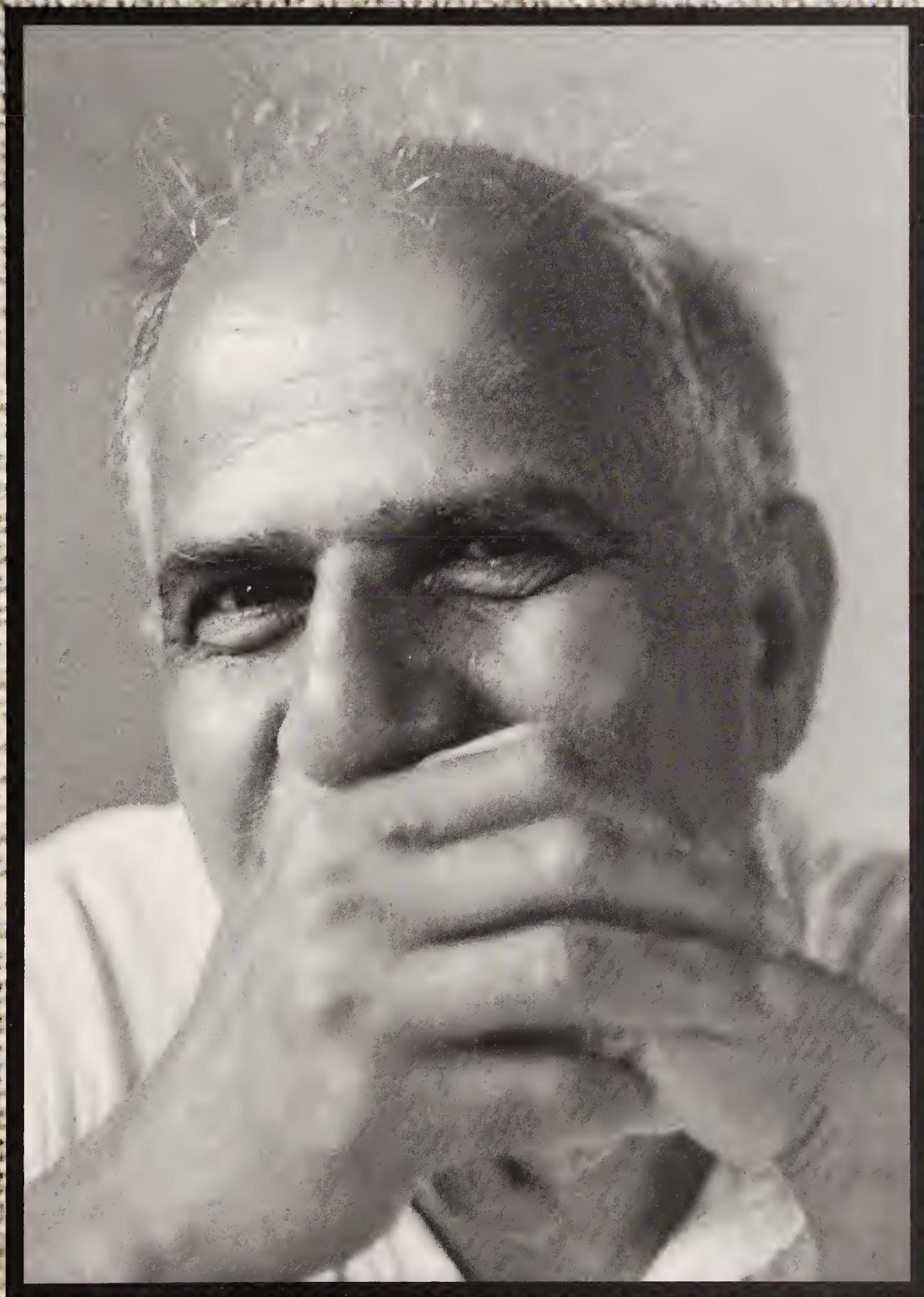


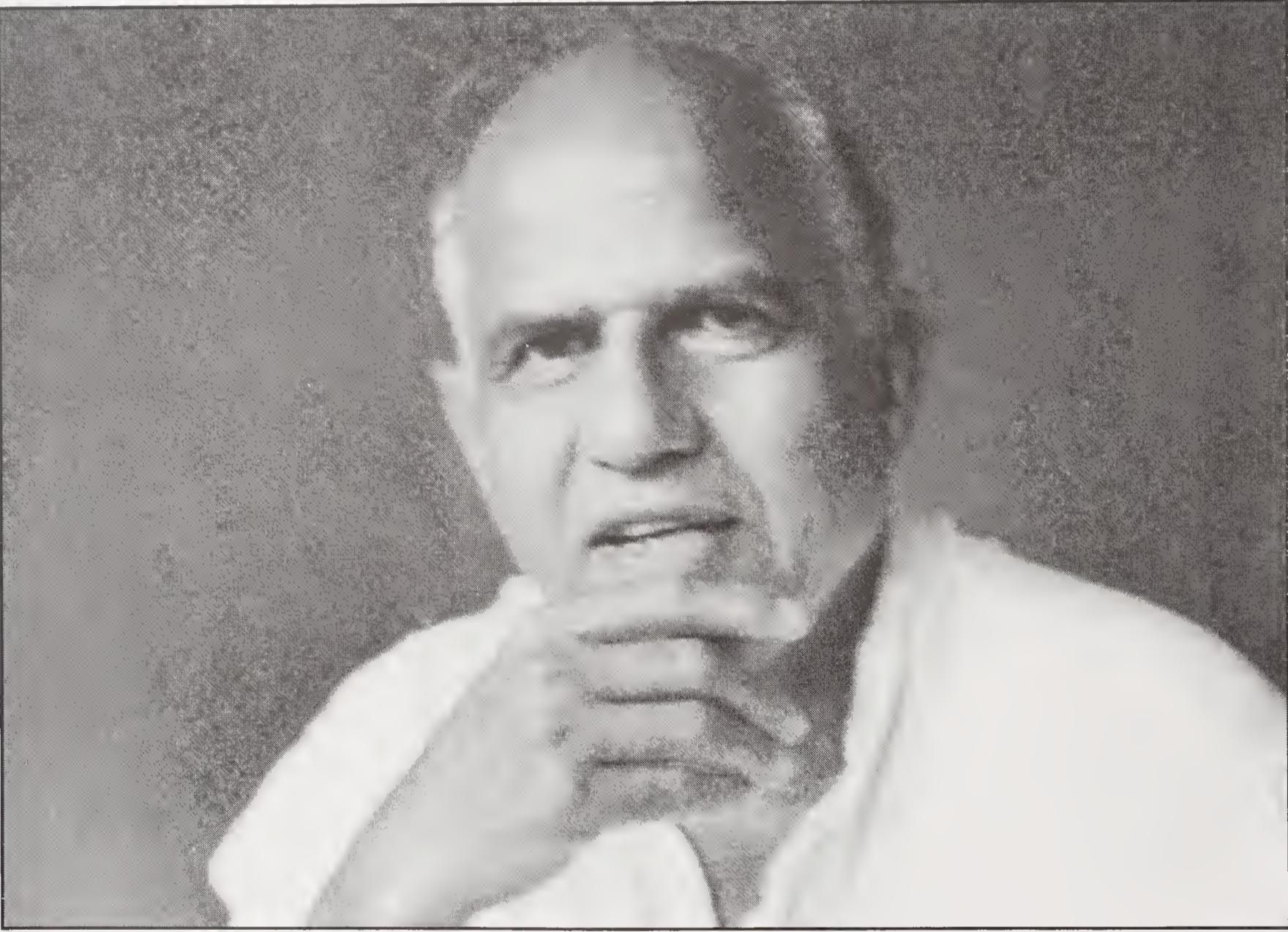
# ESSENTIAL WRITINGS OF DHARAMPAL







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# Essential Writings of Dharampal

*Compilation & Editing*  
**Gita Dharampal**



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## Preface

Humanity on this planet earth has witnessed a rapid change during the last two and a half centuries. This change is taking place in the form of modernization through science, technology and industrialization—a transformation which has destroyed the basic quality of human experience and sensitivity. In the process of such change in the name of development, humanity has faced two world wars and many continued conflicts in the form of declared and undeclared wars or acts of terrorism. Millions of people have perished as a direct result of this violence. Today, direct, indirect and structural violence has reached an extreme. Economic disparity, environmental degradation, civilizational conflicts, etc. threaten the survival of humanity and the very existence of the planet earth. In such a ‘Dark Age’, a miracle happened. That was the appearance of a unique individual, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Despite having received, albeit partially, a modern western education, he was not deluded by western and modern civilization. Thanks to his unique wisdom and intellect, he was able to discriminate between truth and falsehood. Thus, he had the courage to renounce modern civilization in its totality, and he worked unceasingly to awaken the inner wisdom and restore the lost sensitivity integral to the human community. The concept of Swaraj, on the basis of truth and non-violence, was established by means of Satyagraha, civil disobedience and non-cooperation movements. Gandhi’s teachings and practical experiments have created a completely new paradigm in human history. The non-violent revolution has enabled many people and nations to become free from external as well as inner domination. But unfortunately, many people could not understand Gandhi’s philosophy either due to the inadequacy of their spiritual strength or due to their self-centered motivation. After Gandhi’s martyrdom, the Indian leadership conveniently reduced the Mahatma to an object to be remembered occasionally by erecting his statues and garlanding them. Faced with this predicament, a great sage, Shri Dharampal, opened countless peoples’ eyes by giving them the most appropriate method and information to understand Gandhi. Dharampal’s tireless efforts in finding and documenting the irrefutable evidence for substantiating Gandhi’s statements and discourses are remarkable. Persons like me, without the help of Dharampal’s guidance, would not have been able to understand the deepest and subtlest philosophy of the Mahatma. Therefore,

I consider the corpus of Dharampal's written work to be of equal importance to that of Gandhi's own writings.

I am overjoyed to hear that the Publications Division of the Government of India is publishing Dharampal's Essential Writings with the cooperation of his daughter Shrimati Gita Dharampal and his other close associates. I feel honoured to pen these few words in remembrance of late Dharampal, who was for a long time my revered friend, philosopher and guide. I wish and pray that the entire work of Dharampal could be published for the benefit of humankind.

**Samdhong Rinpoche**

First elected Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in exile,  
Founder and First Director of the Tibetan Institute of Higher Studies in Sarnath.

# A Tribute

## Undoing Intellectual Schizophrenia

India is a civilization which is most misunderstood by its own people. Colonial scholarship for more than one hundred and fifty years (under the auspices of the historian James Mill) created an imaginary India which, though not really existing anywhere, was, nevertheless, forced to exist in the minds of the urban English educated Indians through the education system which was put in place by the colonial rulers. These so-called educated Indians have lived in one India, and yet carried an altogether different India in their minds. But this was not due to their own choice. It was a kind of precondition of their life. To paraphrase T.S. Eliot, between the reality of India and its idea fell the big shadow of modern Indian education. It did not allow anglicized Indians to come to terms with the reality of India. Mahatma Gandhi was perhaps one of those very few thinkers who tried to undo this strange intellectual schizophrenia suffered by the Indian educated class, but could succeed only partially. One would have expected certain corrective measures to be taken by the ruling elite after India had attained freedom from colonial rule under the unique leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in 1947. But their self-interest and forgetfulness were so strong that we were forced to continue to live in the same schizophrenic situation that was prevailing before the independence of the country. The same was the case with me. I, too, was educated in a more or less colonial way and was living with an artificially constructed India in my mind. I used to feel a little uncomfortable living in one India and carrying another in my head. Then appeared—like some kind of miracle—the texts of Dharampal into my life. The inside India started changing. I started understanding lots of things about the outer India which I used to find either idiosyncratic or unexplainable. Being a remarkable historian, Dharampal presented us with certain salient features of India through the medium, in certain cases, of colonial documents, which made us realize the falsity of the image of India with which we were living. His way of writing is such that he could successfully inculcate in us the same curiosity about our civilization which had inspired him throughout his entire creative and intellectual life. Instead of going into intricacies about his enormous work, in these few lines of deep appreciation, I will only express my humble gratitude to him for his work which rescued Indian writers and intellectuals like me from the debilitating schizophrenia about our civilization under whose influence we

were all suffering. Let me add that his works are like signposts which may direct us towards understanding and realizing the Indian civilization which may actually have throbbed for centuries in this part of the Earth. But these works are signposts and need to be explored further as Dharampal himself wanted to all his life, particularly in his last decade. Yet another thing to be said is that Dharampal never saw Indian civilization in isolation. He, as a true thinker, saw it in its relationship with all other civilizations, particularly in relation with western civilization. Thereby he also succeeded in presenting to the intellectual world a slightly different image of the west. His works are a great reminder to all of us that in the aftermath of colonialism a lot of intellectual work has to be done in disciplines such as History, Sociology, Philosophy, etc. to get rid of the effects of colonization in order to create new ways of surviving in the contemporary world.

### **Udayan Vajpeyi**

Hindi poet and essayist, teaches Physiology in Bhopal

# Introduction

## In the Footsteps of *Hind Swaraj*<sup>1</sup> The Oeuvre of the Historian and Political Thinker Dharampal

### I

Engaging with the oeuvre of one's father in the public sphere, albeit a difficult task, is essential given the crucial significance of Shri Dharampal's research. As a provocative Gandhian thinker with a creative and imaginative intellect, Shri Dharampal (19th February 1922–24th October 2006) engaged in extensive archival research in British and Indian archives which revolutionised our understanding of the cultural, scientific and technological achievements of India at the eve of the British conquest. However, the enormous portent of his discoveries still needs to make more of an impact on conventional perceptions of pre-colonial India. These commonly held assumptions of underdevelopment and degeneration before the advent of the British Raj—refuted by his painstaking historical investigations—had been induced (as he stated time and again) by colonial indoctrination and were maintained in place by a persistent sense of subservience to the modern west experienced, unfortunately, by too many so-called 'educated' Indians. According to my father, until his very last days in Sevagram Ashram, an 'intellectual-psychological unburdening' was a matter of urgency, so that 'India could come into its own', as he phrased it, and in doing so, bring to fruition Gandhiji's vision of *Hind Swaraj*. This entailed that Indian societal organisation, its polity as well as its cultural and economic institutions would become regenerated, locally and nationally, from within—and after intense self-reflection, determined by the needs of the people concerned.

Besides reappraising a selection of his publications, such as *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century* (1971), *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition* (1971) and *The Beautiful Tree* (1983), this introductory essay, in tracing the genesis of Shri Dharampal's historical research, simultaneously discusses the intellectual as well as the political implications of his oeuvre: As an

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1 Gandhiji's political manifesto, first published in 1909, proclaimed that real *swaraj* (signifying more than political independence) could only be achieved by bringing about a regeneration of Indian society through its own indigenous resources and in tune with its people's cultural ethos. Constituting simultaneously a radical contestation of modern civilisation, this revolutionary pamphlet served as a source of inspiration for Shri Dharampal's life journey.

endeavour to challenge or delegitimise the historical master narrative relating to India's pre- and early colonial past, his research aimed to initiate further studies into remapping history with a view to accordingly reshape contemporary Indian society and polity.

## II

Originating from Kandhala, a small town in the Muzaffarnagar district of western Uttar Pradesh, but having been educated in Lahore,<sup>2</sup> Dharampal belonged to a generation of young Indians who were deeply inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's propagation of *swaraj*. Responding to Gandhiji's call for individual *satyagraha* in 1940, he joined the freedom movement, abandoning his B.Sc. studies in Physics,<sup>3</sup> and became actively involved in the Quit India movement, initiated in August 1942.<sup>4</sup> After a short term of imprisonment,<sup>5</sup> his nationalist fervour was channelled in the direction of Gandhiji's constructive programme which involved strengthening the decentralised social, political and economic village organisation. Intent on regenerating India's rural population, Dharampal became associated in 1944 with Mirabehn (the British-born disciple of Gandhiji) in a village development project near Haridwar.<sup>6</sup> His participation in this experiment in community revitalisation was interrupted by portentous political developments: During the Partition upheaval, in 1947-48, he was put in charge of the Congress Socialist Party centre for the rehabilitation of refugees coming

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2 In Lahore he attended the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School (matriculating in 1938), and considered himself a child of the Gandhian era, as rendered explicit in his own words: "My first glimpse of Mahatma Gandhi was in December 1929 at the Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress. I had gone there with my father who—like thousands of other young people at the call of Mahatma Gandhi—had abandoned his university education. Those were days of great excitement for me and many of my age (I was barely eight!)." Dharampal: *Understanding Gandhi*, Other India Press, Mapusa, 2003, p.1.

3 Begun at Fergusson College, Lahore, Dharampal then shifted to Meerut College to facilitate entrance to the Engineering College at Roorkee. Shortly after, in October 1940, he abandoned his studies altogether.

4 Having heard as a fervent spectator Gandhiji's speech, given at the Congress session in Bombay (Gowalia tank maidan), he joined the Quit India movement as an underground member of the AICC run by Sucheta Kripalani; carrying messages and literature on behalf of the AICC between Meerut, Varanasi, Patna, Bombay and Delhi, he also came in contact with Girdhari Kripalani (a nephew of Acharya Kripalani) and Swami Anand, among others.

5 April–June 1943, in a Delhi police station, where he met Sadiq Ali (1910–1977), the then office secretary of the AICC.

6 Near the Roorkee-Haridwar highway, Mirabehn had been given (on government lease) a piece of land where she established the Kisan Ashram, assisted by Dharampal from October 1944 until August 1947.

from Pakistan. Working in the make-shift camps on the outskirts of Delhi,<sup>7</sup> he came in close contact with Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, as well as with numerous younger friends, such as L.C. Jain, in Delhi; subsequently in 1948, he functioned as a founding member of the Indian Cooperative Union (ICU).

Figuring prominently in these various activities was his endeavour to sustain Indian community structures, both rural and urban, through social, political or economic means; for he was convinced about the central role of the community in the ongoing nation-building enterprise. In search of communitarian initiatives—also in the global arena—which could possibly serve as a model for Indian rural reconstruction, he decided at the end of 1948 to go and study the much acclaimed kibbutzim experimental system in Israel. However, due to the partial closure of the Suez Canal, he had to reschedule his sea voyage via England. There, as chance would have it, in an educational and agricultural reconstruction programme in post-war rural Devonshire, Dharampal met and decided to marry Phyllis (my mother), a cultured and altruistically oriented English lady who shared his commitment to rural reconstruction. Paradoxical as this marital union may have appeared in the historical context of Indian Independence from the British Raj, nonetheless, the pioneering spirit of this intercultural couple does underscore in exemplary fashion the immense attraction exercised by their mutually shared humanistic-communitarian visions: So intense was their idealism that it not only transcended nation-state boundaries but also challenged conventional norms.

Yet, alongside and perhaps superseding these universalistic aspirations,<sup>8</sup> a strong sense of commitment to the cause of Indian rural regeneration instigated Dharampal to travel back to India with his acquiescing young bride in the autumn of 1949. Choosing the overland route with the intention of visiting Israel, he was eventually able to familiarise himself with the organisation of the oldest kibbutz, Degania Alef,<sup>9</sup> set up by Russian Jews. However, after a short stay, he realised that their highly regulated communitarian life-style would not function as an appropriate blue-print suitable to Indian conditions which were defined by divergent social and cultural constellations. The task of understanding Indian historical configurations was to constitute a primary incentive and focus of his subsequent research which took concrete shape a decade and half later.

