner shows that these shifts in occupational structure were probably spurious and arose from several problems with the census definitions. In their reconstruction, occupational structure hardly changed between 1881 and 1951. This basic finding has not been seriously questioned in subsequent work.

However, this finding rests, among others, on a disputable argument about women’s employment. Women’s presence in industrial work-force declined dramatically in the census period. If women’s data are excluded, occupational structure shows rather little change. If women’s data are included, the share of industry in work-force shows a fall. The Thorners suggest that the trends in women’s industrial work arose from a reporting problem, and therefore, they should not be given too much credence. Women who were mainly engaged in household duties and marginally in commercial production tended to be classified as workers. In other words, there was a possible overestimation of women workers in the earlier censuses.

Now, the point that declining presence of women in industry is mainly a reporting problem is disputable, among other reasons, because the decline has been a very long-lasting one. It occurred over nearly a century. It is difficult to accept that a reporting bias carried on that long. In my view, there was a real decline in employment here, which involved mainly women. Further, the decline derived from a retreat of household industry in competition with units using mainly wage labour. To this point I shall return.

Let us now consider the second critique of employment data, which does not dispute a decline in employment but questions what it means. Does decline in employment mean technological obsolescence? Not entirely, because employment declined in a number of industries where no serious competition with machinery was in existence (such as dress and toilet, wood, ceramics, construction). Does decline in employment mean technological obsolescence of Indian goods in competition with foreign goods? Not necessarily, for as noted by J. Krishnamurthy in 1967, a fall in industrial employment could have resulted from modern industry replacing traditional industry within India. How do we test this? If incomes in industry increased even as employment fell, that could mean rising capital intensity within Indian industry.

National income data suggest that total and per worker real income in industry grew at significant rates (in the range 1.5 – 2% per year) between 1901 and 1947. Several authors explain this by rising capital intensity. In this view, what we see in census and income statistics is the beginning of a large-scale substitution of craft labour by machinery with India. Such an inference, however, is counter-intuitive and unrealistic because modern industry engaged a tiny percentage of industrial employment (4-6%) in the early 20th century. With such marginal weight in employment, it is not credible that it could compensate for the decline in traditional industry even in income. Part of this increase in productivity, in fact, derived from the emergence of a semi-mechanized small-scale industry segment in India, engaged in processing basic materials. These new
firms used slightly improved tools and slightly higher capital per worker compared to their artisan counterparts.

But when we look at national income data more closely we see signs that in fact real incomes increased within traditional industry as well. More surprisingly, income per worker probably increased at a faster rate in this sector than in modern industry. Evidence of productivity increase is strong also in specific industries like handloom textiles, tanning and metal work. In textiles, real value-added unquestionably increased, and in all of them, output indicators show growth whereas employment indicators show stagnation or fall.

To sum up, traditional industry probably experienced a fall in employment in the period after 1881, though not as large a fall as it may seem. But since there was no fall in incomes, the employment trend cannot mean a general decline in demand. Proposition 2 (see the last section) must be discarded, for the later periods at least. Fall in employment in the census period derived from not only technological un-employment but also a drive to replace low-productivity workers, or a drive to improve efficiency. Where did that drive originate from? We need an alternative perspective on traditional industry that can answer this question.

The alternative I propose starts from two premises. First, British machinery and Indian tools were not competitive, with the important exception of cotton yarn and some cloths. By and large, Indian artisans made labour-intensive consumer goods for which there were no imported mechanized substitutes available. Or such substitutes were not profitable because capital was relatively costly in India. Second, traditional industry changed not due to external competition but due to internal competition. From these premises, we can suggest an alternative story, which we can call ‘commercialization’.

The Commercialization Thesis.

The 60 years spanned by the opening of the Suez Canal (1869) and the Great Depression (1929) were a period of rapid commercialization in India. Long-distance trade expanded and regional markets integrated on an unprecedented scale due to, mainly, three factors: foreign trade, modern transport and communication, and the definition of contract law and private property rights. The effects, which were quite dramatic, are well-researched for agriculture. It is not so well-recognized that traditional industry was also transformed by commercialization. Production for subsistence, production under various types of non-market and barter distribution arrangements such as jajmani, and production for local, rural, periodic and other spot markets declined in favour of production on contract for distant markets. Such a process had begun before the 1860s and it certainly continued beyond 1930, but the intervening period saw its full impact unfolding. This rise in long-distance trade had two types of effects; increased competition, and changes in industrial organization.

Industrial organization changed in two ways. First, long-distance trade had made information and working capital essential resources. But these were scarce resources. The small number of entrepreneurs who had access to these resources expanded scale of business, could take closer control of the manufacturing process, and sometimes make
technological experiments and improvements. Capitalists and labourers became more clearly distinguishable. So did employer–employee relationships. Second, competition among manufacturers led to increased specialization and division of labour. There are two major examples of specialization. Formerly, many rural artisans performed agricultural labour on the side, such as tanners and coarse cotton weavers in most regions. Such part-time industrial activity generally declined, whereas specialized artisans survived to a greater extent. A second example is the decline of household industry in favour of small factories employing wage labour. The family as a production unit had certain advantages. But it also had serious disadvantages. It could not specialize enough and could not be supervised closely enough. It is this competitive decline of the family that explains the long downward trend in women’s presence in the industrial workforce. Women formerly worked in industry mainly as members of the household. The preference for the home as a work-site still remains strong among women workers in South Asia. When the household declined as a unit of production, women workers exited industry, and were replaced by male hired labour. Women are returning now to the factory, not because the household is coming back, but for other factors that influence women’s participation in the factory.

Conclusion: Summary and Wider Relevance

We set out to test two propositions with which the thesis of ‘de-industrialization’ has been defined here: (1) there was an absolute industrial decay in colonial India, and (2) it derived from competition between machinery and crafts. We restated a well-known critique of the data-base, owing to the seminal work by the Thorners, which qualifies proposition 1. My critique here deals with proposition 2 specifically. The ‘de-industrialization’ thesis explains trends in employment solely by competition between nations of unequal technological capability. This significance of competitive decay in the crafts is questioned by citing two facts: (a) productivity and income growth in the crafts, and (b) insufficient examples of industries where external competition occurred.

The alternative ‘commercialization’ thesis proposes that there were two almost parallel processes at work in the colonial period – obsolescence in segments of the textile industry, and commercialization in the other crafts not threatened by obsolescence. The former process dominated in the early nineteenth century, and the latter form the late 19th century. Traditional industry in the latter period changed in organization due to increasing market exchange. The decline in employment, at least in the census period, was a symptom of internal competition. Equally, as a result of internal competition, there emerged segments of growth and capital accumulation. The commercialization story, thus, explains not a one-dimensional decay, but a duality in the experience of traditional industry. There was decline as well as growth, external as well as internal competition. The net result was a positive one for as long as we can measure. We shall end this essay by suggesting three ways in which this alternative story matters to our views about development and industrialization.

First, at the level of theories of history, there is a difference. We are looking at British India more from Adam Smith’s point of view, rather than the Marxian viewpoint that has ruled post-independence Indian historiography. Marx and the Marxists were too
preoccupied with technological change. Smith, by contrast, was concerned with markets, competition and efficiency. In this sense there is a shift in accent.

Second, the commercialization story suggests several areas of continuity between the past and the present. The processes I just described have not finished happening. Let me mention three points of continuity. The first is the overwhelming importance of labour-intensive industry in employment. The majority of manufacturing workers even now work in small unregulated factories, use simple general-purpose tools and a great deal of manual skills. In that respect the past and the present are not different. And they are not different because India’s factor endowment has changed relatively little in the long run. A second example of continuity is that many small-scale labour-intensive industries today have traditional roots. For example, many owners of small powerloom factories today are handloom weavers by ancestral occupation. If we investigate the background of today’s powerloom capitalists, we find that some of their great-grandfathers made money in long-distance trade in handloom cloth or raw material in the inter-war period. De-industrialization cannot explain how this happened. The commercialization thesis can. To repeat a point mentioned already, commercialization created segments of decline and segments of growth. It is these segments of growth that form the major link between the past and the present of Indian small-scale industry. A third example of continuity is organization change. Post-independence censuses suggest a continuous decline in household industry, and shift of employment out of families into tiny factories. The rate of employment growth in industry since 1961 has been rather small, only about 1.2% per year. But, as with British India, this small growth is an illusion, being the average of a negative growth of employment in family enterprises, and a very high growth rate of employment in unregistered factories. Our story shows that the long-lasting and ongoing shift from families to small factories did not somehow begin at 1947. It began long ago. It began within traditional industry. And it began because of increasing internal competition in traditional industry.

Finally, the alternative story matters to views about industrialization as a global process. De-industrialization suggests that the 19th century globalization that industrialized Europe destroyed industry in Asia. Our story suggests that there was no essential difference in the beginning of industrialization between Europe and Asia. At different times and places – 18th century Europe, early 20th century Japan and British India – a similar form of industrialization began that was based on utilizing labour more productively, rather than on replacing labour by machinery. The key process was commercialization and modernization of traditional industry. Such a process was stimulated by long-distance trade, and resulted in capital accumulation. In the course of this transition, there was a persistence of traditional organizations in the short run, and a movement towards the labour market in the long run. These messages are now well-known to historians of early-modern Europe and East Asia. We suggest that South Asia is an example of the same thing. If, however, such common roots gave rise to different levels of prosperity that difference needs to be explained not by such global factors as trade or colonialism, but by local variables and also by what happened after the British rule ended.
POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

British rule in India lasted for about 200 years and the British left India in 1947 after transferring power into the hands of the Indians in a peaceful manner. Such a long rule was bound to leave behind a rich legacy.

1. The most important legacy of British rule in India is the unification of India. Undoubtedly, it was British imperialism which brought about the unification of the country and enabled the people of India to think as one nation. Before the coming of the English to India, the people of the South were usually separated from the rest of India except for some short intervals. Prof. Moon rightly says that “British Imperialism in India gave her a political unity under a third party in spite of the many discordant elements in Indian society”. The whole of India came to be governed from one Central Government. It is true that there were provincial Governments but those were merely the agents of the Central Government and it was their duty to carry out its orders.

It is rightly pointed out that the unity given to India by the British was not a complete one. During the British rule, India was divided into British India and non-British India and the latter was ruled by the Indian Princes, Chiefs and estate-holders. In spite of the emergence of a strong nationalist movement in the country, the people in the States were separate and it required a lot of effort on the part of men like Sardar Patel to make them a part and parcel of the Union of India. Moreover, the British created many invidious distinctions which were liable to create a split in Indian society. They recruited in the Indian army soldiers only from the so-called martial races. The object was to recruit only those who were loyal to the British rule in India. In public services also, preference was shown to the Muslims, Anglo-Indians, Europeans and certain castes or sub-castes among the Hindus. From 1909 onwards, separate representation was given to the Muslims, Sikhs, Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians and Europeans. They were given not only separate representation but even weightage in their representation in order to keep them away from the main stream of national life. The net result was that the unity given to India by the British was not a solid one and ultimately it led to the partition of the country in 1947.

2. Another legacy of British rule was the emergence of a sense of national consciousness in India. British rule in India brought the Indians into intimate contact with the European countries and they were very much influenced by them. The 19th century in Europe was the century of nationalism and liberalism and the Indians learnt their lessons in nationalism and liberalism from the Europeans. It was rightly felt by the people of India that if Germany and Italy could achieve their independence and unity, they also could do the same. The practical examples of those countries created a new spirit among the Indians to fight for the liberation of their country. National consciousness was also aroused by the Indian press and literature, both in English and in vernacular. The discontentment of the people with many acts of omission and commission of the British in India also stimulated the nationalist movement in the country. The English language also played its part in the growth of nationalism. It acted as the lingua franca for the intellelgentsia of...
India. Without the common medium of the English language, it would have been impossible for the people of India coming from various parts of the country to discuss at one place and common problems facing the country. The English language also put the English literature into the hands of the Indians and that also had its effect on the growth of national consciousness in the country. It cannot be denied that national consciousness in India arose as a direct result of her connection with England. It is men like Hume who played an important part in the creation of the Indian National Congress which played a glorious role in the awakening of the national consciousness in the country.