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7 In Kurukshetra, where he organised a co-operative rehabilitation camp for about 400 families who had been displaced from Jhang.

8 Interestingly, during his stay in Britain, he enrolled as an occasional student at the London School of Economics to attend courses on diplomacy and world affairs.

9 Founded in 1910 on the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

However, in 1950, having gained valuable insights from observing and comparing temporally parallel but culturally and politically distinct endeavours in societal reconstruction in Britain, Israel and independent India, Dharampal felt the urgent need to resume his work with Mirabehn. Above all, he was convinced that ‘ordinary’ Indians were as capable and innovative as their European or Middle-Eastern counterparts; yet due to colonial subjugation and exploitation, having lost all personal initiative, they had been reduced to their present state of apathy and destitution. Hence, summoning the support of a group of dedicated social workers, Dharampal, propelled by idealistic zeal, set about constructing the community village of Bapugram near Rishikesh,<sup>10</sup> constituted of about fifty resourceless agricultural families. However, after many years of strenuous and often frustrating work (due partially to the lack of creative dynamism emanating from the artificially created community whose structures were not organic), Dharampal became increasingly disillusioned by the futility of this idealistic experiment in village development. And all the more so since his endeavours in rural regeneration seemed to have no impact on the post-Independence mainstream that was mesmerised by the Nehruvian industrialisation agenda.

Notwithstanding his decision to leave Bapugram early in 1954, Dharampal continued to be preoccupied with India’s rural regeneration. After a three year interlude in London where he had joined his wife and two small children,<sup>11</sup> he returned to India in late 1957<sup>12</sup> to work towards the realisation of this essential task. From 1958 until 1964, based in Delhi with his family, he pursued endeavours in this field more intensely: His overriding aim was to impact upon policy-making in order to attenuate the dichotomy between ‘Bharat’ and ‘India’. This he hoped to achieve in his capacity as General Secretary of the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD).<sup>13</sup> Founded in 1958 by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, AVARD, as the first Non-Government Organisation (NGO) in independent India, played a path-breaking role, presided over by Jayaprakash Narayan (known as JP), with whom Dharampal developed a very close

10 As part of the Pashulok Trust which consisted of 700 acres of land leased to Mirabehn by the government.

11 In London, working with Peace News (a journal published by the War Resisters International, focusing on peace issues and nonviolent social change), he reflected on India’s role in global developments (formulated in letter-form to Shri Ram Swarup, and as a separate note in January 1957).

12 By ship, visiting several Buddhist and Hindu holy places in Sri Lanka and South India; in Dhanushkodi and Rameswaram, in particular, he was impressed by the traditional hospitality of the temple pandas.

13 Its stated objective was the “promotion and strengthening of voluntary effort by helping in the exchange of experiences and ideas and by conducting research and evaluation studies.”

relationship of mutual respect and appreciation. His appointment at AVARD provided him the opportunity to get first-hand insights into pan-Indian rural conditions as well as into the (mal-) functioning of institutional frameworks. Dharampal's critical reflections about misconceived governmental planning and development projects were articulated with stringent precision in leading articles to the *AVARD Newsletter* (later renamed '*Voluntary Action*') where, to cite one example, when writing in the context of the Lok Sabha debates on the draft of the Third Plan, he castigated the status-quo view as follows:

“[...] the people for whom we plan and weave our dreams are seldom anywhere in the picture. More often they are just labourers, wage-earners, with little sense of participation or adventure in the India we plan to reconstruct. The reasons for such apathy are perhaps very deep, somewhere very near the soul of India. Yet that soul has to awaken, before we proceed from dams and steel plants to the flowering of the human being, of the Indian we have deemed to be ignorant, of the people of India whom we describe as ‘teeming millions’ equating them with ant-heaps. Such awakening, however, is not impossible—Gandhiji did it against heavier odds. All of us in a way are heir to Gandhiji, what we lack is proportion and humility.”<sup>14</sup>

In an attempt to comprehend the immediate causes for the disoriented functioning of Indian state and society, he began examining the proceedings of the Indian Constituent Assembly (1946–1949). This investigation was published as a cogent monograph in 1962. That it was entitled *Panchayat Raj as the Basis of Indian Polity*<sup>15</sup> rendered explicit his prime concern: In reproducing extracts of the Constituent Assembly debates, the failure of the Constitution to incorporate the indigenous administrative and political structures is highlighted. And the poignancy of the matter is underscored by prefacing his introduction with the following quote by Gandhiji:

“I must confess that I have not been able to follow the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly [...] [The correspondent] says that there is no mention or direction about village panchayats and decentralization in

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14 “A Surfeit of Planning: Where are the People?” *AVARD Newsletter*, New Delhi, July-August 1960, republished in: Dharampal, *Rediscovering India. Collection of Essays and Speeches (1956–1998)*, SIDH: Mussoorie, 2003, pp.129–131, quoted phrase on p.130. Intent on influencing political opinion, Dharampal sent this article to all members of the Lok Sabha. It also reached E.F. Schumacher who used parts of it in a lecture delivered in 1962 at the Gokhale Institute of Economics and Politics, Pune.

15 *An Exploration into the Proceedings of the Constituent Assembly*, AVARD: New Delhi, 1962.

the foreshadowed Constitution. It is certainly an omission calling for immediate attention if our independence is to reflect the peoples' voice. The greater the power of the panchayats, the better for the people."<sup>16</sup>

Yet Dharampal's political intervention in public affairs was soon to take on a more assertive form: In November 1962, incensed by the debacle of the Indo-Chinese war, he wrote an open letter<sup>17</sup> to the members of the Lok Sabha calling for Jawaharlal Nehru's resignation on moral grounds. For this castigatory act, Dharampal (along with two friends, Narendra Datta and Roop Narayan, who were co-signatories of the letter) was arrested and imprisoned in Tihar jail, but released after some months due to the intervention of Lal Bahadur Shastri, the then Home-Minister, and Jayaprakash Narayan. Besides underscoring Dharampal's impetuously forthright nature, his provocatively critical stance succeeded in sparking off a public debate, partially carried out in the press.<sup>18</sup> The issues raised were of fundamental importance in the post-Independence political arena—such as the need for patriotism (as distinct from nationalism), the deconstruction of the personality cult around political figures, in particular Nehru, and the importance of freedom of expression in a democracy.

Dharampal's sincere patriotic commitment coupled with an unerring talent for striking a sensitive chord in public discourse was exhibited time and again. The cogency of his arguments as well as his search towards fathoming 'the soul of India' (as he phrased it), however, were to receive more historical depth as a result of archival research carried out in the Tamil Nadu State Archives: It was as Director of Study and Research of the All India Panchayat Parishad (1963–1965) that he produced a detailed examination of the Madras panchayat system.<sup>19</sup> This pioneering study—of which short sections are being reproduced in this volume<sup>20</sup>—underscores how the indigenous panchayat-based polity was

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16 *Harijan*, December 21, 1947, quoted *ibid*, p.15. The fact that this omission was not remedied, according to Dharampal, contributed towards incapacitating rural Indians from participating in the mainstream of post-independence India.

17 This is accessible in digitised form in the archival collection of the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library [NMML], New Delhi.

18 In particular, in the *Blitz Weekly*, November/December 1962. There followed an extended debate in the *National Herald*, Editorial, 22.12.1962; rejoinder by Acharya Kripalani, 27.12.1962; further statements by L.M. Tripathi, 28.12.62; Banarsi Das, 02.01.63; B.P. Sharma, 07.01.63; P.D. Tandon, 08.01.63; this critical intervention was even mentioned on the front page of the *New York Times* (late December 1962).

19 Later published as Dharampal, *The Madras Panchayat System: A General Assessment*, Impex India: Delhi, 1972, vol.II.

20 See below Chapter 4, *The Madras Panchayat System*.

destroyed: According to his findings, the colonial land revenue system, introduced at the beginning of the 19th century, sapped the resource base of the local polity. This economic extraction was further compounded with systematic political and bureaucratic intervention. Then, towards the end of the 19th century, a colonially defined bureaucratic apparatus was set up which remained out of synch with the real needs of local communities.<sup>21</sup> That this dysfunctional system was maintained even after Independence, more or less unchanged—despite its debilitating influence—constituted, according to Dharampal, one of the main causes for the highly detrimental disjuncture between the need for self-empowerment at the grass-roots level (as propagated by Gandhiji) and Nehruvian centralised statist planning.

### III

Having appraised remnants of pre-colonial structures,<sup>22</sup> Dharampal realised that these findings were indicative of well-functioning societal mechanisms for maintaining a beneficial social and economic equilibrium among diverse local communities. Consequently, he became increasingly convinced about the urgent need for an objective understanding regarding the detailed functioning of Indian society before the onslaught of colonial rule. Not only was he deeply sceptical about conventionally held assumptions concerning pervasive destitution at the eve of the British conquest. Perhaps even more crucially, he was seriously concerned about the concrete repercussions these assumed ‘degenerate’ conditions in the recent past had in the policy-making of modern India. About this detrimental state of affairs he formulated the following lucid statement:

“This picture usually implied that our village folk and their ancestors had wallowed in misery for a thousand or more years; that they had been terribly oppressed and tyrannised by rulers as well as their social and religious customs since time immemorial; and that all this had mostly left

21 This was elaborated in a preliminary note entitled “In-built contradiction between the British structured Indian state and indigenous, or even statutory, local communities or Panchayats”, July 1-5, 1965, 55 pp; later incorporated in *The Madras Panchayat System*, *ibid.*

22 Such as the *bees-biswas panchayat* (= village council of 20 parts) which was still (in the early 1960s) partially operative in some villages of Rajasthan, as well as the organisation of Tamil rural communities as *samudayam* villages in which individual shares in the cultivable land were redistributed periodically (a practice known as *kareiyedu*) in order to maintain a degree of equity of livelihood among all members of the village community; according to local reports, *samudayam* villages had still been in existence in the 1930s; and British revenue surveys from the late 18th century mentioned that 30% of all villages in the Thanjavur district were of the *samudayam* type.

them dumb or misguided, or victims of superstition and prejudice. From this we assumed that what we had to deal with was like a blank slate on which we, the architects of the new India, could write, or imprint, what we wished. We seldom thought that these people had any memories, thoughts, preferences, or priorities of their own; and even when we conceded that they might have had some of these, we dismissed these as irrelevant. And when we failed in writing on what we assumed to be a blank slate, or in giving such writing any permanence, we felt unhappy and more often angry with these countrymen of ours for whom we felt we had sacrificed not only our comforts, but our very lives.[...].<sup>23</sup>

Recalcitrantly not accepting the modernist developmental notion of a “blank slate”, he adamantly considered “a more exact knowledge of the past” to be “a necessary foundation for future development”.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, historical sources in Indian languages relating to the pre- or early colonial period were relatively inaccessible in the early 1960s. Yet, fortuitously, he had become briefly familiarised in the Tamil Nadu State Archives with some insightful British colonial records. Hence, from the mid 1960s, living in London for family reasons, Dharampal decided to embark single-handedly on an exploration of British-Indian archival material. His archival research focused on documents emanating from the first commissioned surveys of the East India Company, lodged in various depositories spread over the British Isles. The principal ones he consulted were the India Office Library and Records and the British Library in London, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh, as well as important collections in the libraries of the universities of Leeds, Nottingham, Sheffield and Manchester. This extensive archival record, indeed, constitutes one of the (only) positive inheritances of colonial rule.<sup>25</sup>

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23 Extract from Dharampal: “Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity and their Relevance to the Present”, a series of three lectures delivered on 4th-6th January 1986, Pune,; these lectures have been reproduced in this volume (Chapter 1) as an extended essay, first published in *New Quest*, 1987, Nos.56, 57 & 58. Also translated into Hindi, Marathi & Tamil (for details, see below), and republished in: *Essays on Tradition, Recovery and Freedom*, vol.V of Dharampal, *Collected Writings*, 5 vols, Other India Press & SIDH: Mapusa, Goa, 2000, repr. 2003, 2007, pp.1-49.

24 Quoted extracts from an unpublished note “The Problem of Apathy: En Enquiry into the Beginning of British Rule”, written in March 1965, 12 pp.

25 Admittedly, though a lot of this material (as well as other even more substantial documentation) is also lodged in various Indian national and state archives, it is unfortunately less accessible there.

When reviewing Dharampal's pioneering historical research, we need to evaluate this against the background of historical studies in the period of the 1960s itself, in India and the west. At this epoch, the analytical studies and innovative theories to be developed by Hayden White, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, Ranajit Guha or others of the Subaltern Studies School<sup>26</sup> (just to name a few great minds that revolutionised historical scholarship) were still in the making and yet to influence the intellectual sphere. What's more, not being a historian by training, nor for that matter a scholar belonging to academia, Dharampal, as he himself formulated it, "launched on a programme of somewhat laymanish archival research"<sup>27</sup> to discover or rather re-map the lie of the land in pre- and early colonial India. His search was inspired by Gandhiji's conviction about the basic viability of Indian society and culture. Reinforcing this firm belief was his intuitive appreciation for the seminal role and function of history. He fully realised the crucial impact and significance history had for understanding a society's past, and in particular the pre-colonial past of a colonised society such as India's. Perhaps he was partially influenced by the Indian concept of *itihasa* with regard to its didactic function. In any case, viewing history as a record or narrative description of past events,<sup>28</sup> Dharampal considered it his role as a historian-in-the-making to reveal how Indian society had functioned at the eve of the British conquest and 'to show what actually happened'.

Impelled by the impression gained from his initial forays in the Tamil Nadu State Archives, he was intent to discover the following: namely, to what extent the empirical reality of early modern India—as depicted in the historical documentation—was at odds with the conventional but hegemonic image of a dysfunctional society propagated by late 19th century colonial historiography. And it was this master narrative which still exercised enormous influence that had to be contested, provided historical documentation revealed a different picture. The irony of the matter is that Dharampal attempted to achieve this contestatory goal by painstakingly deconstructing the official documents dating from the

26 A few crucial titles may suffice: Michel Foucault's *L'archéologie du savoir* [The Archaeology of Knowledge] (1969), Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1975), Michel de Certeau's *L'écriture de l'histoire* [The Writing of History] (1975), Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983), *Subaltern Studies* (1982 ff).

27 Quoted from a slim brochure by Dharampal entitled: *India before British Rule and the Basis for India's Resurgence*, Gandhi Seva Sangh: Wardha, 1998, p.9.

28 Indeed he understood *itihasa* not as mere historical legend, but more so as the narrative of what happened, which is strikingly similar to the Rankean explanation of history 'Geschichte' as a narration of what happened, 'wie es eigentlich gewesen ist'. Thereby he was perhaps attempting to dissolve the asymmetrical distinction between *itihasa* and the modern enterprise of History.

17th century onwards, generated by the British themselves in the process of their reconnaissance and subsequent conquest of the subcontinent.

Moreover, he soon realised that during the extended stages of colonisation (from 1600 until 1947) a heterogeneity of reports had been generated. This existing diversity made him intent on tracing the shifts in the British perspective on India that had taken place during a period of three and a half centuries. It was not long before he discovered that the records for the early years of British administration in India were the most revealing. Henceforth, he began to “treat the mid-18th century [...] as a sort of benchmark point for the understanding of Indian society and polity”.<sup>29</sup> The wealth of first-hand accounts by zealous British officials—striving to gain a foot-hold in the recently acquired territory (commencing in Bengal, and quickly proceeding through the south to the west and the rest of the subcontinent)—contained not only detailed descriptions regarding the functioning arrangements of regional polities, but also empirical data on the political, economic and ideological strategies used to counter and undermine indigenous institutions. By critically ‘revisioning’ this historical documentation, and allowing the sources themselves to speak, Dharampal started engaging in an archaeology of knowledge (*à la* Foucault). His archival excavations uncovered a wealth of astounding material that had later been discarded, or disregarded, in the construction of the subsequent hegemonic colonial historiography whose influence still held sway in mainstream academia, to a greater or lesser extent.

The revolutionary portent of the discoveries made by Dharampal’s expedition into the not-so-distant past—of a functioning and relatively prosperous society—became forcefully apparent to him. Significantly, they belied the hitherto propagated images of pre-British India as a poor, disorganised country, lacking in political, economic and social vitality. Simultaneously, he was astutely aware of the political impact these historical revelations could have for the present. This explains his urgent need to communicate to his contemporaries back home the findings made during this archival voyage back in time: “What I learnt from day to day”, he writes in one of his essays, “I tried to share with some friends in India including Sri Annasaheb Sahasrabuddhe, Sri R.K. Patil, Sri Ram Swarup and Sri Jayaprakash Narayan.”<sup>30</sup> The thrill of excitement he experienced through

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29 “Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity”, *op. cit.*, p.12; cf. the essay in this volume, Chapter 1. This crucially valid evaluation has become current in academic history, but only during the last decade.

30 *India before British Rule*, *op. cit.*, p.9. The note he circulated was entitled “Nature of Indian society (ca.1800) and the foundations of the present structure: A note and some illustrative material”, April 1967, i-ix & 1-74 pp.

his archival findings can still be sensed in his writings written 30 years later. The history of 18th century India was being remapped: A new territory was unfolding before his eyes. Some British reports he also sent to Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia who quoted from them in a Lok Sabha debate in the spring of 1967. The discussion concerned in particular the revamping of the Delhi police; thanks to the historical record supplied by Dharampal, the stark equation to Lord Ellenborough's reorganisation of the Indian army after 1857 could be pointed out: Dramatically, Dr. Lohia highlighted the colonial heritage of independent India's law and order measures to the assembled parliamentarians.

Appreciative of the political insights that could be drawn from his findings, including their applicability as caustic criticism of contemporary undemocratic developments, Dharampal pursued his archival mission with renewed zeal. With meticulous precision and scholarly integrity he ploughed through thousands upon thousands of pages of British documents, getting Xerox copies, and otherwise copying the historical sources word for word in long hand, and then back home typing them out on a small Olivetti type-writer (in those antediluvian days without digital cameras, laptops and scanning). This constituted the beginning of his own archival collection that was to amount to ca. 40,000 sheets of precious documents, a large amount of which is still waiting to be closely analysed.<sup>31</sup> So consumed was Dharampal by the desire to know every inch of this territory of the past, that day after day, despite many adversities (including lack of funds), he would commune 10 to 12 hours at a stretch with his archival treasures. The routine of his life was determined by the opening hours of the libraries and archives. His regular absence from the family home led my younger sister to state one day in kindergarten that her father was 100 years old, for he was a resident of the British Museum!

#### IV

What did this life of research actually produce? Broadly speaking, the archival collection assembled over a decade and a half was tripartite in

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31 Stored away in steel cupboards of the Gandhi Seva Sangh library in Sevagram (Wardha, Maharashtra), I would like this valuable archival collection (along with a sizeable number of books, journals and letters) transformed into a research library, in the very near future. In the meantime, large sections have been digitised (a digital copy being held by the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library [NMML], New Delhi, as well as by the Gandhi Research Foundation, Jalgaon) so that this historical material, once catalogued and indexed, can be more readily accessible to interested researchers. Moreover, an original version of the archival material is lodged in the office of the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), Chennai, of which digitised copies are accessible through their website: <http://cpsindia.org/index.php/dh-archive>.

perspective: Firstly, it contained documents (in particular, commissioned surveys) dating mainly from the late 17th century up to the middle of the 19th century relating to descriptions of different regions of India, its physical landscape, the manners of its people, their public life, festivals, cultural and educational institutions, the nature and extent of agricultural and industrial production, of sciences and technologies. In short, this diverse documentary material mapped out the cultural, social and political history of the subcontinent in the pre- and early colonial period.