It is rightly pointed out that the idols of the early Indian nationalists were the European patriots. During the 1870's, Surendra Nath Banerji often put the following question to the members of his audience: "Who among you will be a Mazzini, a Garibaldi?" The reply used to be: "All, all". The Irish movement for home-rule was closely watched by the Indians and that also provided them with inspiration. Bradlaugh, an Irish statesman-politician, visited India and addressed the annual session of the Indian National Congress. It cannot be denied that the concept of human rights and human equality is taken from the West.

3. Another legacy of British rule in India was the adoption of a democratic form of Government in the country. The present Constitution of India provides for a democratic form of Government for the country and the credit must go to the British for evolving the same. The beginnings were made in the year 1853 and the process was continued in 1861, 1892, 1909, 1919 and 1935. By stages, British Government transferred to Indians larger and larger share in the administration of the country. The result was that partly by this process and partly as a result of the experience gained from other sources, the leaders of India were able to take over the responsibility for running the administration of the country in 1947. What was given to the people of India by the British in 1947 was a democratic Government and the same was continued after that. This very process was applied to the Indian States after 1947. The result was that a democratic form of Government was set up in the whole of India. It is not possible to forget or ignore the meritorious services of men like Lord Ripon who set up municipalities and District Boards for the purpose of giving political and popular education to the people of India.

4. Another legacy of British rule in India is the Parliamentary form of Government in the country. British Parliament is rightly called the mother of Parliaments. The British introduced in India what they had in their own country. It was slowly and slowly that in 1861, 1892, 1909, 1919 and 1935. Parliamentary institutions and practices were introduced in the country. The Indians were allowed to put questions and supplementary questions to the Government of the day. They were allowed to discuss and criticize the budget of the country and also reject the same. Dyarchy was introduced in the provinces in 1919 and this Indian Ministers were put in charge of certain Departments in the provinces. A further step was taken in 1935 when provincial autonomy was introduced and the responsibility for the administration of most of the Departments in provinces was put in the hands of the Indians. The Government of India Act, 1935 also provided for a large measure of parliamentary
form of Government at the Centre with many reservations. But the Federation never came into being. The net result of all this was that when the British left India in 1947, India had a parliamentary set-up in the country. Even when the Constituent Assembly laboured hard to frame a Constitution of India, it was decided to retain the parliamentary form of Government for the country and the same is embodied in the new Constitution of India, both at the centre and the States. Even in the Union Territories, a parliamentary form of Government prevails and all this is a legacy of the British rule in India.

It is true that men like Chief Justice Mehr Chand Mahajan and Chief Justice M.C. Chagla have advocated a presidential form of Government for the country with a view to remedy some of the ills which have come in the country as a result of the working of the parliamentary institutions during the last few years but in spite of that the parliamentary form of Government is being maintained in the country as a whole. We find every day parliamentary practices and usages from England being quoted and followed both in the Indian Parliament and the State Assemblies.

5. Another legacy of the British rule is the rule of law. One of the greatest achievements of the British in their own country was the establishment of the rule of law. This they did after a long struggle. When British institution were introduced, the rule of law was also introduced in the country. No man was to be punished except according to law. All were equal before the law. Public servants were not to enjoy any special privileges. If any person violated the law of the country, he was to be punished irrespective of his status. The same law was to apply to all. The Code of Civil Procedure, the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Indian Evidence Act, the Indian Penal Code, the Indian Contract Act, the Sale of Goods Act, the Partnership Act, etc., applied equally to all whether an individual was a Hindu, Muslim or a Christian.

The rule of law was applied impartially by the British in India so far as the relations between the Indians were concerned. However, a departure was made in the case of Europeans who were entitled to a special procedure in criminal cases against them. That led to a lot of agitation on the occasion of the Ilbert Bill but the distinction was continued. Moreover, public servants could not be prosecuted without the permission of the Government in certain cases. In spite of these exceptions, the rule of law was enforced in the country by an independent judiciary. This rule of law has also been adopted by the people of India even after the departure of the British from the country. The Indian Constitution embodies the rule of law and with a few exceptions, every effort is made to stick to the principles of rule of law in the country.

6. Another legacy of the British rule is the present legal system in the country. The more critically we study the present legal set-up in the country, the more it becomes clear that the present legal system in the country is a legacy of the British rule. We teach the same text books on law as they do in England. Jurisprudence by Salmond is as much taught in India as in England. We follow the analytical system as they do in England. The method of Case Law is now being introduced after the Independence of the country but the old basis still continues. The Code of Civil
Procedure, the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Indian Evidence Act, the Indian Penal Code, the Indian Contract Act, the Sale of Goods Act, the Partnership Act, etc., are a legacy of the British rule in India. As a matter of fact, whatever law was found useful in England was introduced into India. A comparison of the Statutes of India up to 1947 with the Statutes in England on the same subject is both instructive and profitable. It clearly shows how much our past legislation was based on the legalisation in England in the same field. Even today, we quite every day decisions from the courts in England. Lord Denning is more popular in India than any other judge of any other court in the world. The Supreme Court is merely a continuation of the Federal Court of India and the Privy Council. We cannot forget the excellent work done by the Indian Law Commissions during the 19th century. All this is a legacy of the British rule in India and this has become a part and parcel of our national life.

However, the legal system inherited from the British is very expensive and beyond the reach of the man in the street. It is also time-consuming. It takes years to dispose of a case and there is truth in the contention that justice delayed is justice denied. The legal system is very complicated and beyond the comprehension of the common man. One takes a very serious risk if one appears in a court of law without a lawyer, although the court is always presided over by a judge. The latter is in a way useless to the litigant. He can decide a matter but cannot advise him as to what he should do.

7. Another legacy is the present system of administration in the country. Before the beginning of British rule in India, the working of the Government depended very much upon the sweet will of the ruler concerned. If he was able, everything was all right. Under an inefficient or weak ruler, the whole thing collapsed. It goes to the credit of the British Government that they set up a systematic framework which continued the work in a routine manner. Administrative Manuals were prepared in every Department containing detailed instructions regarding its working. There was to be no ambiguity about the same and hence the chances of arbitrary action or the failure of administrative machinery were very much lessened. A system of competitive examinations was introduced and the result was that the best talent in the country was attracted. This does not mean that everybody was appointed on the basis of merit alone. It is well-known that in many cases, even nominations were made. However, the administrative set-up was pretty efficient. The Indian Civil Service did a marvelous job and some of the officer brought with them a standard of efficiency which was rarely equaled but never surpassed. As the officers were trained and came to have a lot of experience in due course of time, the administrative machinery was able to shoulder the responsibilities of the government of a big country like India. Bureaucracy had its advantages and disadvantages but it goes to its credit that India enjoyed such an efficient administration which she had never seen before. It is true that the Indians hated the Civil Servants on account of their bias against them, but these very men were found to be useful when the British left India in 1947 and the responsibility of running the administration fell on the Indians themselves. The manner in which they faced the problems after the independence of India does them credit and that was
ndoubtedly a legacy of the British rule in India. The example set by the Indian Civil Service in the matter of efficiency deserves to be followed by the present and future generations of India.

8. Another legacy of the British rule in India is the industrialization of the country. It cannot be denied that there was practically no money which was required for the industrialization of the country. It is the Englishmen who invested their money in the railways which were constructed in every nook and corner of the country. It is their spirit of the enterprise that different the trick. Railways were constructed both for commercial and military purposes. Without the British lead, it would have been difficult to accomplish the same. It is the Englishmen who set up jute mills and cotton textiles in the country. They were responsible for the growth of indigo and tea. They took the lead and it same was followed by others. The Tatas and the Birlas came later on in the field. The system of joint stock companies was introduced in the country by the British. India moved from the cottage industries to the factories and that is very much a legacy of British rule in India.

9. The urbanization of India is also a legacy of the British rule. Formerly, most of the Indians lived in the villages. It is the Englishmen who set up factories where millions of Indians assembled from the villages. The old towns were replaced by large towns like Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. Industrial towns like Ahmedabad also came into prominence. Urbanization brought to the fore the problem of slums. The joint family ties were weakened. The very face of society underwent a revolution.

10. Another legacy is the present educational system in the country. It is true that before the coming of the British in India, we had our Pathshalas and Madrassas but not much could be expected from them in the field of higher learning. Credit must go to the Englishmen for setting up universities, colleges, high schools and other schools in the country. It is true that to begin with the Indian Universities were merely examining bodies and practically no teaching work was done in them. However, that stage has passed away and there are many universities in the country which are doing teaching work as well. Indian Universities have become the centres of higher education and research. It would have been difficult to secure the millions of officers and clerks required for running the present administrative machinery without the Universities set up by the Englishmen. It is not denied that a lot was accomplished as a result of co-operation received from the Indians but the credit for giving the initiative must go to them. They introduced in India what they had in their own country and it goes without saying that we have benefited immensely. Critics may find many shortcomings in the present educational system in our country, but it will be practically impossible to replace the same by another system of education.

11. It is the Englishmen who helped India to discover her past. It is them who led the way which was followed later on by the Indian scholars. It was the efforts of Englishmen that helped us to decipher the Brahmi script. Without it, it would have been impossible to decipher the various inscriptions that were discovered from the
various parts of the country. The glory and grandeur of Asoka would have remained hidden from without the labours and efforts to English scholars. It would have been difficult to decipher the inscriptions of Asoka. It is the Englishmen, who translated into English the whole of the Buddhist literature and made it available to the Indians. It is they who translated the Ceylonese chronicles, viz., Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa. The Sacred Books of the East series did a lot to reveal to India the glory of her past and the knowledge of the ancient saints of India. We cannot forget the debt that we owe to scholars like Max Muller, Weber, Macdonnell, Monier Williams, Barnett, Winternitz, A. B. Keith, Rhys Davids, H.H. Wilson, Allen, Fleet, Sir Mortimer Wheeler, Sir John Marshall, etc. It was Dr. V.A. Smith who did the pioneer work in the History of Ancient India. Cunningham’s work in the field of archaeology is well-known. The work of Pargiter on the Puranas is remarkable. The 5 volumes of the Cambridge History of India are a true legacy of British rule in India. We cannot forget the work done by the British scholars on Sanskrit in general and editing all references about India by Megasthenes and others. It is the Englishmen who edited and translated the accounts of Fahein, Hiuen Tsang and Itsing. The lead was given by the Englishmen to hunt out old manuscripts and later on those manuscripts were collated and translated. The History of India as told by her own Historians by Dilliot and Dawson was also due to the industry of Englishmen. Akbarnama, Ain-i-Akbari, Humayun Nama, Tuzk-i-Jahangiri. Tuzk-i-Babari, etc., were all edited and translated into English by the Englishmen and all that helped the growth of learning in the country. All this is a legacy of the British rule in India.