Secondly, reams of official correspondence between authorities in Britain and India (with detailed instructions, sometimes controversial enough to be copiously debated) delineated the instrumentalities and modalities for the preparation and consolidation of the British conquest of India, in which sufficient evidence is to be found of the long arm of the British state from the 17th century onwards—a fact which was emphasised by Dharampal over and over again. For, from his reading of the archival records, the East India Company [EIC], empowered from the very outset in 1600 by royal charter, was acting in accordance with instructions from the British State. From the middle of 18th century the EIC was explicitly carrying out orders of the British government, exemplified concretely by parliamentary acts from 1784 onwards, after the establishment of the statist Board of Control.<sup>32</sup> The official records, labelled the Board's collection (of correspondence between the Directors of the East India Company and the Commissioners of the Board of Control, including reports, instructions, etc.), contained details about the process of subordination and control of its rulers, of the recruitment for the army, and of the establishment of a

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32 In 1784 the British Parliament passed an act, which constituted a Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India (commonly referred to as the Board of Control) with a British cabinet minister as its president. Initially the British Prime Minister was also a member of this Board. For most of its 74 years of existence (1784-1858), the Board had six members, all of them British privy councillors, out of whom three were cabinet ministers. It was this Board, which governed India from 1784 to 1858 when a British Secretary of State for India replaced it and India began to be formally considered by Britain as a part of the British Empire. During the 74 years (1784-1858), while the East India Company (EIC) prepared the initial drafts of all the instructions to be sent to India—in any of the governmental departments either at the Presidency levels or at the all-India level—the Board of Control in every single case was responsible for the finalisation and approval of each and every instruction. Yet the instructions, though finalised and approved by the Board, were, however, formally conveyed to the British Presidency governments in India under the signatures of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman and some twenty members of the Court of Directors of the EIC. In a way the job of this Court was similar to the job of an under secretary to the Government of India today, who ordinarily conveys all governmental orders and instructions under his own signature, in the name of the President of India.

government apparatus whose structure and function continued more or less unchanged after Independence.

Thirdly, the documentation comprises statistical data with regard to economic policies and measures, including protracted deliberations about the amount of land revenue, the manner in which it was levied, with information also about numerous other taxes and levies, such as those on beggars, which were introduced more as disciplining measures for controlling and harassing the population.<sup>33</sup> Related to this domain are extensive documents underscoring the crucial need for – and the heavy reliance on – forced labour, in particular for the construction of railways and roads, as well as the supply of bullock-carts and bullocks for the transportation of the British army and administrative personnel.

Fourthly, this material is supplemented with evidence of continued Indian resistance which took various forms throughout the period of colonial rule. Fifthly, there is a select collection of documents concerned with indological research, which highlights the rationale behind such scholarship, initiated by Warren Hastings, the first Governor General in 1784.<sup>34</sup> Lastly, a sizeable set of documents, beginning in the first decade of the 19th century, provides details of British government policy concerning the Christianisation of India which was initiated in 1813 after lengthy parliamentary debates.<sup>35</sup>

This, in a nut-shell, constituted the substantial contents of Dharampal's efforts at remapping Indian history from the 17th into the 20th century, and thereby contesting the hitherto historical master narrative. Only some of the material has become known to the public through three pioneering books which have now become classics within the framework of the recent ongoing reappraisal of the early modern period. The topics of these publications were determined both by the wealth of archival material on the subject, as well as by urgent concerns of the post-Independence period: His first two books, both published

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33 Dharampal has collected substantial material on taxes levied on trades and professions known as *mohturpha and veesabuddy* in South India; it constituted a complicated graded tax to be paid by all non-agricultural people; for more details, cf. his extended article: "Erosion of Norms and Dignity, and the Origins of Callousness, Pauperisation and Bondage in Modern India", first written in 1981, and published in: *Rediscovering India*, op.cit., pp.27-92.

34 Cf. the founding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (January 1784), with William Jones as the primary British orientalist.

35 The chief proponent for the 'Propagation of Christianity' was William Wilberforce whose two crucial speeches (on 22.06 and 01.07.1813) have been republished and commented in Dharampal: *Despoliation and Defaming of India: The Early Nineteenth Century British Crusade*, Bharat Peetham, Wardha/Other India Press, Goa, 1999, pp.49-61, 63-146.

in 1971, on *Indian Science and Technology in the 18th century*<sup>36</sup> and *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition*<sup>37</sup> created quite a stir.<sup>38</sup> The first title comprises a discerning selection of British primary documents dating from the 18th and early 19th century relating to applied sciences and technologies as observed in various regions of the subcontinent. In his informative and well argued introduction (reproduced in this volume<sup>39</sup>), whilst contextualising the historical sources, Dharampal also explains his choice of the time-frame—1720 until 1820—as follows:

“Practically all European scientific and technological accounts relating to the sciences and technologies of non-European countries (including the ones reproduced here) are an outcome of the seventeenth and eighteenth century European quest for usual knowledge in these fields. [...] It is in the context of this widening horizon, coupled with growing sophistication and the urgent need (partly resulting from constant warfare in which Europeans were engaged during the greater part of the eighteenth century) for materials and processes that accounts like most of the ones presented here were written and submitted by individual Europeans to their respective patrons. It is thus in the European writings of the period (i.e. from 1720 to 1820) that one discovers the European observed details about non-European science and technology as well as about the societies, institutions, customs and laws of various parts of the non-European world. Before this period the European ability to comprehend this world was limited; and after about 1820 the knowledge and institutions of the non-European world began to have much less usefulness to the problems of Europe. Further, by the 1820s, most parts of the non-European world are no longer themselves. Their institutions, sciences and technologies are not what they were 50 or 100 years earlier, and have met the same fate as their political systems and sovereignty. By the 1820s or so, most of the non-European world had become, at least in European theory and most history texts, if not altogether in actuality, ‘backward and barbarian’.”<sup>40</sup>

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36 With the subtitle *Some contemporary European accounts*, Impex India: Delhi, 1971

37 Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan: Varanasi, 1971

38 In particular, *Indian Science and Technology* was widely reviewed, and is considered as a seminal study for gaining insights into Indian scientific and technological achievements in the early modern period.

39 See Chapter 2.

40 *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century*, op.cit., extracts from pp. XXVII-XXX.

Indeed, by focusing on 18th and early 19th century British reports on Indian scientific and technological achievements, Dharampal initiated a process of delegitimising the master narrative of the rise of the west, in particular concerning the domains of science and technology. This was a radically innovative intellectual perspective in the 1960s which was only to acquire more widespread currency a few decades later. His incisive insights about the (often inadequate) modalities and yet far-reaching repercussions of European intellectual and political interactions with the Indian subcontinent underscore the formers' deleterious impact for the latter. Resulting as these negative repercussions did from a historical process of intercultural 'entanglement',<sup>41</sup> Dharampal, from his critical perspective, underscored the need for undertaking a more historically nuanced analysis in the field of transcultural studies that have gained such academic prominence during the last decade.

Of the seventeen documents presented in this book, six deal with science (focusing on complex astronomical calculations, appreciative evaluations of the observatory in Benares, and on achievements in algebra, such as the binomial theorem). The eleven documents in the longer section devoted to technology describe a wide variety of implements and practices observed in different regions of the subcontinent, among which figure prominently the practice of smallpox inoculation in Bengal as well as the familiarity with plastic surgery in western India; the use of the drill-plough and other sophisticated agricultural implements including irrigation techniques; detailed descriptions of iron and steel-making in various parts of India; the technique of ice-making in Allahabad and Calcutta, that of mortar production in Madras, and of widespread paper-making from *san* plants. Accompanying many of these detailed accounts (originally intended for a British scientific readership and sometimes even presented to parliamentary committees) are intricate diagrams illustrative of the exact construction of the observed apparatus. This fact in itself would seem indicative of the latter's subsequent appropriation and further development in accordance with British industrial requirements at the turn of the 19th century. Although the compactness and simplicity of fabrication—as of the mobile iron and steel furnaces (numbering up to 10,000 with each producing 20 tons annually) or the ingenious drill-ploughs—may have appeared crude to some British observers, Dharampal contests this impression by maintaining that the inherent simplicity

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41 In the last decade, post-colonial studies have described the historical process of intercultural interaction in terms of entanglement, and thereby highlighted its dynamic, hybrid qualities with positive overtones; contrastively, Dharampal is fully cognisant of its overriding negative repercussions for colonised societies.

“[...] was in fact due to social and political maturity as well as arising from an understanding of the principles and processes involved. Instead of being crude, the processes and tools of eighteenth century India appear to have developed from a great deal of sophistication in theory and a heightened sense of the aesthetic.”<sup>42</sup>

Needless to say, his ulterior aim in publishing this documentary evidence of the relatively high level of Indian scientific and technological achievements in the 18th century was to initiate a paradigm shift in India’s modernising agenda: According to him, the still existing indigenous expertise needed to be taken into serious consideration in order to stimulate innovation and creativity—inspired by the grassroots—in the ongoing developmental enterprise.<sup>43</sup> Although high-profile seminars were held, no concrete action was taken. The project to found an institute (which would have enabled more extensive research to be done and could have led to an Indian pendant of Joseph Needham’s multi-volume oeuvre on China) was unfortunately never brought to fruition. Nonetheless, Dharampal’s book did have another lease of life a decade later: It inspired young IIT scientists from the PPST group<sup>44</sup> to engage in innovative *swadeshi* research into indigenous scientific and technological practices.

Dharampal’s second, slimmer book on *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition* is equally significant, albeit in a different manner, and yet has not received due recognition until today. As elucidated in the introduction, which has been reproduced in this volume,<sup>45</sup> the book underscores the Indian embeddedness of Gandhian *satyagraha*. But in doing so, it constitutes a strong refutation (supported by historical empirical evidence) of conventional views regarding the origins of civil disobedience in India: According to mainstream opinion, Gandhiji had either appropriated this non-violent technique of protest from western

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42 *Indian Science and Technology*, op. cit., chapter 2 of this volume.

43 This crucial aspect is elaborated further in: Dharampal: “Indigenous Indian Technological Talent and the Need for its Mobilisation”, lecture delivered at the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum, Calcutta, October 4, 1986; published in *PPST Bulletin* (Chennai), No.9, December 1986, pp.5–20; republished in: *Collected Writings*, op.cit., vol.V, pp.50–108. Other lectures with a similar bearing were “The Question of India’s Development” (IIT, Bombay, January 1983), “Some Ideas on the Reindustrialisation of India”, published in: *Rediscovering India*, op. cit., pp.172–184 & 185–191, respectively.

44 An acronym for the *Patriot and People-oriented Science and Technology* group of enterprising young scientists, founded in the late 1970s; cf. above reference to the *PPST Bulletin*, to which Dharampal made regular contributions.

45 See Chapter 3.

luminaries such as Thoreau or Tolstoy, or he had invented it himself. Consequently, it was commonly considered that ordinary Indians possessed no fundamental understanding of the philosophical and organisational principles governing *satyagraha*. How misconceived these views were is explicitly shown by this exceptional documentary analysis.

The historical evidence is provided by British administrative reports of a major non-violent protest against the imposition of a house-tax in Varanasi and neighbouring regions. This massive movement of resistance was organised and carried out extensively between 1810 and 1811. In reproducing the detailed reports written by perturbed colonial officers, Dharampal's succeeds above all in underscoring the perspective of the protestors. Thereby, he exemplifies, by means of the empirical data presented, how socio-political and cultural expressions of popular demands not only explicitly aimed to safeguard the interests of the governed, but also were simultaneously attempting to redress the balance of power between the rulers and the ruled. Moreover, as documented in the British reports, the massively organised resistance testified to the fact that traditionally the 'consent of the governed' constituted an integral element validating the political authority's legitimacy. This, in itself, underscored that the moral right to exercise state power was, or ought to be, derived from the people over whom power was exercised. And in the negative scenario, the right to protest or to enact a revolution formed part of this quasi social-contract theory, according to which people were entitled to legitimately instigate resistance if the government misused its authority in acting against their interests. As averred by Dharampal, such assertions of legitimate rights were recognised as such by pre-colonial political authorities themselves, besides being shared and enacted by the community at large; for they were influenced by prevalent and mutually acknowledged religious and ethical-philosophical conceptions of justice and societal well-being. The basically non-violent nature of the documented protests in Varanasi—described as being meticulously organised and exhibiting political skill—testified first and foremost to the peoples' self-assurance in their own legitimate cause and its strength. Equally significantly, the fact that these protests were initially staged without fear of reprisals—Dharampal perspicaciously deduces—epitomises the belief in the hitherto enjoyed relationship of mutuality and trust between the rulers and the ruled.

As becomes apparent from a close reading of the documents, the colonial intervention changed the customary 'rules of the game' of negotiating political asymmetries of power: On the one hand, by illegalising such traditionally exercised

‘trials of strength’, and, on the other, by redefining relationships between social groups and—more importantly—by foregrounding the starkly rigid asymmetry between colonial authority and the colonised populace.

Dharampal poignantly highlights the discrepant views concerning the appropriate relationship between state and society: In the first instance, as expressed by the protesting inhabitants of Varanasi who considered that the legitimacy of their demands should be acknowledged; secondly and contrastively, by the British administrators who demanded obedience and submission to their authority. For the British were above all intent on establishing ‘law and order’. Outlining this antagonistic scenario constitutes the crucial contribution of this volume. As a result, the reader not only gains a better understanding of India’s recent past, but is also sensitised to its significant political relevance to the present. Concerned with the need both to acknowledge the legitimate rights of the Indian populace as well as to facilitate ordinary citizens’ active participation in national politics, Dharampal formulates the fundamental political message of the book at the end of his introduction as follows:

“It is suggested that non-cooperation and civil disobedience are integral to the well functioning and even to the security of a free and democratic society. In a way, they are even more crucial than stratified courts of law, the present forms of periodic local, state-level or national elections, or the rather stilted and constrained debates and considerations within such elected bodies. Instead of being hostile and inimical, those who resort to non-cooperation and civil disobedience against callousness, authoritarianism and injustice are the protectors of their state and societies. Without them, a society will end up at best performing some mechanical ritual; or, more often, in tyranny, leading to anarchy and armed insurrection.”<sup>46</sup>

Dharampal’s third major book *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the 18th century*,<sup>47</sup> was published in 1983, and was perhaps the most acclaimed of all his publications. The tome, comprising ca.450 pages, provided documentary evidence of the widespread prevalence in late 18th and early 19th century India of educational institutions. These schools taught a sophisticated curriculum, with daily school attendance by about 30% of children aged between 6 to 15 years. Astoundingly the majority of students belonged to

46 *Civil Disobedience in Indian Tradition*, op. cit., p.LXI; reproduced in this volume.

47 Biblia Impex Private Limited: New Delhi, 1983; reprinted by Keerthi Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.: Coimbatore, 1995. Its extensive introduction is reproduced in this volume, cf. Chapter 5.

communities who were classed as *shudra* or even lower. In some areas, for instance in Kerala, even Muslim girls were quite well represented. This data was a real eye-opener for the reappraisal of the historical tradition of education in India. What's more, the findings conclusively refute the hitherto widely accepted assumption that, before the British Raj, education in India was the sole prerogative of the twice-born castes, if not exclusively of the Brahmins. Ironically, this undemocratic and unequal social prioritisation became the state of affairs only after the establishment of English medium schools towards the end of the 19th century—a skewed situation which persists in large measure in contemporary India.

Dharampal's research into the field of indigenous education was instigated by the following statement made by Mahatma Gandhi during a speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in 1931:

“I say without fear of my figures being challenged successfully, that today India is more illiterate than it was fifty or a hundred years ago, and so is Burma, because the British administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that, and the beautiful tree perished.”<sup>48</sup>

Subsequently, Sir Philip Hartog, former vice-chancellor of Dacca University and chairman of the auxiliary committee of the Indian Statutory Commission, contested this claim and requested written evidence which Gandhiji (being preoccupied with the Independence struggle in the 1930s and 1940s) was unable to provide to the former's satisfaction. Dharampal's book, deriving its title “the Beautiful Tree” from Gandhiji's metaphor and in providing statistical proof to substantiate Gandhiji's statement, can also be seen as a delayed response to Sir Hartog's query.

The substantial documentary evidence contained in the book originates from various administrative sources, namely official surveys of indigenous education in the Presidencies of Madras (1822–26, commissioned by Governor Sir Thomas Munro), Bengal (1835–38, known as the William Adam's Report), and in the Punjab (1849–1882, penned by G.W. Leitner).<sup>49</sup> The volume also

48 Quoted in *The Beautiful Tree*, *ibid.*, p.355.

49 Though these official surveys had all been published, and extracts of Munro's survey were even available in the House of Commons Papers of 1831-32, it is astounding that their factual portent was not heeded by previous scholars concerned with the history of Indian education.

includes reports from Malabar by a Carmelite missionary, Fra Paolino da Bartolomeo, in 1796 referring among other matters to the famous monitorial system, as well as by Alexander Walker in 1820 on traditional practices in education and on the wide prevalence of literary learning. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the conclusive statistical data of relatively widespread ‘liberal’ education in village elementary schools and institutions of higher learning enjoyed by large sections of the population<sup>50</sup> refers to periods several decades after the conquest of these regions. Hence, this empirical evidence leads one to assume that the level of education provided must have been even higher before the advent of British rule. Such an assumption is substantiated by the collector of Bellary who graphically describes the state of decay into which the schools had fallen because of their neglect by the British administration and as a consequence of the “gradual but general impoverishment of the country.”<sup>51</sup>

Notwithstanding this noticeable degeneration, it is astounding that acclamatory statements such as Governor Munro’s estimation in 1826 (on the basis of the extensive surveys received from the diverse districts of the Madras presidency) that “the portion of the male population who receive school education to be nearer to one-third than one-fourth of the whole”<sup>52</sup> could be made. No doubt, the colonial governor’s appreciative stance needs to be understood against the backdrop of the comparatively low level of contemporary British education, about which Dharampal, in his extensive introduction, provides a critically discerning overview: He avers—citing statistical data relating to the British Isles—that “school education, especially elementary education at the people’s level, was rather an uncommon commodity until around 1800”.<sup>53</sup> In all due

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50 The Madras Presidency survey (1822–1826) gives concrete statistical data stating that 11,575 schools and 1,094 colleges were still in existence with the number of students being 157,195 and 5,431 respectively. Further that *sudras* and castes below them formed 70%-80% of the total students in Tamil-speaking areas, 62% in Oriya areas, 54% in Malayalam areas, and 35% in Telugu areas. In Malabar, 1,222 Muslim girls, as compared to 3,196 Muslim boys, attended school; the representative curriculum taught comprised, besides the three Rs., also disciplines such as literature, astronomy, law and sciences; data extracted from *The Beautiful Tree*, *ibid.*, pp.1–251.

51 Report of the Collector, Bellary to the Board of Revenue, 17.8.1823, *ibid.*, p.182.

52 *Ibid.*, p.20 (reproduced in this volume, Chapter 5). This estimation was made after taking into consideration the sizeable number of boys (from upper as well as other castes) being taught at home, over and above the statistical data providing evidence that one fourth of all boys between the ages of 5 and 10 years were attending village schools.

53 *Ibid.*, p.6; reproduced in this volume, Chapter 5.

fairness, he does go on to trace the subsequent novel development of publicly institutionalised school education in the first half of 19th century Britain. Yet, in sketching this early modern Indo-British comparative and diachronic educational scenario, Dharampal succeeds in underscoring the rationale behind British administrators' avid interest in reporting about prevalent Indian schools, including the reasons for their being impressed by their findings<sup>54</sup> despite the observable decline.

Admittedly, the primary objective governing this study was to dispel the all-too pervasive myth about India having received the boon of education from the British as part of their civilising mission. At the same time, the politically contestatory nature of his intervention, with a view to overhauling the contemporary pedagogic system, is succinctly formulated in a concluding paragraph of the book's introduction:

“What India had in the sphere of education two centuries ago and the factors which led to its decay and replacement are indeed a part of history. Even if the former could be brought back to life, in the context of today, or of the immediate future, many aspects of it may no longer be apposite. Yet what exists today has little relevance either. An understanding of that which existed and of the process which created the irrelevance India has today, in time, could however help devise what best suits India's requirements and the ethos of its people.”<sup>55</sup>

This clarion-call has subsequently instigated many to rethink the definition and content of present-day education.<sup>56</sup> Such inspired educationalists aim to reinstate a pedagogy that equips children to be able to more fully participate in and work towards the well-being of their local communities and regions. Educational programmes of this nature are striving to provide a corrective to the present dilemma created by semi-westernised schooling which tends to alienate the youth from their familiar environments and to produce (mostly unemployable) graduates for a job-market determined by the globalised economy.

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54 According to the Adam's Report, there were 100,000 schools in Bengal and Bihar in the 1830s, and in the Madras Presidency in the early 1820s, according to Governor Munro, there was “a school in every village”, *Ibid.*, p.73.

55 *Ibid.*, p.79; reproduced in this volume, Chapter 5.

56 An exemplary case in point would be the educational work initiated by SIDH, Mussoorie, in the Himalayan region.

## V

All in all, these three pioneering publications (constituting only part of Dharampal's endeavour to delegitimise conventional History<sup>57</sup>) represent historiographical documents *par excellence* in which the reader is confronted with the original official British sources describing crucial societal achievements in the different regions of 18th and early 19th century India. Hence, the factuality of the picture that emerges appears even more convincing, for, presumably, a British administrator would have had no reason to exaggerate the positive features of Indian society—quite the contrary. Yet these British reports, according to Dharampal (who was for ever self-critically reflective), also had certain drawbacks: Firstly, according to him, the topics that were being written about had been selected in accordance with the interests of the British observers (who would have been influenced by various concerns, political, cultural or scientific). Secondly, and more significantly, the specific emphasis or interpretation given to the objects described would have been determined by the socio-cultural background of the writer, if not by contingent political factors of the immediate colonial-political context. Hence, not only would inadvertently (or often, advertently) misinterpretations or distortions have crept into the descriptions, but also the matters selected for description would not have represented the total picture of a functioning society.

For such a canvas to be portrayed, Dharampal was absolutely convinced that large-scale research needed to be undertaken in the subcontinent itself. He, thus, attempted to pave the way for future scholars by presenting a critical but also dynamic overview of the momentous developments that had taken place in

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57 Another important publication, belonging to a later date and also contesting hegemonic assumptions, is Dharampal and T.M. Mukundan: *The British Origin of Cow-Slaughter in India with some British Documents on the Anti-Kine-Killing movement 1880–1894*, Society for Integrated Development of Himalayas, Mussoorie 2002. Besides providing historical British documentary evidence about the genesis of mass cow-slaughter under British auspices, this volume presents extensive documentary material about one of the most significant resistance movements in India against kine-killing (perpetrated by the British) during the years 1880–1894. By highlighting the support given by some prominent Muslims during phases of this mass protest as well as by emphasising the crucial fact that it was the British and not the Muslims who were the main consumers of beef, Dharampal is able to dispel one of the deep-seated myths perpetuated in the interest of reinforcing divisive colonial strategies—with the aim of assuaging communalist tensions. This was also his underlying intention through the stand he took with regard to the controversial debates in the wake of the Ramjanmabhumi/ Babri Masjid issue at Ayodhya, cf. his contribution “Undamming the Flow”, in: J.K. Bajaj (ed.): *Ayodhya and the Future India*, Centre for Policy Studies, Madras, 1993, pp.213–238. As recognition of his historical research, in 2001, he was appointed Chairman of the National Cattle Commission set up by the Government of India.

India from the 18th into the 20th centuries—in his many essays, lectures and newspaper articles.<sup>58</sup> Simultaneously, he exhorted research-minded Indians to make a concerted effort to gain access to indigenous regional testimonies from varying sources, written, oral and inscriptional. As possible repositories of valuable historical data he suggested that researchers consult the annals of religious and cultural centres, the libraries of royal or aristocratic families, the records of banking and merchant families, registrars and account-keepers as well as village records and histories<sup>59</sup> (as preserved in the Rajasthan state archives at Bikaner with which he was familiar). These and varied documents from many other sources would contain essential data that could corroborate or amend and supplement the British testimony to subsequently provide a more holistic understanding of India's recent past and the functioning of its society.

In view of this crucial desideratum, he emphasised that his work constituted just a beginning,<sup>60</sup> and that his findings should serve to instigate and inspire others to focus on and investigate the wealth of historical material lying at their doorstep. This is what he surmised 30 years ago, and he has been proven correct, now that the National Manuscript Mission has located thousands, if not millions of manuscripts throughout India. That means that there exist a multitude of documents in Indian regional locations just waiting to be researched into by hundreds of budding grass-root social historians, or Indian *Le Roi Laduries*,<sup>61</sup> whose contribution he considered essential towards developing a more differentiated sense of Indian cultural identity.

From another perspective, one of Dharampal's underlying aims in pursuing his historical research (as I understand it from frequent conversations with him) was to indulge in a sort of hermeneutics of historical knowledge. Let me spell

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58 Cf. the lists in the appendix to this volume. Some of these lectures have been published in Dharampal: *Essays on Tradition, Recovery and Freedom*, Vol. V of Dharampal: *Collected Writings*, Other India Press, Mapusa, Goa, 2000, reprinted by Other India Press & SIDH, 2003, 2007; as well as in: Dharampal: *Rediscovering India*, SIDH, Mussoorie, 2003.

59 In particular, *Jati puranas* which he maintained contained a wealth of data about community practices and beliefs. He himself started this research by consulting the volumes of the *People of India: Anthropological Survey of India*, Delhi 1985 ff. whose voluminous empirical data, according to him, required more in-depth analysis.

60 In recognition of his research work, in the early 1990s, Dharampal was elected Member of the Indian Council of Historical Research for two terms, and for a third term during 1999–2001.

61 Emanuel Le Roi Ladurie is a French social historian whose work focuses on the history of the peasantry during the French *ancien régime*, in particular in the Languedoc, in southern France.

out what this entailed for him: Having provided sufficient evidence of the advanced level of Indian achievements in the various fields of science, technology, education, social and political organisation, he considered it, firstly, necessary to investigate the causes and mechanisms by which not only this knowledge had been discarded and then fallen into oblivion, but also, concomitantly, the relevant institutions had become defunct. To obtain any viable understanding would, according to him, entail in-depth research into socio-economic, political and ideological impinging factors subsequent to the advent of colonial rule. Secondly, intent on evaluating impartially the social-historical significance of his findings, he opined that this would not necessarily be obtained by juxtaposing India in competitive comparison to Europe. That is, rather than merely emphasising that India produced better steel, practised more sophisticated medicine, provided better education for its children before the onset of colonial rule—than either its counterparts in contemporary Europe, or 50-100 years later on the subcontinent itself—, it would be more worthwhile to investigate how the attainment of this relatively high level of civilisational achievement had indeed been possible. This, he insisted, could only be achieved by becoming familiarised with the complex societal, economic and cultural mechanisms that had facilitated these accomplishments. Obviously the attainment of these insights would entail doing detailed research into the functioning of Indian localities and their communities, their socio-economic infrastructure and instrumentalities. His own insights gained from a close analysis of early British-Indian historical documentation seemed to indicate that Indian society and polity in the 18th century<sup>62</sup> was defined not so much by categories of hierarchy and political asymmetries, but rather by ones of mutual relationships which may possibly have been of a competitive nature, but not of a suppressive subjugating one. As for the categories of hierarchy and political asymmetries, he considered that these factors had become accentuated as a result of the British-Indian encounter. The data collected from the Chingleput district of Tamil Nadu<sup>63</sup>—a project initiated by him in the 1980s—constitutes a paradigmatic case-study for such research into understanding the structure and functioning of Indian localities and their communities.

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62 Cf. his extended essay “India’s Polity, its Characteristics and Current Problems” reproduced in this volume, Chapter 6.

63 This refers to an extensive commissioned survey of about 2,000 villages carried out by a British engineer, Thomas Barnard, based on data collected during a five-year period (1762–1767) soon after the area around Madras came under direct British control. Since this survey is supplemented by detailed Tamil palm-leaf records, it contains a wealth of information not only on agricultural production and the variety of crop cultivation, but also on the very elaborate distributive system, the diversity of demographic and professional composition and the wide range of ecological habitats. The research project is being pursued extensively by two of Dharampal’s close associates, Dr. M.D. Srinivas and Dr. J.K. Bajaj.

Thirdly, Dharampal wanted to trace how certain elements from this corpus of knowledge were appropriated, refined and integrated into the early modern British or European scientific and cultural institutions, a process which he considered was nothing unique but rather quite representative of the continual flow of knowledge (appropriated or exchanged) between the cultures of the world. Hence, on the one hand, he considered it essential to evaluate and comprehend the sociological as well as the psychological-cognitive portent of intercultural flows and appropriations of knowledge in which all societies of the world were participating. On the other hand, however, though he would not have been inclined to establish an exclusive right of cultural ownership on specific technologies and sciences, he did consider it important, without being chauvinistic, to study and be aware of their respective cultural embeddedness. To elucidate, he stated:

“Every civilisation has to do its own learning and in its own way. The knowledge of what others did can only serve as one pointer amongst many. Similar understanding can be initiated in many other long neglected technologies and industries. It should not be surprising if at least some of them (with minor modifications here and there) prove to be as productive and cost-efficient as the new technologies which we have borrowed from modern world industry.”<sup>64</sup>

In a fourth step, he attempted to understand the multifarious ways in which the fabric of Indian society had been shattered, and more significantly, to highlight the often subtle and surreptitious means by which Indian *minds* had been colonised under the impact of British rule. His objective here again was not necessarily to apportion blame to British administrators, but rather to unravel the ensconced logic of colonial operations. In historical retrospect, there was no point in being moralistic about the damage done. Rather, it was necessary to deconstruct the whole process and rationale behind the colonial endeavour. This challenging task, he urged, could be embarked upon by studying the vast collections of the Board of Control<sup>65</sup> which itemise the dismantling and remodelling that the colonisation process involved. Yet, according to his understanding of developments elsewhere—and his ability to discern and highlight structural linkages in the global arena—the British-Indian experience did not constitute by

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64 Extract from “Indigenous Indian Technological Talent and the Need for its Mobilisation”, a lecture delivered at the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum, Calcutta, 4.10.1986, quoted from Dharampal: *Essays on Tradition, Recovery and Freedom*, op. cit., p.66.

65 These documents, catalogued by him with great care, are lying in Sevagram waiting to be researched into.

any means an exceptional scenario: Indeed, he perceived similar operations at work, for instance, in the British Isles from the time of the Norman conquest and in North America from the early 16th century onwards.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, the impact of the colonial enterprise he considered, in like manner to Mahatma Gandhi, had been entirely destructive to Indian society, not only because of the exploitative factor involved, but even more so because it was defined by categories alien to or at odds with the Indian cultural ethos.

## VI

What the component parts of this Indian cultural ethos are (and in which manner they are at odds with modern conceptions) are spelt out in his slim volume on *Bharatiya Chitta, Manas and Kala*,<sup>67</sup> reproduced in this volume. By underscoring the Indian traditional conceptions of time and space as well as of the relative insignificance of man—his knowledge and his crafts in the scheme of creation—Dharampal aimed to underscore the intellectual and spiritual sustenance derived from a such world-view: A philosophical cosmology that, according to him, was defined by a totally different logic to the one operative in the modern perspective. His intention, however, was not to extract India from the modern world. Rather, his overarching concern was to instil Indians with self-confidence. For him, it was essential that Indians should have the self-assurance that their world-view was valuable, and that their contribution could perhaps influence world agendas. This was worth striving for since, according to his understanding, modernity or post-modernity was neither static nor everlasting, to say the least. In a more philosophical vein, he averred that the ways of the world were governed by a logic unfathomable to men. Yet, simultaneously, in a more practical affirmative tone, he concluded with the following reassuring prospect:

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66 “Most of what Britain did in India was not basically very different from what the British State had done in Britain since about the Norman Conquest of England in the 11th century, and which it more or less continued until after 1800. [...] the same was attempted by England in Ireland from about the 16th century; or experimented upon in North America in the 16th-17th-18th centuries; and the same was continued by the successors of British power in the fast expanding territories of the USA in the late 18th and the 19th centuries.” Quoted from “Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Polity and Society and their Relevance to the Present”, *op. cit.*, reproduced in this volume, cf. Chapter 1.

67 Dharampal: *Bharatiya Chitta, Manas va Kala* (Hindi), Pushpa Prakashan, Patna and Centre for Policy Studies, Chennai 1991; English translation (with a preface and glossary) by Jitendra Bajaj, published as *Bharatiya Chitta, Manas and Kala*, Centre for Policy Studies, Madras 1993; reproduced in this volume, cf. Chapter 7.

“To redefine our seekings and aspirations, our ways of thought and action, in a form that is appropriate and effective in today’s world may not be too hard a task at all. Such re-assertions and re-definitions of civilisational thrust are not uncommon in world history. For every civilisation, there comes a time when the people of that civilisation have to remind themselves of their fundamental civilisational consciousness and their understanding of the universe and of Time. From the basis of that recollection of the past, they then define the path of their future. Many civilisations of the world have undergone such self-appraisal and self-renewal at different times. In our long history, many times we must have engaged in this recollection and re-assertion of the *chitta* and *kala* of India. We need to undertake such an exploration into ourselves again.”<sup>68</sup>

This culturally and intellectually reinvigorating historical perspective embodies the reassurance that India could or would reassert itself, once Indians had understood and come to terms with their own cultural moorings. To reinforce this deeply held conviction, Dharampal’s exhortation also comprised a socio-political thrust, as expressed many a time in public fora: Rather than “walking in the grooves laid down by the west, while dreaming day-dreams that our time will come one day”,<sup>69</sup> he contended that a systematic intellectual effort needed to be undertaken. The goal of such an undertaking constituted evolving viable indigenous models of social, economic and political organisation in tune with contemporary realities so that an organic linkage between society and polity based on sounder indigenous foundations could be established.<sup>70</sup>

## VII

It goes without saying that Mahatma Gandhi represented for him the inspirational model for this programme of civilisational regeneration. In fact, Gandhiji had been his lodestar right from his childhood days in Lahore. It was in

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68 Ibid., p.64, reproduced in this volume, cf. Chapter 7.

69 Cited from the lecture entitled “Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity”, *op. cit.*, reproduced in this volume, cf. Chapter 1.

70 More concretely and inclusively, he urged the following: “Our essential task is to bring the innovative and technological skills of our people, those who professed them for millennia and till at least 1800, back to the rebuilding of our primary economy and industry. We have ignored this so far. Instead, we have tried to create a new economy and industry to which the primary economy has been subordinated.” Cited from the lecture on “Indigenous Indian Technological Talent and the Need for its Mobilisation” (1986), *Collected Writings*, vol.V, *op. cit.*, p.63.

the intellectual footsteps of this revolutionary personality and his conception of *Hind Swaraj* that Dharampal pursued his pioneering historical research with such commitment and zeal. As he proceeded, he also endeavoured to attain a more in-depth understanding of Gandhiji's significance. And after completing his archival research, he focussed his attention more specifically on the written documentation of the Independence struggle. Being based in Sevagram from the 1980s onwards, he also had access to some unpublished notes and letters penned by Gandhiji. The essays he wrote and the talks he gave (dating from the 1980s until about 2002)<sup>71</sup> provide fresh insights about Gandhiji and his outstanding achievements. One these essays, entitled *Reconsidering Gandhiji (1915-1948)*, is being reproduced in this volume.<sup>72</sup> In another essay, Dharampal formulated his assessment of Gandhiji's contribution as follows:

“What is special about Gandhiji's effort is that both the attempt at salvage and the recovery of freedom were based on the spiritual view of life that he shared in a profound way with his ordinary fellow beings. It is this spiritual sharing that enabled him to help them regain their courage, fearlessness and confidence, and to resist injustice by trying, to the extent possible, to hold on to truth and to non-violence.”<sup>73</sup>

Besides emphasising the Indian embeddedness of Gandhiji's spirituality, Dharampal considered that his extraordinary leadership qualities, too, needed to be foregrounded more explicitly which he does in the following insightful manner:

“If we look at Gandhiji from the point of view of his being a general—like Sri Krishna of the Mahabharata—we will be able to account for practically all of his thinking and actions from 1915 to the end. Bringing about a transformation seldom before attempted by any individual required not only total dedication to the achievement of the task [...] but demanded even more a sort of communion with those for whom the end was really meant. It also depended on incomparable organisational and strategic skills. [...] Yet the ‘Mahatmaship’ of Gandhiji in a way seems to have made us oblivious of his approach, of the way he went about solving problems, and the designs and strategies of his battles not only against foreign yoke but also against what he treated as evil or misguided in his own people. For

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71 These were published in a small volume entitled *Understanding Gandhi*, Other India Press, Goa, 2003.

72 See Chapter 8.

73 “A Child of the Gandhian Era”, in: *Understanding Gandhi*, op. cit., p.16.

instance, his battle designs had advances as well as retreats built in them. As a superb general he knew that there can be few advances without some retreats.”<sup>74</sup>

It was during the last years that Gandhiji was involved in one such epochal battle—attempting to extract India from the ‘western orbit’ and to strengthen the subcontinent’s ancient links with the Asian world, as exemplified concretely by the Asian Relations Conference held in Delhi in March 1947, at Gandhiji’s instigation.

This last endeavour of Gandhiji at resuscitating inner Asian unity was to provide inspiration to Dharampal, too: Towards the end of his life, broadening his horizons and transcending the shores of the subcontinent, Dharampal initiated a research project on the maritime world of the Indian Ocean. The project’s overarching aim was to investigate the shared historical cultural links within Asia, with the ultimate goal of reviving past intimate Indian contacts with countries of South-East and East Asia.<sup>75</sup> This he envisaged as an essential and urgent enterprise he hoped many would enthusiastically take up. Given the surge in Asian maritime studies during the last decade, it seems that his innovative research initiative is bearing fruit.

*Summa summarum*, not only did Dharampal, in challenging and delegitimising the historical master narrative, thereby remap a few centuries of Indian history as well as retrace old seascapes, but he also attempted to design blueprints for societal renewal, i.e. to bring to fruition Gandhiji’s *Hind Swaraj*. Thereby he charted out a course of research for the next few decades, or more, depending on the productive pace we—his heirs—manage to maintain.