12. Indian literature was also influenced by the British rule in India. It is true that the Englishmen, to begin with, used Persian and Urdu for their administrative work, later on English was introduced in every sphere of the government. English education spread slowly but steadily and ultimately that had a tremendous influence on the people of India. The knowledge of English brought with it the knowledge of the English literature and all that it contained. The result was that the Indians were very much influenced by the Western learning. We had no such thing as newspapers in the modern sense of the term in the past. It is the Englishmen who started newspapers for themselves and slowly and slowly Indian newspapers appeared both in English and the various vernacular languages of India. Indian drama was very much influenced by the English drama. The technique of writing novels in India was very much influenced by what was there in England. Even Indian poetry was affected by English contact. The Indians learnt to write short stories, satires, One-Act plays, etc., on the model of English example. The English principles of literary criticism were copied in this country. Western influence on Indian art is total. Modern Indian art has become experimental like that of Europe and America. It has gone through all the European historical styles. Recently Indian art has taken a new turn under the inspiration of some Englishmen and Indians such as Havell, Abanindranath Tagore and others.

13. It is well-known that the English East India Company was opposed to missionary activity in its territorial possessions in India. It was under pressure that it allowed in
1813 missionaries to travel on its ships and admitted to British Bishop at Calcutta. British Prime Minister Spencer Percival was a friend of the Evangelicals and he helped the missionaries to overcome in 1808 the opposition of the English Company to allow missionaries in its territories. These missionaries did a tremendous job and were able to convert lakhs of Indians to Christianity.

The propaganda of the Christian missionaries had its repercussions on Indian society. Under Christian criticism, the Hindus learnt to re-examine the tenets of their religion and were in turn influenced by Western concepts. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who is described by Nicol Macnicol as “India’s Columbus in the discovery of a new continent of truth”, made the first organized effort to adopt Hinduism to the new conditions. He was a scholar of Sanskrit, Hebrew, Greek, Persian, Arabic and English. He was a follower of Vedantic philosophy but admirer of Christianity. He was ready and willing to borrow everything that was good in Christianity. He stood for western learning for the Indians. He demanded the abolition of Sati. He founded the Brahmo Samaj which has been described by Mayhew as “doctrinally similar to Victorian utilitarianism”. He stood for the synthesis of Eastern and Western cultures.

The propaganda of the Christian missionaries also provoked Swami Dayanand, founder of the Arya Samaj. He called upon the Hindus to remove the evils that had crept into Hindu society. He gave the Hindus self-confidence and determination to fight for their existence and progress. He assured them that their religion was better than Christianity or Islam. His propaganda made the Christians and Muslims uneasy. A large number of D.A.V. Schools and Colleges were set up in the country and those were instrumental in spreading western knowledge in India in addition to Indian culture.

Swami Vivekananda preached “oneness of all religions”. He asked the Hindus to become better Hindus, Muslims to become better Muslims and the Christians to become better Christians. He interpreted Indian thought to Western people and provided a bridge between the East and the West. He was not apologetic in his speeches or writings. He spoke and wrote with self-confidence and righteous pride.

Mahatma Gandhi, Maharishi Aurobindo, Tagore, Nehru and Dr. Radhakrishnan were influenced by the West. It is well-known that Gandhiji admired Christianity. He often admitted that his concept of non-violence was influenced by the Sermon on the Mount. In his daily prayer meetings, the popular hymns were: “When I survey the wonderous Cross” and “Lead kindly Light amid the encircling gloom”. About Maharishi Aurobindo, the greatest modern Indian philosopher, thinker, saint and mystic, Hakim says: Sri Aurobindo has by a great spiritual vision comprehended into one organized whole the heritage of the East the West, the old and the new”. It cannot be denied that Marx has also influenced modern Indian thought and life.

14. The biggest legacy of the British rule in India is that very many Indians learnt not only to dress like Englishmen but also to think, speak, write and act as Englishmen. The result is that although the Englishmen went away in the year 1947, their thoughts, their dress and their institutions have become a part and parcel of our lives. Not only our leaders but even the common people copy the west in the matter of dress. Even to-day, many people in India take pride in speaking English
and writing in English. Most of the work of the Government is also done in the English language. Even to-day, English literature inspires many of us and moulds our way of thinking and acting.

The view of Dr. Tarachand is that the British impact was like the application of hoe and shears to prune to rotten roots and dead branches. It was like the advent of the spring tide after a formidable winter. The changes brought about by British rulers in polity and economy of India, though in some cases, quite radical, failed to effect a social revolution which could only take place if Indian economy had grown out of its medieval agrarian system into a modern industrial regime. Whatever degree of modernization was achieved was more or less confined to the cities and affected the villages only indirectly and superficially. The change of mind was largely a bourgeois phenomenon, a change of the middle-class intelligentsia. This was natural and inevitable. The educated class alone had the opportunity to assimilate Western knowledge, to study close Western sciences, philosophy and literature and to learn by actual participation in Western type activities, the values and modes of Western life. Their reaction to the ideology from the West took several forms. Some Indians were swept off their feet completely. They rejected their Indian traditions root and branch. A second school of thought took the opposite extreme and justified the whole of this tradition. In the middle was a group of thinkers who endeavoured to shift the wheat from the chaff, the national and the pure and the high-minded from the fatuous, degrading and false.

R.P. Dutt says: “In the earlier period of British Rule, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the British rulers in the midst of, and actually through all the misery and industrial devastation – were performing an actively progressive role, were in many spheres actively combating the conservative and feudal forces of Indian society. This was the period of courageous reforms, of such measures as the abolition of suttee (carried out with the wholehearted co-operation of the progressive elements of Indian society), the abolition of slavery (a more formal measure in practice), the war on infanticide and thuggism, the introduction of western education and the freeing of the Press. Rigid in their outlook, unsympathetic to all that was backward in Indian traditions, convinced that the nineteenth century bourgeois and Christian conception was the norm for humanity, these early administrators nevertheless carried on a powerful work of innovation representing the spirit of the early ascendant bourgeoisie of the period; and the best of them like Sir Henry Lawrence, won the respect and affection of those with whom they had to deal. The deepest enemies of the British were the old reactionary rulers who saw in them their supplanters. The most progressive elements in Indian society, at that time represented by Ram Mohan Roy and the reform movement of the Brahmo Samaj, looked with uncondemned admiration to the British as the champions of progress, gave unhesitating support to their reforms, and saw in them the vanguard of a new civilization”. (India Today, pp. 273-4)

About the legacy of the British rule in India, K. Santhanam says that by extinguishing and suppressing many medieval vested interests, British imperialism did clear the way for the emergence of modern India. It established peace and the rule of law. It evolved the Indian Penal Code, the Code of Civil Procedure and the Code of Criminal
Procedure and civil laws except those regarding marriage, adoption, inheritance and succession, which were common to the whole country. The English education infused the people with the ideas of freedom and democracy and that provided a valuable climate for the birth of Indian nationalism. It built up railways and promoted plantation industries of tea and coffee which became valuable assets of Indian economy. In the beginning of this century, it permitted and occasionally encouraged the development of modern industries of jute, cotton and sugar. Though it was done under pressure, the introduction of the principle of representative Government in 1909 provided valuable introduction to the principle and procedure of parliamentary democracy.

As regards the debit side of the British rule, a tremendous blow was given to Indian economy by the destruction of cottage industries of India and the premature and forcible introduction of machine-made foreign goods. Millions of persons engaged in cottage industries were forced to fall back upon agriculture which has already over-crowded. By discouragement of the growth of modern industry, the Indian economy was kept at least 100 years behind the economy of Europe and America. The country was systematically drained of capital resources and the people reduced to poverty. The policy of divide and rule made the Hindus and Muslims enemies of each other and ultimately resulted in the Partition of India. British imperialism resulted in social, economic and moral stagnation which still persist in spite of the struggle for freedom and decades of Independence.

However, there are some writers who have written critically about the British rule in India. Dadabhai Naoroji, the grand old Man of Indian nationalism and a Liberal member of the House of Commons, who was elected and re-elected President of the Indian National Congress many a time like Jawaharlal Nehru later on, while praising the many blessings of law and order which was given by the British to India, characterized the British rule in India as “un-British” as the despotic system of Government in British India was destructive to India as well as to British ideals and honour. There are many others who hold the view that the British could have done more than what they actually did in India. We may conclude with the following observation of Edward Thompson and G.T. Garratt:

“Whatever the future may hold, the direct influence of the West upon India is likely to decrease. But it would be absurd to imagine that the British connection will not leave a permanent mark upon Indian life. On the merely material side the new Federal Government will take over the largest irrigation system in the world with thousands of miles of canals and watercuts fertilizing between thirty and forty million acres; some 60,000 miles of metalled roads; over 42,000 miles of railway of which three-quarters are State-owned; 230,000 scholastic institutions with over twelve million scholars; and a great number of buildings, including government offices, inspection bungalows, provincial and central legislatures. The vast area of India has been completely surveyed, most of its land assessed and a regular census taken of its population and its productivity. An effective defensive system has been built up on its vulnerable North-West frontier; it has an Indian army with century-old traditions, and a police force which compares favourably with any outside a few Western countries. The postal department handles nearly 1,550 million articles yearly. The Forestry Department not only prevents...
the denudation of immense areas, but makes a net profit of between two and three crores. These great State activities are managed by a trained bureaucracy who is today almost entirely Indian.

“The spiritual heritage is far more difficult to estimate and for many years most people will have their judgment warped by the racial animosities of the last half-century. How much of the common language and common culture which we have introduced will survive under the new constitution? Will the three per cent of ‘English educated’ Indians cling to their knowledge when the present racial animosity has become less acute, and will a happier relationship begin when English administrators go East only at Indian invitation? Many special virtues, as well as failings, went to the building up of the British Empire and its retention by a minute force. A high sense of duty, incorruptibility, a passion for improving, recognition of social responsibility, these may be remembered and be better appreciated when the friction due to disputed authority, economic grievances, and social differences has been forgotten.
CHAPTER-V
PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

BIPAN CHANDRA’S FORMULATIONS REGARDING NATIONAL MOVEMENT.

The present situation in the country makes it necessary for persons with different political points of view and belonging to different organizations and ideological currents to come together around a common platform. Such a platform can only be built around a renovated, redefined nationalism. Till 1947, nationalism meant anti-colonialism. Many felt that nationalism became redundant after independence. It has certainly failed to inspire the post-independence generation of Indians. Bipan Chandra would like to suggest that this is because we constantly failed to redefine nationalism on the basis of what had been achieved at an earlier stage. Nationalism had to be constantly redefined as the objectives of a particular stage of historical development were achieved and therefore were on the way to being superseded. In other words, ‘new’ nationalism had to take off from where ‘old’ nationalism had ended, even while maintaining continuity.

The basic task undertaken by post-independence India was that of nation-building so that the work of the national movement could be brought to conclusion and Indian independence and unity made irreversible. The basic ingredients of nation-building and the ideological content of Indian names were already formed during the struggle for independence. But the Indian national movement was historically specific and was not ideologically or programmatically monolithic. It went through several distinct phases. The movement and its leaders constantly redefined nationalism, especially during the 1920s and 1930s, each generation not negating but building on what the earlier generations had conceived. This is dramatically brought out by Bipin Chandra pal constantly referring to the India of 20th century as ‘New India’. This was also the title of the weekly he started in 1903. Moreover, there was a constant contention between different political-ideological trends or paradigms. At the same time, even when differing on the different elements of the social organization of free India, the different trends also shared many elements of a common vision. The fact that increasingly during the 1930s, the leadership of the national movement got divided into broadly left wing and right wing strands has tended to obscure this fact of a great deal of commonality among the two. The right wing was as strongly anti-colonial and nationalist, humanist, reformist, democratic, secular and developmentalist as the left wing.

As Neerja Singh has brought out in her unpublished study of the Congress Right as represented by Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad and C. Rajagopalachari, it was not at all rightist in the sense in which Tories or Liberals of 19th century or 20th century Britain or the right wing of Europe or the USA were rightist. In economic, social and political terms, Indian nationalist Right was closer to the New Deal Democrats, post-1945 Labour Party and Mitterand’s socialists. It is to be seen as right wing primarily because it was not socialist and was opposed to the Communists and Socialists. In any case, the Congress Right did not stand in the way of the Gandhi-Nehru paradigm becoming dominant in the movement after 1937 and thus determining the political ethos of post-Independence
India. It quietly accepted Nehru as Gandhi’s heir both in the latter’s life-time and after his death.

What were the great and common tasks, objectives, and principles around which the national movement revolved and around which its different ideological trends were united? The most important and complex task was that of nation-making. Nation is the product of a concrete historical process and is therefore a long time in-the-making. Indian leaders from Dadabhai Naoroji to Tilak and Nehru accepted that India was not yet a given nation, a fully structured nation but a nation-in-the-making and that one of the main objectives of the national movement was to promote the process of nation-making through the common struggle against colonialism and through active ideological, political, economic and cultural efforts.

Moreover, India’s becoming a nation was not to be seen as an event but a prolonged and complex historical process which had to be carefully promoted and nurtured. With the passage of time and effort, this process went on being stronger as the present became the past but it could also be constantly challenged. Precisely because it was a process it would go through detours, suffer setbacks and even be interrupted, as happened in 1947 with the partition of India. Nation-in-the-making was both an objective and a subjective, i.e. emotional and intellectual, process. Objectively, Indians were more and more sharing common interests, that is common economic and political conditions of existence, as they had for centuries shared in common elements of culture. But nation was also the product of painstaking conscious effort of the struggle against colonialism during which the Indian people acquired the necessary collective self-consciousness and identity of being one nation. An important part of the vision of the national movement was the commitment to usher in a political system based on parliamentary democracy and civil liberties which were assigned universal and absolute value. The movement itself was organized on democratic lines. It also avoided an authoritarian bent because from the beginning it consisted of and incorporated diverse political, ideological and organizational tendencies.

What is even more important, the concepts of democracy and civil liberties were propagated among the mass of people in rural and urban areas by the nationalist political workers. Thus, gradually, over the years, the national movement created both among the intelligentsia and the people a political culture based on freedom of expression, respect for dissent, the majority principle and the right of minority opinions and trends to exist and compete with the majority opinion. At the same time, the national movement was based on the active role of the masses and on their mobilization for political activity. Already at the turn of the century, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lokamanya Tilak had put their faith in the common people and their capacity to struggle against colonialism. Gandhi’s greatness lay precisely in turning this faith into a reality by promoting the self-mobilization of the common people—the peasants, workers and the middle classes, thus making the movement he led one of the greatest mass movements in world history.

The social vision of the national movement encompassed a secular society and a secular state. Secularism was defined in a comprehensive manner as the separation of religion from the state and politics, treatment of religion as a private affair, state
neutrality towards or equal respect for all religions, and refusal to discriminate between followers of different religions. To counter communalism and give expression to its secular commitment, the National Congress declared in 1931 in its famous Karachi Resolution that in free India “every citizen shall enjoy freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess and practise his religion”, that all citizens would be “equal before the law, irrespective of caste, creed or sex”, that no disability would attach to any citizen on grounds of creed or caste “in regard to public employment, office of power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling”, and that “the state shall observe neutrality in regard to all religions”. Gandhiji, a deeply religious person, not only moved the Karachi Resolution but in turn began to underline what may be described as the secularization of religion. Thus, for example, he wrote in 1942: “Religion is a personal matter which should have no place in politics”.

India consisted of a large number of linguistic-cultural-zones and geographic-economic zones. Its people followed different religions and were divided into hundreds of castes. Tribal people were dispersed all over India. Leaders of the Indian national movement realized that Indian nation had to be built on a very broad foundation. India could be unified and its segmentation overcome only by recognizing and accepting its immense diversity. The Indian leaders did not counterpose the process of nation-in-the-making to the diverse regional, linguistic and ethnic identities and loyalties in India. On the contrary, the emergence of a strong national identity and the flowering of other narrower identities were seen as processes deriving strength from each other. The differences in language, culture, religion and ethnic were to be seen not as obstacles to be overcome but as positive features that were sources of strength to Indian culture, civilization and nationand were, therefore, to be integrated with the emerging common nationhood. Consequently, regional-cultural identities developed but they died not grow in conflict with or opposition to the national movement and the all-India identity. Instead colonialism was seen as the common enemy which surpressed both and prevented their flowering.

Indian national movement was, therefore, committed to religious freedom, diversity of cultures, reorganization of Indian administration and political units or states on linguistic lines, removal of economic disparity among regions and full protection to and development of the cultures, economic autonomy, and life-styles of the tribal people. The movement accepted that a federal polity, a strong centre, a unified economy and composite culture had to be evolved on the basis of the principle of “unity in diversity”. Aware of India’s cultural diversity, the Indian nationalists were also fully conscious, as also proud, of the unifying strands of the common Indian cultural heritage of the last thousands of years. Both at the level of the elites and the common people, elements of a common, composite culture as also common values had been growing over the millennia and thus knitting the epo together. Moreover, even the politics of the rulers had revolved around territorial ambitions which usually cut across regions and were, at their most ambitious, sub-continental in their reach. The concepts of Bharat Varsha and Hindustan were a reality of Indian history. As S. Gopal has put it: “The sense of unity was an emotional reality rooted in history even more than in geography”.
We may also note that India was also increasingly getting divided into modern social classes and strata. Indian nationalism had little difficulty in coming to terms with the emerging class consciousness as also class organizations such as trade unions and kisan sabhas on one side and the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, etc., on the other. The Indian freedom struggle was also a struggle for economic development and economic independence. The movement also accepted with near unanimity the objective of the complete transformation of Indian industry and agriculture on the basis of modern science and technology. Gandhiji was the only major leader who dissented from this vision.

From the beginning, the national movement was ideologically committed to economic nationalism. It based itself on a brilliant critique of colonialism and its impact on Indian economy. The critique, developed as early as the late 19th century by intellectual giants like Dadabhai Naoroji, Justice Ranade, G.V. Joshi, R.C. Dutt and G. Subramaniya Iyer, brought out how, instead of developing India, colonialism had underdeveloped India and subordinated Indian economy to British economy. In particular, the national leaders opposed the appropriation and domination of Indian economic space by foreign capital. Committed to independent and self-reliant economic development, they held that the process of industrialization had to be initiated and developed primarily by Indian capitalists and the Indian state. In the 1930s, the movement also accepted that the self-reliant economy would be developed on the basis of planning and public sector.

The Indian national movement had a deeply humanist vision of society and was fully committed to economic and social justice. At every stage, from Dadabhai Naoroji and Ranade to Gandhi and Nehru, the national leadership linked the goal of independence and the process of nation-making with socio-economic change in the interests of the oppressed and the deprived. The movement adopted from the beginning a pro-poor orientation. Moreover, it constantly went on defining itself in a more and more radical direction. Increasingly freedom was defined in terms of greater social and economic equality. The coming of Gandhiji on the political stage brought the movement closer to the poor. It is they, he laid down, who constituted the nation and consequently nationalism must be judged in terms of how it affected their lives. In the late 1920s and 1930s, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose, Socialists and Communists introduced the socialist strand in the national movement. What is significant is that, as pointed out earlier, even the Congress Right was reformist in its socio-economic outlook. Consequently, no major strand of Indian nationalism was in favour of social status quo; and all agreed that the entire Indian people and not merely the middle and upper classes should benefit from the processes of economic development and political democracy.

The makers of modern India since the days of Raja Rammohan Roy opposed inequality, oppression, and domination based on caste and sex. The national movement brought out millions of women out of the home and the kitchen into political movements and Satyagraha campaigns. The increasingly radical economic and social commitment of Indian nationalism found expression as early as 1931 in the Karachi Resolution of the...
National Congress. Conceived by Jawaharlal Nehru, drafted jointly by him and Gandhiji, and moved by the latter in the Congress session presided over by Sardar Patel, the Resolution declared that “in order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions”. In particular, the Resolution promised equality between men and women, economic relief to peasants and workers, the right to peasants and workers to form unions to protect their rights, and state ownership or control of key industries, mines and means of transport.

Nationalist politics had several distinct characteristics. It was politics of sacrifice. Lakhs gave up their careers, their studies and their jobs, abandoned family life and devoted their entire lives to the national movement. Their life-long commitment to the national cause was no less revolutionary than the sacrifices of the many martyrs. As a whole judged in its totality, nationalist politics maintained a high degree of morality – not a very fashionable word among the sophisticated today. Unity and harmony between means and ends was by and large maintained.

The national movement was in many ways original and innovative. It was no carbon copy of other revolutionary movements, even though it was not sealed off from world history and political thought and was constantly open to the influence of other historical or contemporary mass movements. It based itself on the historical experience and culture of the Indian people as also of the people of the world. This innovative character emerged clearly in the adoption of non-violence as the supreme method of national liberation revolution, the Satyagraha as the form of the mass movements, mass meetings and processions as the forms of political mobilization and education, the delicate, almost dialectical, combination of lawful and law-breaking political activities and the use of the constitutional space provided by the colonial state to promote national struggle.

Above all, nationalist politics united broadest sections of the people of different ideological bents and of vastly different capacities to struggle together for common objectives, common principles, common forms of struggle, and a common goal. Post-1947 Indians were to be heirs to this great revolutionary movement which overthrew the colonial state and established the independent national state. The movement’s basic objectives and traditions were enshrined after great deal of debate and discussion in our Constitution. Political struggle for the making of a new India was to continue, but it had now to take a different form. Instead of massive anti-colonial movements, it had now to take the form of nation-building. And just as our national movement was different from that of others, our nation-building has also to follow a far more complex and different path. However, before we proceed further, note must be taken of two major approaches to nationalism and nation-building that have developed since 1947.

One school belonging to one stream of Marxism, denies and decries the relevance of nationalism to the post-independence period. It has always regarded nationalism as a bourgeois ideology, which was to some extent relevant during the anti-colonial struggle because the indigenous bourgeoisie too was anti-colonial – though constantly vacillating – and therefore a part of the camp of the people. But once the anti-colonial struggle was
over and this bourgeoisie captured state power, nationalism became irrelevant so far as the mass of the exploited and dominated were concerned.

Nationalism now became an instrument of the ruling classes. It became the chief ideological vehicle of bourgeois domination over society. It had now to be treated as a dirty word, or a word of abuse among the revolutionary-minded persons. Similarly, according to this school, the concept (and programme) of nation-building is to be denigrated because nation-building means building the capitalist socio-economic and political order. This is the task of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois class-state. It is therefore of little interest to the working classes and the peasantry. It may be noted that a basic assumption lies at the back of this thinking, i.e., that all politics can be completely divided into two neat and separate political boxes: ruling class politics and non-ruling class politics. This assumption also applied to the politics of the Indian freedom struggle: Gandhi-led, Congress-led national movement was a bourgeois or elite movement while the working people had their own separate movement or movements.

Another strand of opinion sees all-India nationalism as oppressive and the effort to build a strong nation-state as authoritarian and therefore not to be supported. But it is willing to support nationalisms of what it regards as nationalities based on language, religion or tribe. Not surprisingly, those who under-played nationalism before 1947, seeing it as a bourgeois ideology, fell prey in the 1940s to communalism, seeing it as a form of opposition to the nationalism of the dominant sections of the Indian bourgeoisie. Today, those who neglect or denigrate nationalism tend to fall victims to casteism or even, in some covert ways, to communal or linguistic separatism. This is perhaps not the place to refute these two schools of thought and politics. Clearly, they are guided by the critique of nationalism as it arose and developed in Europe. But the origins and therefore the character of nationalism are very different in India, China and other similarly situated countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. In Europe, democracy came in the form of the achievement of political rights by the bourgeoisie against the autocratic state and feudal domination but that does not make democracy and civil liberties bourgeois in character. Same is the case with nationalism in the colonial and ex-colonial world.