As a non-conformist with a creative mind, he remains refreshingly accessible for the post-modern world, for he challenged the status-quo, interrogated the legitimacy of established socio-political constellations, broke through normative categories of thought, and opened up new philosophical and practical possibilities, forever intent on promoting the welfare of the common people—to achieve *Hind Swaraj*.

## VIII

In this volume of the *Essential Writings of Dharampal* a small selection of his seminal contributions, extending over three decades, is being reproduced

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74 “What Gandhiji Tried to Achieve”, in: *Understanding Gandhi*, *ibid.*, p.115.

75 A short proposal was formulated and a research unit was set up in Chennai.

in the following eight sections.<sup>76</sup> The texts have been arranged thematically, but also follow a chronological sequence.

In compiling these texts, I have gratefully received immense encouragement from family members, coupled with invaluable advice and unstinting support from many of Dharampal's close associates. In particular, I should like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. J.K. Bajaj, Dr. M.D. Srinivas, T.M. Mukundan, Banwari, P.M. Tripathi and Pawan K. Gupta, as well as to Alice Williams and Ankur Kakkar for assistance in the final editing. However, above all, I am deeply appreciative of the constant support provided by Shri Rajesh K. Jha, former Director of the Publications Division, who most perspicaciously suggested this project in the first place. Lastly, my warm thanks go to Ms. Roma Chatterjee, Assistant Director of the Publications Division, as well as to her efficient team, for successfully facilitating the whole production.

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<sup>76</sup> A complete list of his publications (including some unpublished writings) is given at the end of the volume.

1

Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society  
and Polity and their Relevance  
to the Present (1986)



## Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity and their Relevance to the Present (1986)

The following piece serves as a good introduction to Shri Dharampal's research work. The text consists of three lectures delivered on January 4-6, 1986 under the auspices of the Indian Association for Cultural Freedom at Pune. These lectures were later published in *New Quest* (Nos.56, 57 and 58, 1986), and were supplemented by an editorial comment by M.P. Rege entitled "Against the Current" (*New Quest*, No.57, May-June 1986). The text of all three lectures was also translated into Hindi and published in *Jansatta* (March 19-31, 1986, in 10 parts) as "Angrazon se Pehale ka Bharat", reprinted as an independent volume by Shatabdi Prakashan, Vidisha, Calcutta, 1988. This coincided with a translation in Marathi, published in book form as *Paramparik Bharatiya Samajik Va Rajkiya Vyavastha Ani Nava Bharatachi Ubharani*, Navabharata Masik 1987. A Tamil translation by K. Ramasubramanian, directly from the English, was published as *Mundeya India Samudayam, Arasamaippu, Sila Amsanga: Avattrin Inreya Poruttam*, Cre-A, Chennai 1992; a translation in Malayalam, albeit in a shorter version, was also published. This compilation of lectures in Hindi continues to be republished intermittently in a few journals like *Himalaya Rebar* (edited by Pawan K. Gupta), and appeared as a separate booklet, brought out by the *Azadi Bachao Andolan*, Allahabad. The text was reprinted in: Dharampal, *Collected Writings*, Other India Press: Mapusa 2000 (reissued 2003 & 2007), vol.V, pp.1-49. Translations into Gujarati and Hindi were published in *Dharampal Samagra Lekhan* (11 vols.), edited by Indumati Katdare, Punarutthan Trust, Ahmedabad 2005 and 2007, respectively.



# Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity and their Relevance to the Present (1986)

The theme of these talks relates largely to the society and polity of India as it appears to me to have existed just before the beginning of British rule (i.e. around 1750), and in many of the areas which came under direct British occupation or protection later (until around 1820). That the basic concepts and fabric of the society and polity I am describing did not come into being just around 1750 but had existed from much earlier times is obvious.

## I

I begin today's talk with an account of how I came to be personally aware of our archival material. From this, I move to a brief reference to our present general understanding of what our society is assumed to have been like around 1750, or in the decades and centuries preceding it. Next, I make some reference to the institutions and manners of British polity in the 18th and early 19th century, and I end today's talk with some mention of the economic differential in Indian society and of life in India at the top levels before the beginning of British rule, as also what it became soon after we began to be ruled by Britain.

The second talk is devoted to a description of Indian society and polity, some of it in detail along with some tabulated data. I also briefly touch on certain other aspects of this society: education, technology, the practice of civil disobedience, etc.

In the third and final talk, I will attempt to explain why my presentation may seem so contrary to prevalent understanding and belief about the nature and functioning of Indian society and polity before British rule. Then I move on to our present public and institutional frame, most of which, I believe—and with which most of you will perhaps agree—is a continuation of what we have inherited from the way the British ruled India. At the end I suggest a few steps which may possibly deserve consideration and discussion with a hope that such a discussion (though not necessarily restricted to what I propose) may possibly help our society to come into its own.

## II

To begin with, I want to mention to you a certain disquiet I feel about ourselves. This disquiet, I expect, is partly a product of my involvement with

archival material. Going through most of it is, for me, like reading high drama, or modern mystery or detective stories: it leads me to an overcharged imagination. Thus, the disquiet I feel may be, to a large extent, without any basis.

I find, however, that many of the points, which I am later going to mention to you, seem to have been discussed and published in the 1920s and 1930s. For instance, Mahatma Gandhi's *Young India* in the early 1920s published a great deal on indigenous Indian education in the late 18th and early 19th century; on the various crafts of India; on Indian social conditions before the British and on the impoverishment of Indian society under British rule; on the relatively superior status which the so-called Pariahs of South India or the Mahars of Maharashtra had until about 1800, etc. The writers of such articles included not only those who were Gandhiji's followers or admirers. There were also men like Sir Sankaran Nair, a member of the British Viceroy's council, who expressed similar views. According to Sir Sankaran Nair, the major erosion in the socio-economic status of the Pariahs or the social and cultural life in general took place during the previous century and a half. I expect there is much more material of this kind in our early 20th century newspapers, journals and scholarly as well as other works.

It is perhaps true that, though this information had come to the notice of many 50–60 years ago, it was not brought together then to form an integrated picture of Indian society. Even when the latter might have been attempted, it was probably done cursorily or in what looked like a highly romantic idiom.

Gandhiji, in most of his writings, and even more so in *Hind Swaraj* (which he wrote in 1909), tried to give a fairly integrated picture of Indian society and polity as he understood it to have functioned during its long past. As many here may recollect, while writing in *Hind Swaraj* on passive resistance he had indicated that this practice had always existed in India, and he had also then given an illustration of it. It is my belief that it is such an understanding of the working of the Indian mind and society which enabled Gandhiji to commune with it with such great ease, and pave the way for the adoption by the Indian people of much of what he suggested. As he said in 1944, what he did when he returned to India was to provide a voice to what the people themselves felt and basically already knew. It is true that it was not only this communion between the people and Gandhiji but also his organisational and related skills which could bring about what India was able to do and achieve under his leadership.

Yet despite what Gandhiji said in *Hind Swaraj* and what was written by many in *Young India*, and elsewhere, about the earlier Indian society and polity, little of it seems to have got internalised and expressed in the institutions which

have been managing India since the regaining of freedom. What continues in the governmental as well as the non-governmental spheres is in a great measure that which the British created during the period of the demolition of Indian institutions and structures between 1760 and 1830; or is modelled on the structures they imported and imposed on India for the consolidation of their rule.

By 1920 a fairly substantial section of the elite in India had become alienated from their society, had taken up the manner and idiom of the British, and had begun to mould their personal and public life according to British concepts and modalities. The period of 25 years when Mahatma Gandhi had the supreme leadership of India was too short for battling on several fronts. It may also be true that the elite which joined him—and which thereby inherited political power—did not take him seriously as regards his understanding of Indian society, and could not conceive that such a society could be viable in the modern world. As one of the more enlightened of this elite, and someone who was quite dear to Gandhiji said: how can one accept that the village people have any virtue when they are so ignorant?

However, even if this substantial elite could not internalise the Indian past and shape its future accordingly, if it had any creative capacity it could have certainly internalised what it had learnt from the West, and used this learning, by recasting it into an Indian idiom, for India's benefit. But even in this it has failed dismally so far. I don't have to labour this latter point, however, as enough has been said on it from more august quarters in recent months.

Yet, it seems to me that this incapacity to recreate or regenerate has been with us for a much longer period. Perhaps the Vijayanagar *Rajya*, as well as the indigenously rooted *Rajya*, which the Marathas tried to create in the early 18th century, had not fared very differently than ourselves. Notwithstanding that the inspiration of Vijayanagar came from the great Acharya Vidyaranya and of the Marathas from Samarth Ram Das, both of whom seem to have failed to unite society and polity, that is to make them function according to a shared idiom and shared concepts.

It is possible that most civilisations have such intervals when the links between society and polity get shattered, or vitiated; or they remain in a state of hibernation. It may be that for several centuries we have been passing through such a phase, and that a time will soon come when India's polity will begin to reflect not only the aspirations and urges of our society, but also its manner and idiom. It is also probable that I am being unduly impatient, and that such processes are already functioning, and will, in due time, make the present split between our society and polity a matter of little consequence. About the time we regained

freedom, Gandhiji had written to someone that no quick results should be expected; and that the situation created by an enslavement of 150 years would take at least half that much time to restore India to health.

Yet, even after reflecting on such possibilities and projections, the disquiet I feel does not wholly disappear. I have somehow a feeling that the rather separate worlds in which our society, on the one hand, and our polity, on the other, have tended to move is due to some deeper and more philosophical causes. Perhaps the Indian psyche and the private universe of the Indian individual are averse to existing in a world in which hostility between groups and areas is a permanent feature. As you will realise, I am putting this before you merely as a layman. But it is my hope that if my disquiet is in any way shared by the learned and the wise amongst us, they will try to look into this question.

### III

I expect what I have said so far must have made it apparent to most of you that, except for a general interest, I have no academic background or professional training in the art of the historian. Until about twenty years ago, I was more involved with the problems of rural reconstruction, and like many of my age, education, and interests, I was interested in a general way also in questions relating to the rebuilding of a new India. I also may have naively believed, in 1947, that such rebuilding and national resurgence was just round the corner. Such a belief seems to have continued with many of our generation until several years later.

But as years passed, these expectations began to take a back seat. It appeared to me, and I suppose to others, that what we were achieving in most fields amounted to very little; and even what we achieved was more a result of certain material inputs rather than of our ingenuity, methodology, or a result of the application of any mental effort on our part. The output of most planned effort seldom seemed to exceed the material input; and the human factor seemed to have played little role in these relatively meagre achievements. Around the same time, I was also of the view, which I retain even today, that the ordinary human being in India, especially the Indian villager, was in no sense inferior to his counterpart in England, or other countries of the West, as regards his ingenuity, capacity to innovate within his circumstances, and in terms of the total amount of hard work done by him during comparative periods. Further, the fact that he was able to produce most of what India needed in agriculture or craft products, with meagre capital and investment, indicated that he was perhaps far superior to the mid-20th century peasant or craftsman of the West.

During the 1950s and around 1960, though I knew that we had what is called the National Archives of India—I often passed it in Delhi—I did not exactly know what relation such archives had to our society, or to our past, or to our lives. But the work I did in connection with rural areas, which included visiting various centres for rural development and the post-1957 institutions of panchayat raj in several parts of the country, gradually made me conclude that perhaps most of us—while we may have been very dedicated to the objectives we had in view, or may have had a great love for our ordinary compatriots—did not really know much about what these compatriots of ours thought, how they solved any problems which confronted them, what their priorities were. Even more surprisingly, we were quite unaware of the social and cultural past of the particular regions or communities we were concerned with. True, we had some sort of general picture about this past. This picture usually implied that our village folk and their ancestors had wallowed in misery for a thousand or more years; that they had been terribly oppressed and tyrannised by rulers as well as their social and religious customs since time immemorial; and that all this had mostly left them dumb or misguided, or victims of superstition and prejudice. From this we assumed that what we had to deal with was like a blank slate on which we, the architects of the new India, could write, or imprint, what we wished. We seldom thought that these people had any memories, thoughts, preferences, or priorities of their own; and even when we conceded that they might have had some of these, we dismissed these as irrelevant. And when we failed in writing on what we assumed to be a blank slate, or in giving such writing any permanence, we felt unhappy and more often angry with these countrymen of ours for whom we felt we had sacrificed not only our comforts, but our very lives. If I may say so, what I have stated here was, I think, in a large measure shared by most of our generation who were given to social or public work.

#### IV

But from about 1960, I began to feel that I knew very little about these people for whom I claimed to work; I knew nothing of what their habitations or society had been in the past, and not much more about their present-day lives. As it has some bearing upon what I later read about our society in the early British records, I may mention a few of the points which I learnt about our society while I was still engaged in this work of rural reconstruction.

One of the early incidents which gave me a different understanding of our village life took place during a study which we had undertaken of the

Rajasthan panchayats in 1961. In one particular village (perhaps this was in the district of Sawai Madhopur), we learnt that this village had some irrigation tanks. As I did not find any reference to these tanks in the proceedings of the panchayat, I asked the panchayat members present if anything ever happened to these tanks. They replied that they were indeed occasionally repaired, etc. On my asking as to who did the work, they said 'we' repaired them. I then asked did the 'we' mean the panchayat. They said it did not mean the panchayat, but it meant those whose fields were irrigated by these tanks. They further described how labour, cash, etc. was collected for the purpose of repair. When I asked why the panchayat did not repair the tanks, they said that this was not the panchayat's work. On my asking them what was the panchayat's work, they replied that the panchayat's work was 'development' and, according to them, 'development' was that which the government wanted them to do. As they understood it, the repair of irrigation tanks did not fall in any development category. So they regarded it as something that they had to do themselves, as had been done for centuries. We had visited this village, like many others, as a team, which included a former member of the first Indian Planning Commission. A young I.A.S. Officer, the Block Development Officer of this area, was also present during this conversation.

The same evening, we visited a village-cum-town panchayat. This panchayat had, just a few months earlier, built a spacious panchayat-*ghar* in which we were then sitting. While looking at their proceedings book, I said to them that the book did not seem to record any decision about the construction of the panchayat-*ghar*. They agreed it did not include such a decision, but said that it included the entry of the money they had collected for its construction. I asked them when and where they had taken the decision to construct this place. They said they had another panchayat in which every section in the village was represented, which they called the *bees-biswa* panchayat. According to them, the decision to construct the panchayat-*ghar*, and everyone's contribution towards this work, was taken there. I asked them why this matter was not decided in the statutory panchayat. They said the statutory panchayat—I think they called it the *sarkari* panchayat—was not the place for such a decision. I then asked them if they needed to take some similar decision again, what they would do. Their emphatic answer was that they would take such a decision in the *bees-biswa* panchayat, and not in the statutory panchayat.

I heard more or less similar narratives in villages of Andhra Pradesh a few months later. Subsequently, during 1962, I was in Jagannath Puri, and called on the President of the Puri Zilla Parishad. He told me about the shortcomings of the panchayat bodies in the new system: their lack of power, resources, etc.,

and as is common with us, he had many things to complain about. I told him that, while I mostly agreed with what he had said, I would like to know what the position of panchayats, etc. was in earlier times. He then told me that near Puri there had been 52 *sasana* villages which had continued as communities with common ownership, etc. for several centuries, but that these were dissolved after 1937, when we began to implement the national objective of land to the tiller. At my request, he arranged my visit to one of these *sasana* villages: the village of Veer Narasimhapur. My impression after visiting that village was that, as regards aesthetics, design, the state of its agriculture and plantation of coconut and other trees, social amenities, etc., the village compared well with any Israeli Kibbutzim, or a village in England, or elsewhere in Europe. I was then told that this was a Brahmin village, which created some doubt in my mind that perhaps it was a very special place. But I was assured that out of the 52 villages there were many which were inhabited by various other communities (including fishermen), and that these were organised similarly.

From 1962 onwards, I began to find traces or residues of such village communities in many parts of South India, especially in Tamilnadu, which I visited more frequently. In 1964, I was informed in Thanjavur that, until 1937, it had at least 100 villages which had long been organised as *samudayam* villages, but that these again were, even formally, dissolved because of our national objective of land to the tiller. On further enquiry, I learnt that the long existence of the *samudayam* villages in Thanjavur was brought to the notice of Acharya Vinoba Bhave when he visited there in 1956 or 1957, but that there was no reaction on Vinobaji's part to this information. Later, I mentioned this to an esteemed Sarvodaya friend. He reacted by asking me what I expected Vinobaji to do. Did I expect him to start researching about it? I replied that I did not expect any research from Vinobaji, but if Vinobaji had felt that his idea of the village community, etc., as expressed through the term *gramdan*, possibly may have had some psychic and historic linkages with his society, and had he mentioned such a feeling to his, then countless, followers, surely at least a few scores of them could have helped him, and thus the country, to establish or disapprove such an assumption.

A more tragicomic aspect in this narration of how I came to archival exploration relates to the holding of statutorily laid down meetings of the village panchayats at certain intervals. During the early stage of a study of panchayats in Tamilnadu in 1964 and 1965, I found that a large number of village panchayats were actually unable to meet because of the lack of a panchayat building; and that instead, the statutorily laid down meeting was considered as having taken place by circulation of the resolution. Realising that because of factionalism, etc., the members were reluctant to meet at the place of any one member or

that of the panchayat president, I asked why they did not meet in the village school. Most villages in Tamilnadu, even in 1964, had a school of some sort and also a large or small school building. They said they could not meet in the school building while the school was on, which was from Monday to Saturday. They then told me that no panchayat business could be transacted on a Sunday according to the rules and regulations of government. A year or two later, I was to learn that this rule of not transacting any 'public' business on a Sunday dated to around 1800; and that this rule was enacted here in India within a few years of the enactment of an Act in Great Britain pertaining to 'A Stricter Observance of the Sabbath Day', which prohibited most public activity in Britain on a Sunday. Incidentally, such enactments in many matters, like the prohibition of stage plays, of opening most shops, or even of privately washing clothes and putting them in the back garden to dry, more or less continued in Britain even until recently. And as many here know, the observance of the Sabbath, on a Saturday, is even more strictly observed in the modern state of Israel.

It is facts like the above which made me realise that most of us had completely lost touch with the reality of our country. Simply because our people by temperament were mild and tolerant, and did not throw stones at us, or murder us in our beds (even when they went without food, clothes and shelter), we had thought that they were nearly dead, or wholly inarticulate and assumed that it was for us to determine their future and to initiate them into prescribed activity. While we believed this to be the state of our people, we who had been left in positions of power, authority and what we called knowledge, did not even know, or certainly did not comprehend, the laws, regulations, procedures and plans which we administered and believed would herald this new India.

## V

It is in Madras that I first came in close contact with government records, mostly relating to the 20th century but some to the early and late 19th century also. Two main things which I learnt in the Madras archives have some relevance here. They were:

- (1) Around 1805, the district of Thanjavur had around 1,800 villages which were known as *samudayam*. These formed about 30% of the total number of villages in the district of Thanjavur then.
- (2) The governmental revenue assessment stipulated by the British in India was fixed at 50% of the gross agricultural produce in Bengal as well as in the Madras Presidency. This fixation was made during the years 1760 to 1820, as and when the British became masters of

an area. This particular information initially baffled me and later, when its implications sank in my mind, I was aghast.