We believe that in India, as in the entire ex-colonial world, the potential of nationalism is not exhausted, but that in fact there is great need for it. It still does provide a real solution to the real problem of uniting the Indian people in their struggle for modern social, economic, political and cultural development which lies at the core of the concept of nation-building. Northerners the Indian people struggle for social change except as a people. Moreover, we are living in a world system in which the core countries exploit and dominate the peripheral countries. But the world system is also an inter-state system. The peripheral countries are exploited as nation-states, just as the core countries exploit and dominate as states. Consequently, struggle against peripheralization – and indeed against the world capitalist system as such – has also to be national and through the nation-state.

Nationalism therefore continues to serve a social and political-ideological function for the struggle of the Indian people for economic and social betterment. The choice before the Indian people is not between nationalism and ‘non-nationalism’ but between
different kinds of models of nationalism. And whichever political-ideological formation occupies the nationalist terrain will become the dominant political force in India and will control the Indian state. In fact, mass-based nationalism and national movements are ideologically and politically plural just as they are also multiclass. In other words, nationalism is not inherently a single class ideology. Its ideological and social-class orientation are the result of continuous ideological and political contention within it. That is where the battle is. Nationalism and nation-building are the terrain. Different ideological trends struggle for hegemony over this terrain. Those who give up this terrain lose the battle even before they have joined it.

Of the three models of contemporary nationalism, the one relying on jingoism, chauvinism, xenophobia and authoritarianism and devoid of any basis progressive social and economic content, as was the case with Japanese nationalism after 1868, has been quite weak in India so far, mainly because of the broad internationalist and humanist outlook and the social commitment of the national movement as also of the founding fathers of the republic. This model has so far not taken root despite three wars with Pakistan, one war with China and territorial disputes with both. The main rightist model of nationalism in India has been that of Hindu communalism, the Indian version of Fascism. The communalists put forward Hindu-religion based culture or ‘Hindutva’ as the only basis of lasting nationalism in India. Redefining Indian nationalism and Indian culture as conceived by the national movement and the Indian intelligentsia, the communalists declare that Hindus are not just a religious community in India but “a nation, a culture, a civilization” and that India can only be a Hindu Rashtra (nation), based on the single stream of Hindu culture. Then there is the liberal model in which the democratic state is seen as the main if not the only instrument of nation-building, even though its objectives are defined in terms of developed and social justice.

The last model of nation-building is what may be described as the nationalism-popular in which nation-building is seen in terms of the interests of the popular masses, while popular forces are mobilized in conjunction with the state to strengthen the nation economically, politically and culturally. It may be suggested that nation-building since 1947 has hovered between the last two models with the national-popular model being often paid lip-service while being subordinated to the liberal model. This is partly because of the statist; bureaucratic approach of the main popular political force represented by the Congress Party and partly is of the failure of the more radical, popular forces to accept nation-building as one of their major tasks. They have instead often adopted a sectarian approach towards nation-building indulging in radical rhetoric while practicing gross economism.

The process of nation-building was initiated and illuminated after independence by a highly imaginative and dedicated team of political leaders who had been earlier active in the national liberation struggle. Every one of the leaders had a contribution to make. For example, Sardar Patel’s role in integrating hundreds of the princely states with the Indian Union and in facing up administratively to the trauma of the Partition and the partition riots was outstanding. It was, however, Jawaharlal Nehru’s fate to become the guiding star of India’s nation-building after 1947 and to define and lay down its basic
contours, for he was fully conscious that independence had to be taken beyond mere political independence, the process of the making of Indian nation had to be pushed forward, and the foundations of a democratic, equitable and socialist India had to be firmly laid. Nehru had no ready-made blue-print for nation-building. Even while himself being a socialist, he did not believe that the party he headed or the country should be sharply divided on left-right lines. A newly liberated, underdeveloped country existing in a world dominated by developed capitalist countries could not be built up around a single rigid economic and political programme. Millions could be united around a common vision of nation-building but not around a clear-cut political line. Moreover, he saw nation-building as a process which would be defined as it moved forward. Nation-building required a broad societal consensus. Nehru would rather carry out a minimum programme which would divide the people. His success lay in the fact that by the time he departed, he had succeeded in evolving such a societal consensus and a minimum programme.

As is well known, Nehru’s commitment to democracy and civil liberties was total. Democracy was, moreover, he believed a basic component of nation-building, for it was linked to the unity of the country. Nehru and his generation of leaders had the farsight and the courage to commit themselves to two major innovations of world historical significance in nation-building and social engineering: to build a democratic and civil libertarian society among an illiterate people and to undertake economic development on the basis of a democratic political structure. Nehru rejected capitalist economic development and bourgeois civilizational perspective and was committed to socialism, but he would not define socialism in rigid, schematic and statist terms. In broad, general terms it meant social justice and ending social and economic inequality and wide disparities in income. It also meant opposing the acquisitive instinct and capitalist competitiveness and promoting the cooperative tendency. It meant gradual ending of class distinctions and class domination, and increasing social ownership or control over the means of production. At the same time, Nehru believed that for a long time to come India must have a mixed economy. Similarly, within the broad framework of planning, reliance will have to be placed for a long time on private enterprise and the market forces.

Nehru initiated the process of the rapid, independent and self-reliant economic development of India thus breaking the vicious circle of underdevelopment imposed on India by colonialism. His success can be measured by the fact that even those who accused him earlier of initiating neo-colonial development today accept that under his leadership India made the structural transition from a colonial to an independent economy. They are now appealing to the country not to abandon the Nehruvian heritage in this respect. It was tragic that the national movement could not fully counter communalism and India was partitioned in 1947. But the founding fathers of independent India, led by Nehru, Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad, remained loyal to the secular vision and set out to build a secular society and state, undaunted by the partition and the partition riots.
Jawaharlal Nehru, in particular, wrote and spoke with deep understanding of the broader social, economic and political dimensions and character and causation of communalism and the dangers it posed to the Indian people and the Indian nation. Very perceptively, he saw communalism, whether it took a Hindu, Muslim or Sikh form, as the Indian form of fascism. Moreover, Indian unity, he emphasized again and again, could be maintained only on the basis of secularism. “If allowed free play, communalism would break up India”, he said. One of Nehru’s and his colleagues’ greatest achievements lay in the consolidation of the nation and the building of a strong state. The strong state alone could defend India’s unity and independence and lay the foundations of an independent economy and just society. “We live in a dangerous age”, Nehru wrote, “where only the strong and united can survive or retain their freedom.”

The crisis in nation-building today arises in several fields and out of several factors. Despite commendable achievements in terms of economic development and political democracy, poverty and illiteracy remain. The economic gap vis-à-vis the advanced countries has not narrowed. The country is today endangered by forces of communalism, regionalism, casteism, separatism, corruption and violence. There has occurred over the years the weakening of the nationalist impulse. Different political and social forces and formations and social classes, strata and groups have increasingly ignored social and economic development and the strengthening of the nation-state. In fact, the nation-state has been gradually weakened during the last decade or so. There is the failure among the intelligentsia to distinguish between the state and government - strengthening of the state is seen as support to the government of the day and is, therefore, often opposed.

Many sections of society and political groups have been weakening the state for short-term gains, often raising legitimate economic, political, social or cultural grievances to the extremity of endangering societal development or state strength. Developments endangering national integrity in Punjab, Kashmir, Assam and Tamil Nadu are only extreme examples of this tendency, as are the efforts to divide the entire country on caste lines through Mandalization and communal lines through the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute. Similarly, the entirely legitimate aspiration to decentralize the polity and decision-making and decision-implementation are counterposed to the strengthening of the nation-state. Simultaneously there prevails the tendency to depend on the state to realize all social and economic ideas and objectives.

The nation-state has also been weakened by the increasing undermining of bureaucracy and other governmental institutions. By any criteria, the police is in a bad shape. Its use in any situation tends to worsen the situation. In general, the administration is inefficient, corrupt and lacking in the necessary autonomy and has been run down at every level, especially at the levels where the people come into contact with it. In the economic field, despite great achievement, it looks as if we will miss the fourth industrial revolution based on microchip, bio-technology, information technology, alternative energy and modern economic management. Today, economic development, is crucially dependent on what may be described as the ‘brain-power’ or the developed scientific, technical and managerial capacities of the citizens. We suffer from massive external brain
drain because of emigration of our trained personnel. But, we also suffer from internal brain drain because of the denial of adequate educational opportunities to most of our children and because of the poor educational standards of our schools and university system. Consequently, even what is given to the poor with one hand is often taken away by the other.

Capitalist development invariably engenders uneven regional development. Planning has failed to eradicate regional inequalities even though to do so was one of its major objectives. Regional inequality is a potential time bomb directed against national unity and political stability. Indian society, as it has developed after 1947, continues to be grossly unequal, unjust and inhuman. Economic inequality has increased rather than decreased. There is maldistribution of income and economic power. Basic needs of the vast masses remain unfulfilled despite certain amelioration in their condition. More than 30% Indians still live below the poverty line even though they no longer live in abysmal poverty as they did in the colonial period and, in fact, till late 1950s. Northern, despite a great deal of progress, are other indicators of progress towards a humane, egalitarian and just social order such as literacy, infant mortality, supply of drinking water, health facilities, and employment opportunities satisfactory. In general, there has been a general failure to shift social, economic and political power in favour of the poor and the disadvantaged. It is only during elections that they get a big taste of political power. While the middle classes have been able to find various means of promoting their interests, the poor, especially the rural poor, continue to be unrepresented in various centres of power from village upwards. Even the radical organizations have tended to neglect their mobilization.

Communalism continues to stalk the land. Even while containing it, national movement and the secular forces during the last five decades failed to eliminate it from the body politic. Communalism is basically a belief system, an ideology; and it is precisely in the ideological realm that secular failure has been large. While communal forces, both Hindu and Muslim, were being contained electorally, their ideological spread was not fully met. The result is that secular forces tend to wake up only when large-scale communal violence occurs or the communal parties make major electoral gains. Similarly, legitimate regional economic and cultural aspirations are being exploited by secessionist and unprincipled political forces. While casteism and caste-war ideologies pervade politics, case oppression continues in rural areas in virulent forms. The thrust provided by the national movement against the caste system has gradually petered out after independence. Women's condition too improves at a snail's pace. Apart from older forms of male domination, they are subjected to new forms of oppression such as dowry deaths and to atrocities such as rape.

There has also been the gradual erosion of traditional values and their replacement by the degenerate values of acquisitive capitalism. Perhaps the main area of darkness in India today is that of politics. The entire realm of politics has been devalued to an extent that in popular parlance it has become a dirty word. Indian political system has been stagnating for some time and rapidly disintegrating in the last few years. It has been losing its moral authority among the people. It has perhaps even become
disfunctional. It tends to corrode everything and everyone it touches. Increasingly, it weighs heavily on civil society and acts as a noose around it. Even at the highest levels of politics, gimmickery has taken the place of broad strategy and meaningful, carefully thought out tactics. Even major parties and political leaders have been living from hand to mouth. Most people now look upon all talk of nation-building also as a part of the empty political rhetoric of power-hungry politicians.

There is the increasing criminalization of politics and a growing nexus between politicians, businessmen, bureaucracy, police, and criminals. One naked expression of this is the massive scale on which elections are being rigged in some states. Similarly, the use of money-power in politics in general and elections in particular has reached unimaginable proportions. Equally worrisome is the wide reach of criminalization and communalization of society and politics which now cover rural areas as they did earlier the urban areas. Symptomatic of this degeneration of politics and the growing public cynicism is the fact that in recent years popular electoral mandates and massive parliamentary majorities are no longer respected and have tended to quickly evaporate or break down. Moreover, as pointed out in 1989 in an appeal by a large number of leading Indian intellectuals: “the level of political debate has sunk low and the focus of public attention is diverted from programmes and policies pursued by various political parties contending for electoral support to issues of a personal nature”. For example, the last two elections have been fought over such non-issues as the Bofors scandal, the reconstruction of a non-existing temple and the reservation of a few thousand jobs in government services. This degeneration of politics is not only dangerous to national unity and development and the nation-state but is especially so in view of the dynamics of the changing international economic and political order.

What is sad and frightening and despairing is that there is no glimpse of an alternative. Forces of nationalism are in disarray, as if the nation is suffering from fatigue. The forces of nationalism, democracy, development, and social equity and justice are unable to put forward a fresh agenda. Those who are inspired by the Gandhi-Nehru framework are failing to adapt and develop it to meet the challenges posed by the very successes and failures of this framework as also by the massive changes the world has undergone in the last two decades or so. What is the way out? Clearly, it is necessary to once again release and reroute the Indian people’s economic, political, intellectual, cultural and moral energies. We have once again to innovate in all fields – in technology, in politics, in economic organization, in education, in human resources development. We have also to link with the traditions of the freedom struggle, even while critically evaluating its positive and negative features.

First of all, there is the need to strengthen the nation-state which must remain “a going concern”, for India, along with other Third World countries, faces a real danger of disruption and destabilization and, ultimately, also of loss of real independence, so that the very existence of the independent nation-state becomes problematic. Today, only effective use of state power can meet the challenges posed by secessionist forces and terrorism in different parts of the country. A strong state is also needed to oppose the processes of economic peripheralization (or semi-colonialism) and to maintain, and make
the full shift towards, economic independence, still perhaps the main national task. A weak state endangers the economy just as faulty operations of the economy can endanger the state.

A united nation and a strong nation-state are necessary today on both economic and political grounds. Because of our large size and national unity, we have already an advantageous position that Europe is trying to achieve and the Soviet Union is trying to maintain and to which Africa and Latin America have been aspiring in vain for decades. Where a nation-state is concerned, the maxim ‘small is beautiful’ just does not apply.

Preservation and further development of national independence in all its political, economic and cultural dimensions need strong ideological commitment – Bipan Chandra would even say dedication – to nationalism. Commitment to nationalism does not of course mean absence of differences on paths of social and economic development or commitment to any other social ideology or ideologies. There is also no need to counterpoise nationalism to class struggle. In today’s world classes too are constituted on a national basis, northern can class consciousness develop without the prior development and existence of national consciousness. Nationalism is also the best antidote to communalism. Struggle against communalism cannot be waged only or even primarily on a class basis. All secular forces can be united to oppose communalization of society and politics only around the much broader societal ideology of nationalism. It is of interest to note that Nehru’s and Gandhi’s main attack on communalism was not that it was anti-Hindu or anti-Muslim but that it was against national interest or was anti-national. This is also the critique which the communalists find most difficult to meet, and it makes them see red, for they hope to come to power by filling the nationalist space masquerading as nationalists. Even apart from communalism, there is a certain decline in the socialist vision. This is likely to lead to people turning to religion fundamentalism, casteism and other reactionary ideologies. The best antidote is to reinforce the socialist vision with the nationalist patriotic appeal and emotion. Moreover, only a strong nation-state based on strong secular nationalism can protect the minorities and deal firmly with communal violence and communalism.

Independent economic development requires certain sacrifices and austerity from the people which is not easy in these days of consumerism aided by the ease with which information travels all over the world. This sacrifice and austerity can only be sustained through strong economic nationalism. This has been the experience of modern China, Japan and South Korea as also of India during the Nehru era. One of our problems has been that the political leadership started catering to populism in place of demanding sacrifice from all. In any case the fight against peripheralization requires its full articulation with strong economic nationalism.

Apart from communalism, nationalism is also a necessary part of the effort to break regional, linguistic, casteist and other narrower identities. It is great that India’s is a democratic polity, but what is the extent of participation in it by the bottom 50 per cent? It is essential to deepen democracy and make it more meaningful to the poor, and to use the processes of democracy to end poverty and to bring about faster and more thorough
going social changes. No strong nation-state can be built unless there is a gradual shift of social, economic and political power in favour of the exploited and the oppressed.

Indian state has been on the whole secular so far. However, society and religion are being gradually communalized. Secularism can be a strong pillar of the state only if society and religion are also more fully secularized. What is meant by secularization of religion was perhaps best put Buddhism Gandhiji. Bipan Chandra repeats what he said in 1947: “Religion is the personal affair of each individual. It must not be mixed up with politics or national affairs”. Moreover, communalism, being an ideology, cannot be weakened unless a long-term political and ideological struggle is waged against it.

Today, nationalism is above all about independent economic developed. But the latter task is much more difficult today than it was in Nehru’s age, for the world is much more capitalist and much more economically integrated today. How to remain loyal to Nehru’s developmentalist vision and retain self-reliance and economic independence, that is, control over the direction of national economic development and the distribution of its fruits, even while participating fully in the world economic processes is the difficult task which the present generation has to perform. Faced with a changing economic world and fast developing technologies, we must devise new economic strategies even while remaining committed to the objectives set by the founding fathers.

Nationalism has also to be more firmly integrated with forces of social and economic change. Eradication of poverty is a national task. Similarly, social oppression, social barriers and social discrimination based on caste, sex or ethnicity have to be much more firmly exposed and uprooted than we have done so far. They are not compatible with nationalism or national identity formation. National cohesion lies at the base of the strength of the nation-state and national cohesion is bound to be weak in a society sharply divided by class, caste or status. At the same time, nationalism is needed to bring about social change in a democratic state. Under democratic conditions, no abiding or thoroughgoing changes in social and economic structure can be brought about without a large majority of people supporting them. But such a large majority can be built only by uniting people of diverse social and economic interests and status. To overcome class parochialism and class egotism an overarching ideology and emotion are needed. Nationalism based on the concepts of social justice and humanism can play this role; and this it can do not by negating class consciousness and class struggle but by making these a part of the larger framework of abiding social change to be brought about within the democratic political framework.

Another area urgently needing innovation is that of culture and tradition. If the communal and obscurantist forces are not to be permitted to appropriate our cultural heritage, it is necessary for modern and secular forces to establish creative and critical link with our cultural heritage and tradition. This is unfortunately an unexplored area of our life. Indigenous cultures and traditions and popular religions continue to play an important part in the lives of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie. In particular, democrats and nationalists must distinguish between religion as philosophy, spiritual experience, guide to morality and psychological solace and religion as ritual, dogma, bigotry and a vehicle for communalism. Of course, neither development nor social
change nor equity nor even national unity can be promoted without the active mobilization of the mass of the people behind the effort. After all, Gandhiji’s greatest achievement was the arousal of the people to politics and their active participation in the political processes.

It is in particular important to mobilize and empower the agricultural labourers who have gained the least from the economic development of the last 44 years and who are still subjected to barbaric forms of social and economic oppression and are often denied participation in political processes. Without going into detail, Bipan Chandra suggests that provision of regular work to the landless under schemes like the Employment Guarantee Scheme would go far in empowering the rural poor and making them active participants in nation-building. Active political mobilization of the people is necessary, but hackneyed hartals, bandhs and hunger-strikes, etc., are not the answer. Here too innovation is urgently needed. We have got to evolve new forms of political activism – forms which are suited to a self-governing democracy. It is necessary in this respect not to confuse mere militancy with social radicalism. Nor need radicalism be equated with disrespect for the law and the Constitution.

Over centralization and bureaucratization of state power are two of the most negative features of Indian political development. Decentralization of decision-making and decision-implementation is very much on today’s agenda. It is also wrong to counterpoise decentralization of state functions to a strong nation-state. We need both. The two are not only complementary, but decentralization of power is needed today precisely to build a strong state based on democratization, active popular support and greater national integration. In fact, the depth of nationalism depends on the degree of actual participation by the people in macro and micro decision-making and decision-implementation. Such participation alone enables the people to feel that the nation is theirs or rather that they are the nation.

Lastly, there is the need today for the unification of all dynamic, democratic and progressive political forces behind the common objective of nation-building and national advance and a common national programme of independence, democracy, secularism, economic development based on the latest technology, redistribution of social product so as to achieve the goals of equality and social justice and, above all, to overcome the poverty of the lower 50%. There can, however, be several models or schools of thought to achieve the national goals outlined above. All political parties and groups and intellectual and ideological currents committed to these goals and to the task of nation-building must accept openness – glasnost – in their attitude to one another. There should also be no rigidity because none of the existing models of nation-building and social change can claim uniform success, to put it mildly. Consequently, all should be willing to innovate and modify and above all to carry on a dialogue with one another.

To conclude: There is the need to constantly redefine Indian nationalism so as to inspire the Indian people with realizable goals and objectives. Nationalism is still the most relevant ideology in India. The question is how nationalism will get defined today. Will it be democratic, secular and socialist or right-wing, communal, chauvinist and fascist? Will it lead to an economically and politically independent nation or will it
push back India into a peripheral, semi-colonial position in the world system and the comity of nations? Will nationalism serve as a negative ideology which strengthens the status quo in the interests of the few or will it serve as the ideological cutting edge for all those who want to restructure society in the interests of the many? Undoubtedly, nationalism will be redefined in the light of the heritage of India’s national movement. The innovations will have to be based on our historical experiences and the values and principles developed in the past. We must remain true to the ideals of our civilization and more immediately to the vision of our nationalist ancestors, such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Lokamanya Tilak, Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru – but at the same time we must creatively develop the thought of these and other great men and not fossilize them.

**WILL INDIAN NATION HOLD?**

The break-up of the Soviet Union has led many to question the viability of the Indian Union and the Indian nation. Others tend to compare India with West European nations and come to a similar dismal conclusion. This questioning is, however, based on a gross historical misunderstanding, for the historical processes through which West European nations came into being or the Soviet Union was formed were very different from those which formed the Indian nation. A nation is the product of a concrete historical process. Its formation and therefore viability and longevity can be studied only by examining its concrete historical development and not through static definitions as is usually done by political scientists or was done by Stalin.

Tsarist Russia was a ‘prison-house of nationalities’ where one nationality, Russia, dominated and oppressed culturally, economically and politically the other nationalities. The success of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Bolshevik success in the Civil War were in part because of the revolts of the suppressed nationalities. But the latter did not struggle together as part of a national or socialist liberation movement. The ensuing union of Socialist states was also the result not of a prolonged organic historical process but of the gradual imposition of a union upon the liberated nationalities. Undoubtedly, the union resulted in the cultural and economic development of the erstwhile oppressed and exploited areas, but the psychological union obviously did not go far, especially as Great Russian chauvinism continued, though not unabated. Moreover, the different nationality-republics functioned together less as a result of mutual interaction and more as a result of the common Russian umbrella or hegemony.