I tried to share this information with some of my knowledgeable and esteemed friends. These included political personalities, planners, former high officers of government, and many others who were intimately concerned with land and rural problems and cared as much about India's continuing poverty as I did. But for a long time none of them could believe this data. One of them, who had been a district collector and later a minister as well as a planner, was categorical that this never could have happened, that it was impossible for any land to pay such an exorbitant government revenue. A friend, also a historian, but more concerned with the 20th century, told me some months later that the British did fix the land revenue at 50% of the gross agricultural produce; however, that few Indians today knew this fact; and that the only important Indian who perhaps was aware of it was the first Prime Minister of the Indian Republic.

In the context of *samudayam* villages, a former chief of land reforms in the Indian Planning Commission was of the view that there could not have been any such *samudayam* villages in Thanjavur, as this fact had not been mentioned by Beveridge—the celebrated late 19th century British authority on Indian land tenures.

It is such incidents and experiences which ultimately led me to a sustained study of some of the material in the archives on India. Only then did I realise what they contained and what purpose they could serve. This path to the archives may indicate the sort of mind I possessed, the search I was pursuing, and explain any subjectivity and erroneous or exaggerated impressions which some may feel have resulted from my approach. But I leave this for you and others to judge.

## VI

Before I move to a description of what I have understood about Indian society and polity from these British records, I must mention some other points. The first relates to my exclusive dependence on British records. This, I realise, is indeed regrettable. But as far as I know, no very detailed Indian records relating to the functioning of Indian society and polity at the primary level are to be had even today, i.e. nearly four decades after we regained freedom. It is indeed tragic that during these decades, but for a few exceptions in the archaeological sphere, the exploration of our past, especially our institutions, our scholarly and popular concepts, and the nature, details, and the underlying

principles of our sciences and technologies, is more or less at the stage where it was about fifty years ago.

I have a hunch that such records must exist, though perhaps not in every village, town, and district of India, but at least in a few scores of places in our vast land. The places which possibly may have such records will be India's religious and cultural centres, old kingly or aristocratic families, old families of bankers, merchants, etc., and many of those who traditionally functioned as registrars and account-keepers in India. That Indian villages maintained detailed voluminous records is borne out by British and other testimony.

So far our history is mostly based on royal court chronicles, on some stone or copper plate inscriptions, or much more on the writings of foreign travellers; and its structure and direction seem to have been determined less by the data, but much more by a variety of ideological formulations. According to 19th century European formulation, for example, feudalism was a necessary stage in the evolution of society; therefore, it was assumed that feudalism must have existed in India, too. As society, according to European notions, is supposed to have had a linear or spiral upward movement, so India also must have experienced this phenomenon; and hence if the standard of ordinary living in India in the 1860s (for which there is some published data) was at a certain level, this standard must have been at a much lower level 60 or a 100 years earlier. Again, if a Dutch traveller in Jahangir's reign found that Indian food did not suit his palate or stomach (his complaint was that beef was prohibited at that time), this meant that food in India then was poor and miserable, and most ordinary people had a terrible life. But according to the same traveller, even the ordinary labourer in places like Agra ate *khichri* with butter daily, a statement which is usually ignored.

Or as a prestigious recent economic history of India tries to convey, the life of the royalty and nobility, and those in their close circle, was indeed fabulous during India's so-called medieval age. As an illustration of such sumptuous living this new history quotes a remark of around 1739 from a writer in Delhi. According to this writer, "in Delhi's bazar a young nobleman could expect to buy only the barest necessities with Rs.100,000". Whether this was meant as ridicule or was a serious statement of fact, is not mentioned in this history. The inference of such a quotation obviously is that the life of the ruling class or the nobility in all parts of India, prior to the British, must have been very fabulous indeed; and as a corollary of this, the life for the ordinary people must have been very hard. Or, if a European writer in the 17th century said that Delhi looked as large as Paris, and modern research finds that Paris then had half a million inhabitants, Delhi by inference must have had a similar number then. Or

lastly, as some royal chronicle of the 17th century says that the Mughal empire (whatever this may mean in terms of area, etc.) had an army and militia of 50 lakhs, assuming that one in every 30 persons (including women and children) was in this army or militia, the Indian empire of the Mughals is assumed to have had a population of 15 crores. And so on and so forth.

## VII

It is possible that numerous local social histories, narratives, etc. are being written today in the languages of India, as well as in other foreign languages, which provide much more solid data and sounder hypotheses, of which I am not at all aware. I am indeed sorry for that. My knowledge of languages is limited and does not go beyond my own language, Hindi, and some English, which I have learnt over the past five decades. It was, therefore, the English records which I obviously turned to.

My selection of the 18th and early 19th century period also seems to require an explanation. I treat the mid-18th century, or a period immediately before it, as a sort of benchmark point for the understanding of Indian society and polity. If we had detailed records, say for 1700, I would certainly prefer them to those of post-1750. To my mind the records prior to 1750 would be, if they are as detailed as the post-1750 British records, much more representative of actual Indian life. What we have in English referring to Indian society and polity is mostly post-1750. There are certainly a few records in Madras and perhaps some in other archives relating to Surat, Bengal, etc. which go back to the period before 1750. A few of the 1680 Madras records describe in some detail the difficulties which the British had with what were known as the 'right hand' and 'left hand' caste groupings, and the protests these groups launched against the Madras British authorities. Or there are a few records, even at this early date, which mention that the practice in Madras was—it possibly prevailed in most parts of India—that the militia and police received a certain proportion of the total agricultural produce of an area, and, in lieu of such remuneration, it was their duty to protect all those who contributed to this charge from local disturbance, thefts, etc. In case the police failed to recover any stolen property, it was its responsibility, and that of its superiors, to compensate the sufferer up to the value of his loss. But most of the British pre-1750 records do not have very much to tell about the details of the socio-political structure of that time. Incidentally, there are accounts, as that of Henry Lord, of around 1620, who described in much detail the life of the Banias and Parsis of Surat and then presented the narrative to the Archbishop of Canterbury for his Lordship's judgement on these heathen tribes. Or the travels of Peter Della Valle, from

about the mid-17th century, which amongst other matters described the functioning of a school, and the method of teaching, in a village of Karnataka.

The post-1750 records (which really describe the society of particular areas) usually refer to the decade or two following the formal occupation of an area by the British. Naturally, these narratives vary in their quality, extent and depth from area to area—depending on the person who reported, or the condition under which the reports were made.

But to better understand Indian society of that period, and the manner in which it was broken and the concepts and structures which were tried to reshape it, the more important record is to be found in the archives in Britain. For it is in Britain that the formulation of policies and structures took place; and the thinking which led to such formulations at various levels (political, academic, mercantile) obviously has to be located in a variety of internal British records. What finally resulted from such consultations, etc. in Britain, in the way of formal instructions, is of course available in the archives in Madras, Calcutta, Bombay, Lucknow, and Delhi. Incidentally, what are called Indian archives either have little archival material (except that of British creation), or have an insignificant amount which the British collected or copied from earlier Indian sources.

## VIII

Most such internal British records (i.e. what I find relevant in comprehending pre-British Indian society) again relate to the period from about 1740 to 1830. It is true, as Macaulay also said, that the British East India Company in the 1830s was no different from the Company when it was formed in 1600. From the very beginning, it was endowed by the British state with the powers of sovereignty, conquest, and rule, in the same manner as the countless other companies established by England and other states of Western Europe were endowed with such powers, through royal charters, etc. from as early a date as the 1480s. By a royal charter around 1480, King Henry VII of England granted to one John Cabot and his sons the licence to occupy and set up the king's banners, etc. "in any town, city, castle, island or mainland whatsoever, newly found by them" anywhere in the "eastern, western and northern sea", belonging to "heathens and infidels in whatsoever part of the world placed, which before this time were unknown to all Christians". The king empowered them to "conquer, occupy and possess" all such places, the main condition being, that they will give in turn to the king "the fifth part of the whole capital gained" by their enterprise.

To understand the manner of European expansion, it must be realised that, by and large, these companies were instruments of the various European

states. Even when the state and a particular company had their inner quarrel, they were under the military and political protection of the state; and when any company, especially the British company, actually began to conquer and rule any area, it was the state which took effectual charge of the conquered territory. The formal rule, in some instances, may have continued through the particular company (as it did in India in certain matters until 1858), but the decision-making and the political and military control was effectively exercised by the British state, and the detailed instructions in all instances had invariably been examined, amended, and approved by the state. In the case of India, it was statutorily so from 1784 onwards, but even from about 1750 no major steps were taken by the British East India Company in India without the instructions or approval of the British state. For instance, the British attack on the Maratha Admiral Angre in the 1750s was based on British state policy and instructions, and had little to do with any initiative by the British East India Company.

It has been generally assumed, and Western liberal thought perhaps had a hand in spreading such an assumption, that the Western states, especially the British, while subjugating the rest of the world, were rather democratic and compassionate at home. Nothing seems to be further from the truth than this assumption.

Most of what Britain did in India was not basically very different from what the British state had done in Britain since about the Norman conquest of England in the 11th century, and which it more or less continued until after 1800. Later on, the same was attempted by England in Ireland from about the 16th century, or experimented upon in North America in the 16th-17th-18th centuries, and the same was continued by the successors of British power in the fast expanding territories of the USA in the late 18th and the 19th centuries.

In a certain sense, because of the largeness of India, or the density of its population, or the unsuitability of Indian climate to large-scale European colonisation, what the British did in India in the way of destruction, oppression, disruption, etc., though long sustained, may have been of a slightly milder degree. For instance, the inflicting of the death penalty was legal and statutory in Britain for more than 200 offences (including the stealing of anything above 5 shillings in value) until 1818. Further, until about 1830 or so, the infliction of 400–500 lashes (with specially prepared whips) on a British soldier, for what may have been considered a serious offence, was quite common. In India, British executions, hangings, lashings, etc. were perhaps much larger in number, but their intensity may have been relatively less. Perhaps even 20–50 lashes, or even the idea that one was to be lashed, was enough to kill most Indians who were naturally unaccustomed to the manners, habits, and the rigour of ordinary

British usage. At any rate, it was not possible for the British, nor other Europeans (who happened to become rulers in India), to always personally engage themselves in the correction and punishment of those whom they ruled. This does not mean that domestic servants were not caned by their master and mistress, leading at times to death, nor that heads of villages and other Indian officers of state did not personally receive lashings from certain British collectors, again leading to the death of many so punished.

Quite naturally, the British officer, in his private and official capacity, initially tried to play the role of the English Justice of the Peace, who had long been authorised in England to inflict summary punishment on anyone who seemed to him to deserve it. But in an area as large as India, this was hardly functional, and therefore more sophisticated political, legal and economic devices were used which could serve similar purposes of control and punishment much more effectively and on a far larger scale. The wiping out of half or one third of the population of an area as a result of fiscal devices (though initially these may not have been devised for such vast destruction) was found much more effective, and in one or the other part of India this began to occur from about 1750 onwards and lasted for some 150 years. In many areas, such catastrophes perhaps occurred every decade.

## IX

The above may seem a rather harsh historical account of British rule and perhaps even far-fetched. Two British statements, the first relating to 1600 Ireland on how best it could be entirely subdued and brought under English obedience, and the second pertaining to 1800 southern India, again dealing with the problem of entirely subduing it, to an extent confirm what I have said above. The first by Sir John Davis, English attorney general of Ireland, suggested the following as a more effective policy for Ireland:

“The defects which hindered the Perfection of the Conquest of Ireland were of two kinds, and consisted: first, in the faint prosecution of the Warre, and next, in the looseness of the civil Government. For, the husbandman must first break the land, before it be made capable of good seeds and when it is thoroughly broken and manured, if he do not forthwith cast good seed into it, it will grow wild again, and bear nothing but Weeds. So a barbarous country must be first broken by a Warre, before it will be capable of good Government, and when it is fully subdued and conquered,

if it be not well-planted and governed after the conquest, it will oft-soonest return to the former Barbarism.”

The second about India by Mr. Henry Dundas, President of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India, was sent in a despatch to the Government of the Madras Presidency on 11 February 1801. Advising against a permanent settlement (of revenue, legal arrangements, etc.), it stated:

“There is a material difference between the state of several of the provinces in the Carnatic and those of Bengal, where the measure of the permanent settlement was first taken into consideration. The Bengal provinces were infinitely farther advanced in the habits of order and subordination to Government than most places in the Carnatic. They [i.e. the Carnatic] are not so ripe for the reception of those benefits and blessings intended for them—any attempt to introduce a popular system of order would be idle and nugatory, till once their minds to a certain extent were prepared to feel the importance of the benefits they were about to receive. This can never effectually be done, till you have suppressed that spirit of rebellion and insubordination, which is so conspicuous in many parts of the Northern Circars. The countries to which this observation applied must be brought to such a state of subjection as to acknowledge and submit to this principle. As they must be indebted to our beneficence and wisdom for every advantage they are to receive, so in like manner they must feel solely indebted to our protection for the continuation and enjoyment of them. We hold these truths to be so incontrovertible.”

Incidentally, Mr. Henry Dundas’ descendants were intimately connected with the British governance of India from early on at highly elevated levels for some six to eight generations until the British quit India in 1947. Quite possibly, at a rather conservative estimate, several thousand British families might have constantly been similarly connected at fairly high levels with the British governance of India from about 1780 to 1947.

## X

Before I end this rather long and rambling introduction, let me give a description of the life of the people at the very top of the Indian polity. Despite the impressions of luxury and fabulous life created by chronicles of the Mughal court, or the accounts of celebrated European travellers, and especially

descriptions like the one given earlier on the life-style of the young nobleman of Delhi, the impression which ordinarily comes through from the British record is of a certain simplicity and frugality in India at the top levels. Even in Muslim ruled Hyderabad, in 1780, a perceptive British officer found it difficult to distinguish the great nobles from their servants. According to him, the only thing which seemed to separate the two was the fact that the clothes of the servants looked less clean. It was not that he was fascinated by such a state of affairs. He was, perhaps, actually disgusted with such indiscriminate mixing of the two.

According to one of the more powerful early British Governor Generals—and what he said is echoed by many others before 1800 and even until 10–20 years later—the Hindu rulers in fact spent very little on themselves. But according to him, they suffered from two great vices: these were that they gave away most of what they had to the Brahmins and to the temples. It is possible that the terms Brahmin and the temple were used in this period in a much wider sense and included all who were given to scholarship of one kind and another, and to institutions which catered not only to religious needs, but also which served purposes of scholarship, culture and entertainment and comfort. For instance, in the detailed description of the practice of inoculation against smallpox in India, it is said that the Brahmins performed such inoculation. Obviously, anyone who exercised some intellectual, medical or other, professional skill seems to have been taken to be a Brahmin, even by fairly knowledgeable Europeans, in this period.

It also appears to have been the practice in places as far apart as Kedarnath in the Himalayas, on the one hand, and in the Thanjavur region of Tamilnadu extending to Rameswaram, on the other, to provide *chatrams* for the stay and comfort of the pilgrims. Public funds, in the shape of assignments of sources of revenue, including revenue from seaports and similar other sources, were given over to such institutions to cover the expenses of these *chatrams*, etc. In the case of the *chatrams* at Kedarnath, it was further stipulated that if an unspent balance got accumulated over a number of years, such a balance was to be wholly spent on the *kumbh*, which happened every twelve years, and a fresh start was made again, beginning from an empty treasury. This may remind many friends here of a similar practice which seems to have prevailed in India in the time of Harshavardhana. Perhaps much more is known of such practices in earlier and later times.

## XI

An idea of how Indian society functioned at least at the rural level comes out fairly clearly from the late 18th century record. Perhaps the data (ca.1770) pertaining to the villages of the district of Chengalpattu demonstrate it best, though in a slightly different way. The data from pre-1800 Bengal seems to tell a similar story.

This data was collected through a survey of about 2,000 villages of the Chengalpattu district during the 1760s and 1770s. The survey recorded the total land belonging to each village, the utilisation of this land for various purposes, the net cultivated land in each village (irrigated and unirrigated), and the details of *manyams* (the land which had been assigned to various village institutions and functions). Such assignments were of the tax which any land might have been liable to pay to a duly constituted political authority, whether such authority was at the level of the village, or at any other region, or national level. The assignment customarily did not interfere with the right of the person or persons who cultivated, or otherwise used such land. The only alteration which took place was that the cultivator of the land, after such an assignment had been made, began to pay the amount of the tax to the assignee instead.

The most important part of this survey, however, concerns the details of the deductions from the total agricultural produce of the village, generally called *swatantrams* (in pre-1800 south Indian records), for the maintenance of the various institutions and infrastructure of the village, and for intra-village institutions and offices. The shares of the produce that were allocated for different functions and different institutions evidently had been determined by ancient custom and usage. This sharing was clearly not merely an economic arrangement, but was a way of defining the role and importance of the various recipients in the village or regional polity.

The following table (Table I) gives the details of these deductions for eight villages: four from the Ponneri area, and four from the area of Carangooly (both part of the district of Chengalpattu, then as well as today). These villages have been picked at random, the only criterion used being that the amount of land in each of them is relatively larger than in those in their neighbourhood.

TABLE I

Details of Deduction for Village and Intra-Village Institutions/Functions in the District of Chengalpattu (ca.1770)  
(Deductions per 100 cullums of agricultural produce, in *cullums*)

Land in village (in <i>caunis</i> ) Name of Institution or Function for which deduction was made	Cavnevem-bacum (Ponnerly)	Naithe-voil (Ponnerly)	Coloor (Ponnerly)	Madoor (Ponnerly)	Purrunoor (Caran-gooley)	Caudama-golatoor (Caran-gooley)	Coonavau-cum (Caran-gooley)	Pooda-patnam (Caran-gooley)
					696	650	600	650
A. Intra-village	*C M P	C M P	C M P	C M P	C M P	C M P	C M P	C M P
1. Temples (Totals)	3-1-4	1-2-0	2-1-0	1-3-0	1-0-7	2-0-3	4-9-5	4-2-0
(i) Canchipuram	1-0-4(a)	0-4-6	0-0-0	0-5-0	0-11-5	0-11-5	0-11-4	1-0-4
(ii) Chingaperumal	0-0-0(b)	0-0-0	2-1-0(i)	0-0-0	0-5-7	0-5-6	0-5-6	0-6-2
(iii) Tinkithoor	0-10-0(c)	0-4-5(g)	0-0-0	0-5-0(j)	0-5-6	0-5-7	0-5-6	0-6-2
(iv) Tirkithoanam	0-10-0(d)	0-4-5(h)	0-0-0	0-11-5	0-11-5	0-11-5	0-11-4	1-0-4
(v) Shrepermadoor	0-2-4(e)	0-0-0	0-0-0	0-0-0	0-0-0	0-11-5	0-11-4	1-0-4
(vi) Perumal	0-2-4(f)	0-0-0	0-0-0	0-5-0(k)	0-0-0	0-0-0	0-11-5	0-0-0
2. Brahmin Scholar ( <i>Poolalogachari</i> )	---	---	---	---	0-5-6	0-5-7	---	0-6-2
3. Cannoogoe	---	0-9-3	---	0-10-0	0-11-5	0-11-5	0-11-5	1-0-4
4. Dovetraw	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	1-0-4
5. Deshmukh	---	1-6-6	---	0-8-0	1-11-2	1-11-2	1-11-0	2-1-0
6. Palegat	0-2-4	3-4-0	3-6-0	1-2-0	2-4-5	2-6-0	1-11-5	4-2-0
7. Tookery	2-6-0	2-9-0	---	---	---	---	---	---
8. Pirzada	---	0-4-5	---	0-5-0	---	---	---	---
TOTAL	5-10-0	9-11-6	5-7-0	5-4-0	8-8-1	9-9-2	9-7-7	13-0-2

Names of temples marked thus: (a) Harikrishnaswamy, (b) Davadanum, (c) Rangunathaperumal, (d) Vellerigoodaswami, (e) Buttaraja, (f) Buttan, (g) Paliswaraswamy, (h) Chicodier, (i) Colaralghaperumal, (j) Palaswaraswamy, (k) Coombaconomchicalier

\* Units of measuring grain in 18th century Tamilnadu.

C-Cullum; M-Mercal; P-Padi; 8 padi = 1 mercal; 12 mercal = 1 cullum

TABLE I (Contd.)

	Caynevem- bacum (Ponnerly)	Naithe- voil (Ponnerly)	Coloor (Ponnerly)	Madoor (Ponnerly)	Purrunoor (Caran- gooly)	Caudama- golatoor (Caran- gooly)	Coonavau- cum (Caran- gooly)	Pooda- patnam (Caran- gooly)
B. Village Infrastructure								
1. Temples								
(i) Easwar	0-3-2	0-4-2	0-4-4	0-1-0	0-1-2	0-4-3	---	0-1-2
(ii) Perumal	0-3-2	0-3-2	0-2-0	0-1-0	0-1-2	0-4-3	0-3-0	0-1-2
(iii) Pillar (Ganesh)	0-3-2	0-2-0	---	0-1-0	---	0-1-7	0-1-0	0-2-4
(iv) Dharmaraj	0-3-2	---	---	---	0-5-0	0-1-2	0-3-0	0-10-0
(v) Amman Padary	0-8-4	0-4-0	0-7-0	0-7-0	0-2-4	0-3-6	0-2-0	0-5-0
(vi) Outside temple	---	---	---	---	0-0-5	---	---	---
2. Dancing Girl ( <i>Devadasi</i> )	0-2-4	0-2-4	0-5-0	0-2-4	---	---	0-3-0	---
3. Temple Flower Garden	---	---	0-2-4	0-2-0	---	0-1-7	---	---
4. <i>Choultry</i> Fund	---	0-2-4	---	---	0-1-2	0-1-7	---	0-2-4
5. Lamp Oil	---	---	---	0-0-6	---	---	0-0-4	---
6. <i>Vullavan</i>	0-4-0	0-4-0	0-5-0	---	---	---	0-0-4	0-2-0
7. Vadavarthy	---	---	---	---	0-1-2	0-1-7	0-3-0	---
8. Purohit	0-3-2	---	---	---	---	---	0-3-0	0-1-2
9. Panjagnum	0-6-4	0-2-0	-	0-3-4	0-1-2	0-1-7	0-1-0	0-2-4
10. Davatwam	---	---	0-5-4	0-8-0	---	---	---	---
11. Vada Vadhar	---	---	---	0-3-4	---	---	---	---
12. Vadhar	---	0-4-4	---	---	---	---	---	---
13. Panican	0-3-2	---	0-4-4	0-3-4	---	---	---	---
14. Water Pandal	---	0-3-0	0-2-4	1-2-0	---	---	---	---
15. Pardesi Brahman	---	---	---	---	0-0-5	---	0-1-0	0-2-4
16. Karnam	2-8-4	3-4-0	3-5-0	2-4-3	1-6-7	3-4-0	1-10-7	3-1-4
17. Talliar	---	---	2-6-0	1-0-0	1-0-4	1-3-0	---	1-0-4

TABLE I (Contd.)

	Cavnevem- bacum (Ponnerly)	Naithe- voil (Ponnerly)	Coloor (Ponnerly)	Madoor (Ponnerly)	Purrunoor (Caran- gooly)	Caudama- golatoor (Caran- gooly)	Coonavau- cum (Caran- gooly)	Pooda- patnam (Caran- gooly)
18. Landholders	4-7-0	3-4-0	2-6-0	---	0-11-2	0-10-0	0-6-0	3-5-2
19. Cultivators Servants	---	2-0-0	10-9-0	4-7-6	6-11-5	8-7-5	7-8-2	7-8-4
20. Artificers (Carpenter & Blacksmith)	1-10-4	2-2-0	1-9-0	0-10-0	1-4-6	1-6-6	0-6-0	2-4-0
21. Corn-Measurer	0-11-0	0-10-0	1-3-0	0-7-0	1-1-5	1-11-6	0-6-4	1-4-2
22. Barber	0-7-2	0-10-0	0-10-4	0-5-0	0-2-4	0-3-1	0-3-0	0-6-2
23. Washerman	0-7-2	0-10-0	0-10-4	0-5-0	0-1-7	0-3-1	0-3-4	0-6-2
24. Paneseven	0-5-2	0-8-0	0-4-4	0-3-4	---	---	---	0-5-0
25. Combcutty	0-6-2	-	---	---	---	---	---	---
26. Wochen	---	0-3-0	---	---	---	---	---	---
27. Potmaker	0-10-0	0-7-0	---	-	-	-	0-3-0	0-6-2
28. Cowkeeper	0-3-2	0-2-0	0-4-4	0-3-4	0-1-2	0-3-1	-	---
29. Chunam Maker	---	0-2-0	---	---	---	---	-	---
30. Shroff	---	---	0-10-4	---	1-4-4	1-6-2	0-5-5	1-6-0
31. Goldsmith	---	---	---	0-5-0	---	---	-	---
32. Doctor	---	0-2-0	---	0-2-0	---	---	-	---
33. Snake Doctor	---	---	---	---	0-1-2	0-3-1	0-3-0	0-5-0
34. Tope Pandaram	---	---	---	---	0-1-2	---	-	0-1-2
35. Village Servant	---	---	---	---	---	0-3-1	0-3-0	---
36. Irrigation (Yary Fund)	2-1-0	4-2-0	2-1-0	4-2-0	1-11-2	1-11-2	-	---
37. Yary Servant	---	---	---	---	0-4-3	---	0-3-0	---
38. Gram Khurch	0-5-0	0-10-0	0-5-0	0-5-0	---	---	---	---
Total B (1-38)	19-3-2	23-0-0	31-3-0	20-4-7	18-11-5	24-4-3	14-10-6	25-6-6
Total Deductions (A+B)	25-1-2	32-11-6	36-10-0	25-8-7	27-7-6	34-0-5	24-6-5	38-7-0

As will be observed, the deductions in these villages range from about 25% to 40% of the total agricultural produce of each village. Incidentally, according to John Malcolm, a major British military commander and later Governor of the Bombay Presidency (1827–30), the deductions for such purposes in villages of Malwa were in the range of 25% of the total agricultural produce. Further, in many of these Chengalpattu villages, there were several other functions for which the deductions were made, like the Malabar (vernacular) schoolmaster, the *Muttum*, the *Siddhum*, the *tom-tom-man*, the *Banian*, the *Fakir*, the oil-seller, the *Totty*, the *Vettiyan*, the Mosque, etc., while a few of the functions mentioned in the above table may not have existed in other villages. Besides, about one-sixth of the cultivated (or cultivatable) land was classed as *manyams*. In many of the districts of Bengal (ca. 1770), in the Ceded Districts of Cuddapah, Bellary, Anantpur, etc. (where British power and authority was consolidated by Thomas Munro during 1800–1807), and in many other areas, the amount of cultivatable land traditionally and historically classed as *manyam* was as high as half the total land of the area, and perhaps in various parts of India whole districts were denominated as *manyams*, largely for the support of the cultural and religious institutions, but some also for the support of local and regional militias. According to a later (ca. 1830) British note, the number of institutions, and individuals who had *manyams* assigned to them in the districts of the Bengal Presidency (Bengal, Bihar, etc.) ran into tens of thousands in each district and in one district the number of claimants of *manyams* was around 70,000 in the 1770s.

As may be observed from the data of the eight villages, the deductions for individual institutions and functions varied a great deal. But by and large, wherever there was irrigation, around 4% of the total agricultural produce was allocated for its maintenance. Similarly, the Devi, Dharamaraj, and what was known as the village temple (there is no example of the latter in these eight villages) had generally much larger combined allocations than the combined allocations to the Easwaran, Perumal and Pilliar temples.

According to an 1818 British survey, the district of South Arcot had over 7,000 great, medium and small temples, and several hundred *muttums* and *chatrams*. Most other districts in the Madras Presidency, where such a survey was ordered, reported 3,000 to 4,000 temples, etc., and at a rough estimate in 1800 the Madras Presidency might have had about 100,000 temples, *muttums*, and *chatrams* of varying importance and size. The number of such institutions for the whole of India might have been in the range of 500,000 in 1800. Possibly around 5% of them might have been places of Islamic worship and learning; and perhaps around one thousand those of Christian worship, most of which would have been in Kerala.

The *Karnam* or Conicoply (which really implied the office of the registrar of the village, a sort of secretariat, rather than a single individual) generally had an allocation of 3–4%, while the *Taliar* (i.e. the village police, which may have included several persons) generally had an allocation of around 3%. Incidentally, it may be useful to know that the offices of the *Taliar*, the corn-measurer, the settler of boundary disputes, and a few other village offices, were generally filled by persons from the Pariah and allied castes. As many will know, in Maharashtra, it was the Mahars who constituted the village police. It is also worth noting that in cases of theft, etc., if the police, or the *Palegar* (the head of the militia and perhaps one who also acted as a modern Inspector General of Police for his area) were unable to recover the stolen property, they were expected to compensate the aggrieved party from the incomes allocated to their offices.

Though this and similar data requires a much deeper analysis, it does imply that every person in this society enjoyed a certain dignity and that his social and economic needs were well provided for. Food and shelter seem to have been a natural right, given India's cultural norms, and made easier by India's fertility, etc. According to a historian of medieval India, the only data which was available about the expenditure details of the pre-British rulers of Delhi referred to the feeding of the people who required such a provision. It is possible that perhaps this was the major expenditure of this state, and that the state had adopted this practice from the prevalent norms of Indian society.

As is clear from the above table, the deductions were not merely for internal village institutions—varied and complex as these deductions were—but also for the support of the intra-village religious, cultural, political, accounting, and militia purposes. Thus, while the village or the locality (for it may be taken as granted that similar arrangements, though based on other productions, earning, etc., also existed in towns and cities) managed and organised its own internal affairs, and thus, in a way, could even be symbolised as an autonomous republic or corporation, it was by no means isolated, or unlinked from other localities. In fact, it seems to have contributed to the support of the intra-local systems, and it can reasonably be assumed that the intra-local systems looked after the requirements of systems, which in their own Indian way provided support and integration to much larger areas. In a sense, the polity, which such data describes, is the kind of polity that Mahatma Gandhi tried to spell out in his idea of the oceanic circles, where the innermost circle retained the utmost internal autonomy, and only such fiscal, moral and other support was extended by them to the outer circles, which was essential for performing those residual tasks which could not clearly be performed at any local level.

Thus it is that, while a fairly large proportion of the production went towards the maintenance of the social infrastructure and its small and great institutions, the proportion which went to the apex state (whether at a regional or at a more central level) was fairly small. According to early British authorities, there had been no land tax in Malabar until 1740, none in Canara until the 15th century, and an insignificant amount in Ramnad, etc. even in the 1790s, and no more than 5% to 10% even as late as the early 19th century in Travancore. That any land tax (for the purposes of the apex state) which had been levied in India had historically been very low is also apparent from the amount of rent (or share of the agricultural produce) which the cultivators of the *manyam* lands paid to those who held these *manyams* until at least 1800. According to Thomas Munro, it was no more than one-fourth of the rate of revenue which the British had imposed; and at times, according to him, the cultivator only paid what he wished, to the holder of the *manyam*. The Bengal collectors in the 1770s report a similar situation and mention that because of the heaviness of the British land-revenue (again about four times the traditional rate) and because the *manyam* lands were around one-half of the cultivated land, in many districts, the cultivators in large numbers tended to give up lands which paid revenue to British authority and instead moved over to cultivate the *manyam* lands. This problem of cultivators leaving land paying revenue to the British authority and moving over to *manyam* land continued even in 1820 in the Madras Presidency. Thomas Munro as Governor then threatened that such holders of *manyams* who allowed this to happen would have their *manyams* confiscated. It may, in the context of the above data, be worth knowing that the exchequer receipts of the Mughal rulers (1556–1707) at no time exceeded 20% of what was termed as the total revenue of the empire (perhaps a wholly notional estimate); and in the reign of Jahangir, these receipts were no more than 5% of this supposed total revenue. It may also be worth noting that the land tax in China historically is said to have been about one-sixteenth of the agricultural produce. If this was the position in China, it may be assumed that a similar arrangement had also obtained in other areas of East and South East Asia as well. The maximum which the *Manusamhita* ordained in India was one-sixth; but what it seems to have advocated far more was one-twelfth of the gross agricultural produce. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that for various reasons the *Manusamhita* was given great importance by the British from about 1780 onwards. Around 1815, when London had begun to discourage the translation and printing of various Indian texts, the published version of the *Manusamhita*, with the commentary of Kulluka Bhatta, was the only book which was encouraged to be printed again.

It is true, however, that in 18th century Western Europe, the land rents collected by the landlords ranged from about 50% to 80% of the agricultural

produce. And it seems that the assumption that in India the situation was similar to that in 18th century West Europe is one of the bequests which the Indian historian and intellectual had received from his Western masters.

The village (or the locality) having contributed for the maintenance of the cultural and religious institutions, for the support of the accounting, political and militia systems (the *Cannongoe*, the *Deshmukh*, the *Palegar*, etc.) probably also made a contribution of around 5% of the above deductions (which would have meant an immense amount as it must have been received from tens of thousands of localities) for the direct support of the apex authority (or to Mahatma Gandhi's outer-most circle). That such arrangements led to a militarily weaker system (at regional or wider levels), may possibly be true; but it is quite possible that the elements of such military or institutional weakness lay elsewhere, and not primarily in the decentralised fiscal and social arrangements of Indian policy.

## XII

There seem to have been various systems of land-rights in different parts or regions of India, as well as in the same region. But most of these systems seem to have assumed the supremacy of the village community over the land, its disposal, or the way it was worked. There were villages where the village community (perhaps the community of only those who cultivated land and those who held *manyams* and not necessarily of all the families in the village) seems to have been organised as a *samudayam*. While its members had specific shares in the land of the village, the land which any of them cultivated was changed from time to time. Such a change in the district of Thanjavur, where around 30% of the villages were classed as *samudayam* in 1805, was stated to be based on the assumption that a certain alteration occurs in the fertility of all land from time to time, which creates inequality amongst the members of the community; hence, occasional redistribution was considered necessary. Again in Thanjavur in 1805, the number of mirasidars (i.e. those having permanent rights in land) was put at 62,042, of which over 42,000 belonged to the *Sudras* and castes below them. The number of cultivators of the group termed Pariah in the Baramahals (the present Salem district) was estimated at 32,474, out of a total population of around 600,000 just before 1800. The number of mirasidars actually listed by the Chengalpattu collector in the district in 1799 was put at 8,300. But the collector was of the view that the actual number of mirasidars there was about ten times more, i.e. around 80,000. In 1817 the number of mirasidars in 1,080 villages of Tirunelveli district was estimated to be 37,494. It is unnecessary to add that throughout India the rights of the actual cultivator were permanent and hereditary; and these began to be scrapped by the British

from 1790 onwards: firstly, to enable them to realise a greatly enhanced land revenue; and secondly, because British ideas of ownership did not admit of any such cultivator rights, even in Britain.

With regard to agricultural production and the wages in agriculture, according to the *Edinburgh Review* (1803–1804), the wages of the Indian agricultural labourer in the Allahabad-Varanasi region around 1800 were in real terms substantially higher than the wages of his British counterpart. The author of the journal at that time wondered, that if these wages were so high at this late period of great economic decline, how much higher such wages must have been when they were first established. According to a recent computation by an economist of the University of Madras, the wages of the agricultural labourer in Chengalpattu during the period 1780–1795 at 1975 prices would have been about Rs.7.50 per day, while in 1975 itself such wages were Rs.2.50 per day, only. The productivity of wheat in the Allahabad-Varanasi region was more than double of that in England on similar land. Further, it may be mentioned that Britain, like the rest of Europe, produced only one crop a year, while in India many lands produced more than one crop.

An idea of the Indian economy and consumption patterns is provided by some 1806 data from the district of Bellary. It is concerned with an estimation of the total consumption of the people of the district, and further indicates the detailed consumption pattern of the three categories of families in which the population was divided by the British authorities.

The three categories were: first, the more prosperous (total population: 259,568); second, the families of medium means (total population: 372,887); and third, the lowly (total population: 218,684). According to this estimate, the consumption of the first article in the schedule, food-grains, differed in quality and value between the families in the first category, on the one hand, and those in the second and third categories, on the other. But the quantity of food-grains estimated to have been consumed in all three was the same, i.e. half a seer of grain per person per day. The schedule included 23 other items including pulses, betel-nut, ghee, oil, tamarind, coconuts both fresh and dry, drugs and medicine, cloth, firewood and vegetables, and also betel-leaves (*pans*). As illustrative of the pattern of this consumption, the number of *pans* consumed per year in a family of six is given as 9,600 *pans* for the first category, 4,800 for those in the second category, and 3,600 *pans* for those in the third category. The consumption of ghee and oil was in the proportion of 3:1:1 approximately, and of pulses 8:4:3. The total per capita per annum consumption was estimated at Rs.17–3–4 for those belonging to the first category Rs.9–2–4 for those belonging to the second category, and Rs.7–7–0 for those in the third category.

The pattern indicated in the above paragraph is, of course, very broad. In reality a number of people may have had a much higher consumption than the average of the first category. An indication of the extent of such differential between the really high and the really low is provided by some 1799 data from the Karnataka area. After much enquiry about the incomes of the officers of the state in Tipoo's domain, the British came to the inference that the highest paid officer of Tipoo (the governor of the fort of Chitradurg) had a total salary of Rs.100 per month during Tipoo's reign. The wages of an ordinary labourer in this area at this period was about Rs.4 per month. The new differentials which were brought into being around this period by the British are indicated by the salary of the British district collector (about Rs.1,500 per month) and a member of the British Governor's Council receiving Rs.6,000–Rs.8,000, while the wages of the labourer were constantly reduced during 1760 until 1850. What the Indian labourer, craftsman, etc. received as wages around 1850 was in all probability no more than one-third or at the most one-half of what he would have received until around 1760. The new disparities, however, were not altogether limited to British salaries. Where state policy so dictated, similar decisions were taken with regard to the emoluments of Indians at high levels. An example is provided by the raising of the personal allowance of the Maharana of Udaipur. Until Udaipur came under British protection in 1818, the Maharana was supposed to have had an allowance of Rs.1,000 per month. Within a few months of British protection, while various other expenses of the kingdom were either abolished or reduced, the allowance of the Maharana was raised to Rs.1,000 per day.

### XIII

Before arriving at a conscious policy regarding education in India, the British carried out certain surveys of the surviving indigenous educational system. A more detailed survey of it was carried out in 1822–1825 in the Madras Presidency (i.e. the present Tamilnadu, the major part of the present Andhra Pradesh, and some districts of present Karnataka, Kerala and Orissa). The survey indicated that 11,575 schools and 1,094 colleges were still in existence in the presidency, and that the number of students in them was 157,195 and 5,431 respectively. Much more important and, in view of our current assumptions, unexpected information which this survey provided is with regard to the broader caste composition of the students in the schools. According to it, those belonging to the *Sudras* and castes below them formed 70%–80% of the total students in the Tamil speaking areas, 62% in the Oriya areas, 54% in the Malayalam speaking areas, and 35%–50% in the Telugu speaking areas. The following Table II provides this break-up in more detail for each of the surveyed districts in the Madras Presidency.

TABLE II  
Caste-wise Distribution of Male Students – Madras Presidency\*

District	Brahmins	Chettris or Rajas	Vysee	Sudra	Other castes	Muslims	Total
<b>ORIYA SPEAKING</b>							
1. Ganjam	808 (27.25)	—	243 (8.24)	1001 (33.76)	885 (29.88)	27 (0.91)	2965
<b>TELUGU SPEAKING</b>							
1. Vizagapattam	4345 (46.16)	103 (1.09)	983 (10.44)	1999 (21.24)	1885 (20.03)	97 (1.03)	9412
2. Rajahmundry	904 (34.49)	—	653 (24.91)	466 (17.78)	546 (20.83)	52 (1.98)	2621
3. Masulipatam	1673 (33.13)	18 (0.36)	1108 (21.94)	1506 (29.82)	470 (9.30)	275 (5.44)	5050
4. Guntoor	3089 (40.53)	—	1578 (20.70)	1923 (25.23)	775 (10.17)	257 (3.37)	7622
5. Nellore	2466 (32.61)	—	1641 (21.70)	2407 (31.83)	432 (5.71)	617 (8.16)	7563
6. Cuddapah	1416 (24.03)	—	1713 (29.07)	1775 (30.13)	647 (10.98)	341 (5.79)	5892
<b>KANNADA SPEAKING</b>							
1. Bellary	1185 (18.01)	—	981 (14.91)	2998 (45.56)	1174 (17.84)	243 (3.69)	6581
2. Seringapatam	48 (7.83)	—	23 (3.75)	298 (48.61)	158 (25.77)	86 (14.02)	613
<b>MALAYALAM SPEAKING</b>							
1. Malabar	2230 (18.64)	—	84 (0.70)	3697 (30.90)	2756 (23.04)	3196 (26.72)	11963
<b>TAMIL SPEAKING</b>							
1. North Arcot	698 (9.60)	—	630 (8.66)	4856 (66.76)	538 (7.40)	552 (7.59)	7274
2. South Arcot	997 (9.57)	—	370 (3.55)	7938 (76.19)	862 (8.27)	252 (2.42)	10419
3. Chingleput	858 (12.75)	—	424 (6.30)	4809 (71.47)	452 (6.72)	186 (2.76)	6729
4. Tanjore	2817 (16.16)	369 (2.12)	222 (1.27)	10661 (61.17)	2426 (13.92)	933 (5.32)	17428
5. Trichnopoly	1198 (11.76)	—	229 (2.25)	7745 (76.00)	329 (3.23)	690 (6.77)	10191
6. Madura	1186 (8.67)	—	1119 (8.18)	7247 (52.99)	2977 (21.77)	1147 (8.39)	13676
7. Tinnevelly	2016 (21.78)	—	—	2889 (31.21)	3557 (38.42)	796 (8.60)	9258
8. Coimbatore	918 (11.30)	—	289 (3.56)	6379 (78.52)	226 (2.78)	312 (3.84)	8124
9. Salem	459 (10.75)	—	324 (7.59)	1671 (39.15)	1382 (32.38)	432 (10.12)	4268
10. Madras City							
(i) Ordinary Schools	358 (7.01)	—	789 (15.44)	3506 (68.62)	313 (6.13)	143 (2.80)	5109
(ii) Charity Schools	52 (12.56)	—	46 (11.11)	172 (41.55)	134 (32.37)	10 (2.42)	414

\* Figures in parentheses give the percentage of students in each caste group.

The Governor of Madras estimated that over 25% of the boys of school-age were attending those schools, and that a substantial proportion, especially girls, were receiving education at home. According to data from the city of Madras, 26,446 boys were receiving their education at home, while the number of those attending schools in Madras city was 5,523. The number of those engaged in college-level studies at home was similarly remarkable in Malabar: 1,594 as compared to a mere 75 in a college run by the family of the then impoverished Samudrin Raja. Further, again in the district of Malabar, the number of Muslim girls attending school was surprisingly large: 1,122 girls as compared to 3,196 Muslim boys. Incidentally, the number of Muslim girls attending school in Malabar 62 years later in 1884–85 was just 705. The population of Malabar had about doubled during this period. It is possible that most higher education in 18th century India was imparted in small groups, and by single teachers. But a report on the University of Navadweep in Bengal for around 1790 stated that the number of students there was 1,100 and the number of teachers 150.

An idea of the subject-wise breakup of institutions of Sanscritic learning and the number of students taking up particular subjects, in the five districts of Bengal and Bihar during 1835-38, is provided by the data in Table III. As will be seen, out of the 2,524 students reported to be studying in these institutions, the largest number 1,424 were studying Grammar, 378 Logic, and 336 Law.

The 1835-38 survey in Bengal also gave a more detailed caste-wise breakup of students (Table IV). This data may be even more instructive, though providing a somewhat different picture than is provided by the preceding Table relating to the Madras Presidency.

Similar information is available in British records on Indian science and technology in the 18th and early 19th century. Much more is of course known today about them, partly due to extensive work in this field in the 1920s and 1930s, and because of more recent research by many scholars. We obviously know a great deal about the manufacture of iron and steel in India since ancient times, and of its world-wide fame and superiority. As has been established recently, iron was being manufactured in India, in places like Atiranjikheda in Uttar Pradesh, at least as early as the 12th century B.C., but what is little known is that even around 1800 the industry was widespread and flourishing and the technical details of this manufacture were highly sophisticated. A rough estimate of the number of furnaces which manufactured iron and steel may be put around 10,000 around 1800; and each of them seemed to have had a potential capacity of producing about 20 tons of very superior steel annually, if the furnace worked about 35–40 weeks in the year. These furnaces were very light and could be moved by bullock carts.

TABLE III

Institutions of Sanscritic learning in some districts of Bengal and Bihar

	<b>Murshi- dabad</b>	<b>Beer- bhoom</b>	<b>Bur- dwan</b>	<b>South Bihar</b>	<b>Tirhoot</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number of Institutions	24	56	190	27	56	353
Number of Students (Subjectwise)						
Grammar	23	274	644	356	127	1,427
Logic	52	27	277	6	16	378
Law	64	24	238	2	8	336
Literature	2	8	90	16	4	120
Mythology	8	8	43	22	1	82
Astrology	—	5	7	13	53	78
Lexicology	4	2	31	8	3	48
Rhetoric	—	9	8	2	—	19
Medicine	—	1	15	2	—	18
<i>Vedum</i>	—	3	3	5	2	13
<i>Tantra</i>	—	1	2	2	—	5
<i>Mimansa</i>	—	—	—	2	—	2
<i>Sankhya</i>	—	—	—	1	—	1
<b>Total number of Students</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>1,358</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>2,524</b>

TABLE IV  
Caste-wise Distribution of School Students – Adam's Survey

	Murshi- dabad	Beerbhoom	Burdwan	South Bihar	Tirhoot
Number of Schools Surveyed	–	412	629	285	80
Total Number of Students	1,080	6,383	13,190	3,090	507
1. Muslims	82	232	769	172	5
2. Christians	–	20	13	–	–
3. Hindus	998	6,131	12,408	2,918	502
CASTE-WISE DISTRIBUTION					
<i>Brahmins</i>	181	1,853	3,429	256	25
<i>Kayasthas</i>	129	487	1,846	220	51
<i>Kaivarta</i>	96	89	223	–	2
<i>Savarna Banik</i>	62	184	261	31	–
<i>Tanti</i>	56	196	249	1	–
<i>Sunri</i>	30	164	188	56	72
<i>Teli</i>	36	38	371	271	29
<i>Mayrea</i>	29	248	281	–	28
<i>Tili</i>	6	35	200	–	–
<i>Aguri</i>	5	28	787	21	17
<i>Sadgop</i>	2	290	1254	–	–
<i>Gandha Banik</i>	59	529	609	540	32
<i>Vaidya</i>	14	71	125	–	–
<i>Sutar</i>	13	50	108	–	2
<i>Kammar</i>	9	109	262	–	4
<i>Rajput</i>	7	68	21	150	62
<i>Barayi</i>	4	62	32	1	–
<i>Swarnakar</i>	11	53	81	51	25
<i>Napit</i>	75	79	192	39	4
<i>Goala</i>	19	560	311	38	8
<i>Tamil</i>	22	127	242	16	4
<i>Kalu</i>	1	258	207	–	–
<i>Kahar</i>	2	14	138	–	–
<i>Bagdhi</i>	2	14	138	–	–
<i>Kairi</i>	1	–	–	200	5
<i>Magadha</i>	–	1	–	468	18
<i>Kumar</i>	8	43	95	10	–
<i>Kurmi</i>					
<i>Vaishnava</i>	24	161	189	2	–
<i>Yugi</i>	10	9	131	8	–
Other Castes*	86	261	407	367	94

\* These other castes are the following (with the total number of students in all the five districts put together, indicated in paranthesis): *Chhatri* (69), *Dom* (84), *Kansayabanik* (70), *Halwaikar* (71), *Daivajna* (54), *Chandal* (66), *Jalia* (31), *Lahari* (25), *Pashi* (29), *Dhoba* (54), *Baiti* (30), *Bhatta* (35), *Mall* (50), *Kandu* (28), *Kalwar* (21), *Vaisiya* (12), *Muchi* (20), *Mahla* (7), *Hari* (2), *Luniar* (35), *Sankhya banik* (36), *Khatiki* (3), *Agradani* (9), *Sanyasi* (15), *Barhai* (35), *Mala* (16), *Osaval* (12), *Gurubanik* (3), *Kandu* (3), *Kayali* (4), *Mahuri* (42), *Garar* (2), *Mal* (14), *Matiya* (1), *Parasua* (2), *Dhanuk* (7), *Kinyar* (2), *Dosad* (23), *Gareri* (1), *Kalal* (40), *Kansari* (4), *Churihara* (1), *Musarkar* (1), *Punra* (23), *Keot* (15), *Chaipikar* (2), *Banawar* (14), *Beldar* (8), *Bundela* (4), *Net* (8), *Lohor* (13), *Sarak* (7), *Patowar* (4), *Bahila* (4), *Bhumia* (2), *Koara* (2), *Ganrar* (2), *Matiya* (2), *Bauri* (1), *Dulia* (1), *Byadha* (1), *Dhangars* (3), *Sonthal* (3), *Tior* (4).

That 18th century India produced artificial ice by freezing water, and not in Himalayan winter but in moderately cold weather in places like Allahabad, or that India for long had practised inoculation against small-pox, and that the art of plastic surgery had continued to be practised in late 18th century India, centuries after Susruta and Charaka, and that this practice of plastic surgery was noticed by the British initially here in Pune, may come as a surprise to many. Similar surprise may be felt at the details of Indian agricultural practices, the agricultural implements which the Indian peasant used, and the much higher productivity which he achieved. Incidentally, a set of the implements (including drill-ploughs, etc.) was sent to Britain by one of the pre-1800 British collectors from a Madras Presidency district, with a view to help improve some of the agricultural implements then used in Britain.

The reality indicated by the above data does not seem to have depended merely on some dead custom or mechanical routine. A moral sense about things seems to have been deeply entrenched, and whenever it seems to have been violated, there was much recourse to opposition, protest, to *dharna*, *traga* or to peasant movements, to even what in modern usage may be called civil disobedience. The prolonged protest against the imposition by British authority of a tax on houses in 1810–1811 was centred in the city of Varanasi. According to official reports, the whole city had completely stopped work for days together, creating a situation that not even the dead could be cremated and had therefore to be cast in the Ganga without the performance of customary rites. According to the Varanasi collector, over 20,000 persons had been continually sitting in *dharna*, while another estimate placed the number of people collected between Secrole and the city at more than 200,000. The data on the frequency of peasant movements in Canara, Malabar and parts of Maharashtra is indeed vast.

One of the early documented protests against the salt tax took place at Surat in the 1840s. A more curious case of protest relates to two men of the Nagore and Nagapatnam area in Tamilnadu just before 1800. They felt wronged regarding their claim to some land and in protest climbed the spire of a temple and threatened to kill themselves by jumping from it unless their grievance was redressed. As a result, the men were promised that the wrong would be righted and they agreed to climb down. The newly established British collector, however, did not take kindly to such a solution.

While protest in the form of *dharna*, *traga*, etc. was resorted to when the populace felt that they had been wronged by some particular action of the political authority, and when such a protest occurred, it was taken by the relevant authority to be a legitimate expression of the political process and as an occasion

for reviewing the disputed action. Yet recourse to such protest was perhaps not often necessary. It seems that the polity allowed for continued dignified dialogue between the populace and the representatives of the political authority: the king and the *Palegars*, etc.; and dignities due to the populace in such dialogue were sanctioned by long-standing custom, which continued to operate to some extent even during the early phase of British occupation.

In South India, the offering of presents, usually in the way of a piece of cloth, a shawl, etc. by the British governmental authority to the heads of villages or even ordinary peasants who happened to visit such authority was all too frequent until about 1800. Where the British had yet to learn this gesture, and the gesture was still important to the British as their consolidation was not yet complete, the villagers themselves suggested the offering of such presents, and even volunteered to defray the expenses of these gifts themselves, as happened in Baramahals in 1792. According to another report, from Ramnad in 1796, even those who had to present themselves before the British courts to sign bonds of good conduct expected to be offered, and received, betel at the *cutcherry*.

#### XIV

I had tried to indicate in the previous lecture that just two centuries ago we had an organised and functioning society and economy in most parts of India. Not that the society had no travails of its own, that it had no wars at all, that it had no social and political disturbances. To an extent it was disturbed from time to time: neighbouring polities quarreled with one another; and many areas of the country for long periods were overcome by such conquerors and adventurers whose main aim was plunder, and who did not seem to share the conceptual world of those whom they had overrun. Such incursions, wherever they happened and succeeded, naturally created a split between society and polity, and the fallout from any prolonged alien incursions had its influence over much larger areas. Even many of those areas which were not directly affected, at least for any length of time, by foreign conquerors and adventurers, were put on the defensive. Their defensiveness and the changes which that brought about tended to sour the relationship between the local society and the larger polity. As is well-known, the Vijayanagar *Rajya* was created with the blessings and support of the *acharyas* of the great Sankara *Math* at Sringeri. In all probability it was also supported by neighbouring smaller *Rajyas*, all of whom wanted to counter the threat of external incursions in southern India. But even the Vijayanagar *Rajya* is said to have raised its revenue assessment from the traditional 1/12 to 1/6 of the produce to 1/4 of it (which latter was permitted by

the Dharmasastras only in a period of great crisis) and made it a permanent feature. Such an act, if true, is indicative of the tensions which such defensive situations and consequent unjust policies must have created in the affected society.

Another illustration of a similar nature is provided by the expansion of Maratha power in most parts of India during the 18th century. The process of this expansion led the Marathas to bring other Indian rulers under their supremacy. To symbolize this, and because of the needs of expansion, they introduced the levy of *chouth* (i.e. the Marathas demanding a tribute of  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the supposed revenue of the particular area). Naturally, this was resented by many, especially by the ancient *Rajyas* in Rajasthan, and such non-recognition of supremacy or non-payment must have at times forced the Marathas to take to the plunder of the recalcitrants. If one concedes that the Marathas were trying to free India, bringing it back to its indigenous polity, and had to adopt such measures only to achieve such an objective, what they did may be considered excusable. But it seems that despite such possible objective the Marathas really did not know how to go about it, as is evident by their adoption of the idiom and practice of the Mughals, and further by their failing to maintain even their own cohesiveness.

However, in spite of such disturbances, either because most of the polities of India continued to share at least a minimum conceptual framework and retained similar social and cultural priorities, or because the political and organisational framework which the alien conquerors, prior to the European entry into India, brought with them was much more elementary, and in no sense could become as stable or deep-rooted as what had existed in India, the society and polity of India, as we have seen above, was in a fairly flourishing state even as late as the 1750s, and in many areas until around 1800. The living standard of the people (or in 18th and 19th century British parlance, of the lower orders) seems to have been adequate and appreciably higher than that of similar classes in Britain around 1800; productivity in agriculture was much higher than in British agriculture; agricultural tools, implements and practice were diverse and sophisticated; the crafts not only of the celebrated textiles, but also the production of iron and steel, of various chemicals and dyes, of *gur* (jaggery) and sugar, the construction of ships, the art of building, or the craft of digging tanks as well as river and road transportation compared, and perhaps with advantage, to that which prevailed elsewhere in these spheres. Society and polity was highly organised, and had an incomparable sophistication in its various arrangements.

## XV

If what I have been saying is based on reliable historical data, how is it that the picture of Indian society and polity which generally prevails today is so very contrary to what I have presented? The answer to such a question is not easy. Nearly two centuries have elapsed between the epoch of the society and polity which I have described and the present. In this intervening period, we have not been our own masters. Even the privileged amongst us (including the great maharajas, nawabs, bankers and what remained of our traditional teachers and scholars of ancient learning) have been deprived of all public and social initiative, and the vast majority of our people during most of this period existed under sufferance and at the very edge of physical survival.

That this latter picture is not overstated is confirmed by a variety of late 19th century and early 20th century writing, by illustrious Indians like Dadabhai Naoroji, R.C. Dutt, and countless others. Even Englishmen, starting in 1824 with Thomas Munro himself (who seems to have been having an introspective interval at the time, but perhaps with a view to making British rule more stable) and ending with men like John Bright, William Digby, and Keir Hardie corroborated this fact. So, what conclusion do we draw from such presentation of the state of India in the 19th century?

Lacking hard data for the earlier period, or having neglected it thus far, the conclusions which we draw from Thomas Munro's or Dadabhai Naoroji's narration largely depend on the ideological position which we subscribe to. Leaving aside the admiration and praise which men like Voltaire or Prof. William Robertson of Edinburgh, and others, had for the then Indian civilisation, its manners and accomplishments, there have been two main Western approaches of judging India. Both of these treated India as more or less barbaric. It is possible that both approaches drew their inspiration from the ancient Greeks, for whom the rest of the world was sunk in barbarism. The first was the evangelical Christian view, which in Britain was very forcefully and effectively put across by Mr. William Wilberforce, and his great many followers, the more important of them being known as the saints or the Clapham sect. For them, it was impossible to conceive that there was any virtue in India, and it was axiomatic for them that India was sunk in superstition, ignorance, misery, and wretchedness. Only their use of the terms ignorance, misery, wretchedness, etc. was according to the then current British Christian terminology, and was used by them in the Christian religious sense (i.e. their belief that the people of India were in constant misery and sunk in wretchedness because of their ignorance of Christianity), and not as regards the material or secular condition of the people of India. For them, even if all Indians had been literate and scholarly,

and led the most luxurious worldly lives, it was worthless, as long as they led a life without the knowledge of Christianity and a belief in it. A large number of British officers and many British writers on Indian affairs subscribed to such a view until the end of the 19th century, and many even till later.

The main author of the second view, who weighed Indian society and civilisation from the pedestal of materialism, was James Mill. For him, the highest form of civilisation was a successful military civilisation. Consequently, he was all for manly virtues and, according to his measure, India was in fact very effeminate and so came very low on his scale of civilisation. Being the celebrated author of the voluminous *History of British India* (1817), considered the major text about India (which every British officer who