In Western Europe, nation and nationalism were largely, though not wholly, the result of common language and culture (neither France nor Britain were ethnically or linguistically homogenous till the 19th century and are not fully so even today) as also the bourgeoisie’s struggle against feudal domination and for the creation of a unified market and state. In the late 19th century and the 20th century nationalism in European countries took the form of chauvinism and jingoism around imperialism and the effort to maintain their dominant economic position in the modern world system.
In India, on the other hand, nation and nationalism were the result neither of ethnicity or common language nor of dominant position acquired by any one ethnic group or region. They were basically the result of the struggle for freedom of the entire Indian people from British rule. This difference also enables us to define the nation in the Indian context. Indian nation basically means the coming into being of the Indian people as a historical entity. The Chinese, for example, do not use the words Chinese nation but the ‘Chinese people’ as a unity or entity. The nation or the people were formed in India not because their society or culture became homogenous but because their economic and political interests and the interests of their social and cultural development became one, even when they continued to be differentiated by language and ethnicity. Consequently, the question whether India is a nation or a federation of nationalities loses much of its relevance. What we have to do is to recognize that the Indian people have historically developed both common economic, political, social and cultural interests as well as cultural and linguistic heterogeneity.

Nation-formation is both an objective and a subjective process. For a nation to be formed its economy and polity as also to some extent its culture have to increasingly get integrated. But that is necessary but not sufficient, for the process of nation-formation can be interrupted and disrupted because of subjective political, ideological and emotional factors. In other words, it all depends on concrete historical development. The pre-colonial India had already acquired some elements of common existence and common consciousness. Despite its immense diversity, certain strands of a common cultural heritage had also developed. Both at the level of the upper classes and the working masses, elements of a common, composite culture as also common values had grown. The politics of the rulers, and of kingdoms and empires, also cut across regions. The territorial reach of the more ambitious engulfed the sub-continent. The concepts of Bharat Varsha and Hindustan were a reality of Indian history.

True, India was invaded and conquered many times. But the successive waves of invaders invariably settled down here and became assimilated. The new ruling classes merged with the older ones. The Mughals, for example, relied on the earlier zamindars, often Rajputs, and the scribal castes, such as the Kayasthas, in Northern India to collect revenue and administer the empire. Nor did the earlier ruling classes or the common people identify the new rulers as foreigners, except perhaps in the first generation. There was, of course, resistance from the top and, especially during the 17th and 18th centuries, from popular rebellions, but neither involved ethnic grounds. It was the colonial and communal historians who later invented the tradition of ethnic or religious resistance against the Mughals or ethnic and religious domination by the Mughals. Interestingly, even though many regional chieftains fought against the Mughal rulers and succeeded in setting up independent kingdoms, they continued to work within the framework of the Mughal revenue and administrative system. Also, despite backward means of transport and communication, a great deal of India-wide trade, specialization of production and credit networks developed, especially during the late medieval period.

The colonialization of Indian economy, society and polity further strengthened the process of India’s unification. The process of Indians developing common interests
and sharing common conditions of existence and thus getting unified into a ‘people’ was very much quickened from about the middle of the 19th century. Growth of internal and external trade, destruction of the relative self-sufficiency of the rural economy and of different regions, creation of an all-India market, introduction of modern trade, industries, banking and means of communication on an all-India scale, and a uniform system of law, administration and education increasingly unified the country and created a single economic, administrative and political entity. Colonization did, of course, produce regional economic imbalances but despite the disparity the economic linkage between the regions was more important. Moreover, regional imbalances were not the result of the evolution of different regional, regionally integrated, economies and the economic domination of some regions by others but the result of the capitalist and colonial character of the unification of the Indian economy.

Above all, however, it was the common enemy in the form of colonialism and the experience of colonial domination and the struggle against them which provided new uniting bonds to the Indian people. The very existence of foreign rule that oppressed all the Indian people irrespective of their social class, caste, region, religion, or language acted as a unifying factor. This aspect was clearly seen by John Seeley, the famous Oxford Professor, who had denied that India was a nation and was the first to describe it as a “geographical expression”, but who also wrote that the British might bring the Indian nation into being by providing a common target to its people. Consequently, the anti-imperialist struggle and the feeling of solidarity in its course contributed powerfully to the making of the Indian nation.

Moreover, the Indian nation was being formed and the identity of Indians being one ‘people’ was coming into existence as a result of the conscious ideological and political practices of the national movement. Social reality is seldom given directly to our senses; we cannot grasp it empirically. Contradictions with colonialism or even the character of colonialism was not directly visible to the Indian people, nor were the objective processes forming the nation. Both anti-colonialism and the Indian nation were, therefore, in part the result of the political and ideological struggle by the national movement. It was during this movement that the Indian people acquired the necessary collective self-consciousness and identity of being one nation. Looked at from this point of view, ‘nation’ was not a datum prior to the national movement or provided to it. Perhaps, without this movement, Indians would have remained merely the inhabitants of a geographical region on the map.

It may also be noted that this is where the political scientists and Stalin make a major error. They pre-suppose a static society. They assume that first a nation is formed and then the struggle for its emancipation or consolidation takes place. The conservative nationalists and the communalists are, of course, even more extreme in their belief. For them, to quote Raphael Samuel, “nationality is something unproblematic and pre-given, a unity which defies time and space and links past and present in a mystic union”. In fact, to repeat, there is no such thing as a nation in abstract. Nation is a process of becoming, and a rather recent phenomenon to boot the world over. In India’s case, the formation of the nation and the struggle for its emancipation are simultaneous. They are interdependent; their relationship is dialectical. National consciousness motivates
struggle and struggle spurs on consciousness. It is also important to note that the Indian national movement was not initiated as a federation of regional or linguistic-area based national movements which joined together to form the national movement. The movement was founded as an all-Indiamo which later acquired regional and language-based units or branches. Neither Europe nor the Soviet Union ever went through this experience. In Western Europe, the only similar experience could have been that of resistance against Nazi occupation. But this was not so: the resistance movements remained separate with British and American high commands providing the only linkages. Nor was there a Russia-wide revolution in 1917. The revolution of 1917 remained essentially a Russian Revolution.

Because the making of the Indian nation was and is a prolonged and continuous historical process and not an event, there was nothing inevitable or pre-ordained about it; it faced and faces continuous challenges and was and is constantly open to interruption, disruption and even reversal. One such disruption occurred in 1947. The process has therefore to be carefully sustained, promoted and nurtured. Part of this nurturing has to be constant remaking and redefinition of nation and nationalism as the common people, who really constitute the nation, become more active and more conscious agents of history. The debate should be on what is the agenda of the nation and nationalism and how the process of nation-making and of national liberation struggle which created the nation are to be taught to the young and not on whether it was a good or a bad ‘thing’ that India became a nation and the Indian people organized a national liberation struggle. After all, we can only study and learn from history and not remake it to suit our views. It is then also clear that Bipan Chandra does not agree with the view which regards nationalism as an inherently negative ideology because it is a ‘bourgeois class ideology’ which therefore has to be opposed from the people’s point of view or at least ignored as being relevant only to the ruling classes. Without arguing at length against this view, he only suggests that the way India was formed into a nation by the people and the way they organized the national liberation struggle effectively negates this view.

Nor can universalisms be used to counter loyalty to the nation, i.e., patriotism. It is being said that Europe’s coming together and formation of an economic and political union is a proof that we in India do not need nationalism and should not promote one. But this is an entirely wrong reading of the historical and political processes in Europe or in India. In fact, Europe is trying to reach today where we started from in 1947. After bitter lessons of the last four hundred years, it is trying to unite into an economic and political union to fare better and on a stronger footing in the world of political and economic giants, even while maintaining the cultural and linguistic autonomy of its different units. It is also trying to replace the existing narrower territorial nationalisms with a European nationalism. It is opening its doors to European citizens but not to the Africans or Asians. Vis-a-vis non-Europeans, including the USA and Japan, it is trying to emerge as a stronger unit—and that is why its constituents are uniting. This is exactly what we have already accomplished in India. India’s linguistic units are united economically and politically even while remaining culturally autonomous. For the foreseeable future this is how we have to develop further. Indian nationalism will become irrelevant not by
its negation or by destruction of Indian unity but only when the rest of the world will also no longer be formed into territorial, political-economic units, i.e., nations.

DIFFERENT VIEWS OF SCHOLARS ABOUT INDIAN NATIONALISM

Historians’ view of Indian nationalism varies from person to person. However, certain lines of thought can be identified in the vast sea of historical and sociological literature produced so far on Indian nationalism. There is no difference, yet, over the fact that Indian nationalism was a product of colonial modernity. As the self-possessed mission of the colonizers was to uplift the colonized from a decadent position to a state of progress towards modernity, it became an imperative for the latter to get out of the backwardness and to assert that they too were capable of uniting and ruling themselves within the structural framework of a modern state. The most important function of the movement, therefore, was to build a national unity and to claim its right to self-determination. But there are different opinions over the question of how Indian nationalism began to be formed and how they actually imagined their nation.

For early nationalist leaders, Indian national movement was the handiwork of the rising middle class in India. The middle class came into existence in India as a result of the leveling tendencies of the western culture and its impact on Indian social institutions. “The rise of middle class in Bengal is therefore the most remarkable and most reassuring of the signs of the (modern) times. It is certain that in this part of India our faces are set in the right direction, that progress and not the retrogression in the order of the day ……”. This somewhat naïve social theory of the national movement breathed an optimism which was naturally not shared by the prejudiced official sociology of Indian nationalism. The (British) official theory was that the political agitation in India was the work of a few wire-pulling lawyers and professional politicians of high caste elites, such as the bhadralok in Bengal, chitpavans in Maharashtra, and against this caste domination the British government was the protector of the cultivation and labouring masses. But the crudeness of the nationalist and official views was not shared by many others.

Two intelligent and forceful arguments about nationalism were that of Valentine Chirol and M N Roy. Valentine negated the nationalist optimism. He claimed that India was a mere geographical expression which could never develop into a nation in the western sense of the term. Whatever political movement existed in India had their roots in traditional, instinctively in anti-western sources. The so-called national movement, according to him, was engineered by small elite groups of traditional society, who had in view the particular interest of their own caste, and not the general interest of the people. He also emphasized the material interest of the elite castes. They were pursuing the old aims of caste domination through new method of adjustment with British rule and acquisition of English education.

M. N. Roy tried to set the Indian national movement in the universal Marxist framework of the development of human society. To him, the movement represented a particular stage in the development of the mode of production in the different parts of the world. He posed a challenge to the view of Lenin that India was a feudal. According to him, as India never experienced feudalism in a predominating manner, the national
bourgeoisie lack the potential for a revolutionary movement for the subversion of the existing order. Only the workers were the new force which would push the national movement to its logical conclusion. Though he explained the emergence of the Indian national movement under British rule in terms of the political ideology and aspirations of a youthful bourgeoisie ‘which has risen inspite of innumerable obstacles’, he promised his argument on the absence of an Indian nationality in the eighteenth century. Here his views coincide with that of Chirol who upheld the absence of any political nationhood in India before the British rule.

This view of absence of political nationhood is also sounded by other historians in post-independence period. R. C. Majumdar had argued that India did not constitute a composite national unit on the eve of the British conquest. “As such India has a precise meaning to us. But to our ancestors, whollived under British rule even a century and a half ago, India in this sense had no meaning and no existence. They talked of the Sikhs, Rajputs, Marathas, Hindustanis, Bengalis, Oriyas, Tamils etc., but had no conception of an Indian” Later, Bipan Chandra expressed that nationalism was an entirely new organizing principles and ideology. Thus there is unanimity to a great extend in the fact that there was no nationalist unity in the pre-British period. At the same time the question of how did a national movement emerged in India under British rule became an important problem pursued by the historians of modern India. Such a problem has been dealt with many historians and sociologists who adopt different approaches with the resultant variations in the conclusions. These differences relate mainly to three vital aspects of the problem. Firstly, what were the dynamic of the political changes in the late nineteenth and early nineteenth centuries? Secondly, what were the most decisive territorial units (the subcontinent, the province or the locality) in which these changes have to be analyzed at first? Thirdly, what were the groups whose participation in one way or other shaped these political processes of change?

The Marxian views about nationalism in India are mainly charcterised by their notion of mode of production. They held that changes in the structure of economy produced new social relationships; transforming society from status based to a contract based one, and set in motion, a large social mobility which had never taken place in India never before. The set in motion, a large social mobility which had never taken place in India never before. The foundation of the Indian national congress was inseparably connected with the rise of anindigenous Indian capitalist industry. The political struggle for freedom was the product of the disruption of the old economic and social order. The economic changes effected in India under colonial rule paved the way for a market economy. Consequently a new social class of traders, merchants, subordinate agents of the company and private British traders, middlemen and money lenders sprang up. The political development of modern India since the beginning of the nineteenth century can be considered as the history of the struggle of this class to find a new identity.

Marxist historians in general attributed the political nationalism in India to the emergence of a new class. R P Dutt wrote that the growth of modern industry in the second half of the 19th century led to the rise of the bourgeoisie, together with a new educated middle class of lawyers, administrators, teachers and journalists. Writing of a
few Marxian historians and sociologists echoed the same view before and after independence. But they shifted from that of Dutt in many respect. A.R. Desai, for example, argues as follows. With the growth of modern industries, new classes of modern bourgeoisie and a working class came into existence, along with the professional classes. The intelligence drawn from professional classes, developed before the industrial bourgeoisie and led the national movement in each phase.

N.M. Goldberg has introduced a somewhat tentative distinction in the class basis of the moderate and extremist movements within Indian National Congress. For him, the native capitalist class, weak and tied to foreign economics interests, was irresolute on the demands which it expressed through the early congress of the moderate leaders, he extremist congress leaders according to him, gave vent to the interest of petty bourgeois intelligentsia as the latter had suffered both from the hard material conditions in the country as well as the extremely limited opportunities of employment. V.I. Pavlov observes that India’s national industrialist bourgeoisie first rose in Bombay by accumulating capital in comprador activities associated with European merchant capital operating in overseas cotton trade and opium trade with China. The deep contradiction between the comprador and industrial activities of big Bombay bourgeoisie made their representatives the Bombay liberal intelligentsia and the top liberal section of Maratha intelligentsia-hesitant in their demand. Bombay bourgeoisie marketed their cotton cloths in China rather than home market. But when they faced the Japanese competition in China, they began to show interest in swadeshi movement. It was the absence of big Maratha intelligentsia, led by Tilak, more uncompromising in their struggles against imperialism.

The economic determinist position was however questioned by many historians belong to both Marxist historians, Bipan Chandra who represents this school assign the most important role in the rise of Indian nationalism to the formulation of an ideology by Indian intelligentsia, though he allows some weight to the Indian capitalist class. To him, the problem concerns the real nature of imperialism and how it contradicted the true interests of all classes of Indian people. In his view, the realization of this problem by intelligentsia and their consequent propagation of anti imperialist ideology, which represented the common interests of all classes of India, gave rise to Indian nationalism. Distancing himself from, the extreme determinism of the early Marxist writings, he argues that the early Indian nationalist ideologue were not middle class, but were the intellectual representatives of the nation as a whole against colonial exploitation. Their outlook was capitalistic because they believed that this was genuine path of Indian development, and not because they were the political representatives of the Indian capitalist class. In any case it was not until after the First World War that they received any support from leading men of commerce and industry.

Sumit Sarkar also expressed similar doubts about the simplistic version of the class approach used by the early Marxist historians. In his study of Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, he points to the inconvenient facts of indifference and even hostility shown towards attitude of industrial bourgeoisie of Bombay and Gujart. He also showed that weakness of the theory of urban petty bourgeois manning the swadeshi movement. He, however, tries to explain the social character of nationalist leadership drawing from
conceptual richness of Marxism. He uses Trotsky’s concept of ‘substitutism’ and Antonio Gramsci’s ‘traditional’ intelligentsia to explain the presence of an intelligentsia which is acting as a proxy for as yet passive social forces with which it had little organic connection. The ‘traditional’ intellectuals too, though not directly and organically related to the production process could be won away by revolutionary forces. The English educated elite of Bengal, according to Sarkar ‘may be regarded perhaps as a traditional intelligentsia in Gramsci’s sense, responding readily if often a bit superficially to word ideological current-liberalism, nationalism, eventually in part even to socialism.

Thus the Marxist views of nationalism revolve around the notion of the mode of production. Though the early Marxist approached the phenomenon with crude and strict tools of Historical materialism represented by economic determinism, the later writers questioned the simplistic adoption of economic determinist theory and proposed more convincing interpretations that could explain multifarious strands and shades of political behaviour and leadership involved in the struggle for freedom in India without deviating from the paradigms of Marxism.

Another school of historians who has contributed significantly to the study of nationalism in India is the subaltern school. They are largely historians of modern Indian history who have initiated a new perspective on the study of Indian nationalism, arguing that the studies conducted in 20th century were dominated by an elitism that focused on the colonial state or the indigenous elites, the bourgeois nationalist or the middle class, They stress the need to look at the participation of the subaltern groups as defined by Gramsci. ‘History from below’ became their slogan.

In the first of the twelve volume Subaltern Studies, R Guha set the agenda for the Subaltern series of histories. The stated aim is “to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian studies. Ranjith Guha’s opening contribution (on some aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India) pursues the critique of elitist historiography in both colonial and bourgeois nationalist variant. In the neo colonialist view the nationalism is the outcome of an Indian elite’s response to the institution and opportunities generated by colonialism, through which they could attain a share of wealth power and prestige created by colonialism. The second variant, in which the indigenous elite alone inspired and led the people to freedom, is, in Guha’s depiction, romanticist and idealist. For him, nationalist historiography assessed popular nationalist action negatively as law and order problems, or, positively, as response to the call of the charismatic leaders or manipulation of the factions.

The study of the Quit India Movement in Bihar by Stephan Henningham shows how the elitists and subalterns participated in the Quit India movement in Bihar on account of different stimuli. The duality of the insurrection which created the impetus for the activity on the part of a broad spectrum of the society was also the basis for the political incoherence which, in the face of massive repression leads to defeat. The works of Gyan Pandey on peasant movements in Awadh, of Ranjith Das Gupta on the national Movement in Jaipalgudi district, various works of Partha Chatterjee, Bikhu
Parekh, Shahid Amin and the work of Josh and Joshi, reveals multiple facets of Subaltern perspectives on Indian Nationalism.

The Ambedkarian perceptions of nationalism are more centered on the practice of Jati than concept of class. Dr Ambedkar’s views of Indian nationalism opposes to the dominant discourse of Hindu nationalism on the one hand, and Communist-secular-socialist nationalism on the other. Hindu nationalism in essence aims at strengthening the Brahmanical supremacy in the post-colonial India. The communist-secular-socialist nationalism though based on abolition of class is myopic to the Dalits tribulations. Dr. Ambedkar’s conception of nationalism articulated and synthesized the national perceptions and aspirations of the downtrodden. Ambedkar’s alternative form of nationalism, popularly known as Dalit Bahujan nationalism’s incorporated the subaltern philosophy of Jyotirao Phule and Periyar E.V Ramaswami Naicker. It constructed an anti-Hindu and anti-Brahmanical discourse of Indian nationalism. It aimed at establishing a casteless and classless society where no one would be discriminated on the basis of birth and occupation. Within the Dalit-Bahujan framework of Indian nationalism, Ambedkar built up a critique of pre-colonial Brahmanism and its asymmetrical social set up based on low and high dichotomy of graded caste system. This system of inegalitarianism led to the process of exploitation by the unproductive Brahmanical castes of the various productive castes. Nationalism thus was conceived from the premises of civil rights and equal citizenship.

The actualization of concrete rights for the masses as aspects of equal citizenship was conceptualized as the very transition of nation and nationhood. Writing in the very year of the foundation of Indian National Congress, Jyothibha Phule challenged the ‘nationalness’ of the new organization with his counter concept of nation. Jyothibha Phule for example says “There cannot be a nation worth the name until and unless all people of the land of king Bali- such as Shudras and Ati-Shudras, Bhils and fishermen etc. become truly educated and are able to think independently for themselves and are uniformly unified and emotionally integrated. If a tiny section of population like the upstart Aryan Brahmins alone were to found the ‘national congress’ who will take any notice of it?

The prominence of religious beliefs and accommodation of religious superstition in the scheme of nationalism of Indian National Congress were further criticized by this stream. Coming down heavily on congress brand of nationalism Peryar E V Ramaswami Naicker says. If we consider, on what must depend the nationalism of a nation, minimally the people of a nation, without having to sell or bargain their mind or conscience, should be able to eke out their livelihood. More then this there are several other nationalisms; knowledge should grow; education is needed; equality is needed; unity is needed; self effort is needed; genuine feelings are needed; cheating one another for a living should not be there; lazy people should not be there; like these several more things should be done’.

Following this B. R. Ambedkar has articulated a more clear form of this thought on Indian nationalism. Ambedkar understandings of the question of the identity and existence of the nation were based on his inclusive analysis of the oppressive character
of the Hindu community. Since the dominant Hindu discourse of Indian nationalism remained indifferent towards removal of the caste system; and the economic analysis of the communist secular socialist school also failed to highlight the issue of the caste in its mechanical interpretation of class, Ambedkar’s himself an untouchable and victim of untouchability “formulated his own framework from the perspective of the untouchables for the understanding of the system of caste and untouchability. The foundations of dalit-Bahujan nationalism lie in this framework developed by Ambedkar. It aimed at restructuring the Indian society into a casteless and classless and egalitarian Sangha. Annihilation of caste was its central theme. Caste for Ambedkar was nothing but Brahmanism incarnate. “Brahmanism is the poison which has spoiled Hindusin”. Any discourse of nationalism bereft of annihilation of caste was just not acceptable to him. The agenda of annihilation of caste was so important to him that it became a central point of his struggle against colonial rule. In the first Round Table Conference, he minced no words in criticizing the British government for its failure to undo untouchability.

Ambedkar’s obsession with the liberation of the depressed classes cannot be extricated from his all important concept of an ideal society in the form of a social democracy. Ambedkar had on several occasions talked of the notion, nationality and nationalism not only in the context of the lower castes but also of the Muslims. His concern was obviously for the nation of which he hoped the depressed classes would become not only an integral but also indistinguishable part. His repeated emphasis on nation as comradeship consciousness of kind, of kith and kinship, of common and united sympathies point to the same direction. For him, “Nationality is a social feeling. It is feelings of corporate sentiment of oneness which makes those who are charges with it feel that they are kith and kin.” Swaraj without extinction of caste had no meaning for Ambedkar. In his undelivered speech to the Jat Pat Todak Mandal of Lahore, he said, “In the fight for swaraj you fight with the whole nation on your side. In this, you have to fight against the whole nation and that too your own. But it is more important than swaraj. There is no use having swaraj, if you cannot defend it. More important than the question of defending swaraj is the question of defending Hindus under the swaraj. In my opinion, only when the Hindu society becomes a casteless society that it can hope to have strength enough to defend itself. Without such internal strength, swaraj for Hindus may turn out to be only a step towards slavery “. Thus, Ambedkar’s perspective distinguished itself from that of the protagonist of the various shades of the national freedom movement. In his editorial in the Bahishkrit Bharat, Ambedkar wrote on 29 July 1927 “If Tilak had been born among the untouchables, he would not have raised the slogan ‘Swaraj is my birthright’, but he would have raised the slogan “Annihilation of untouchability is my birthright”. Nation for Ambedkar then was a new form of social and societal relationship built on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity.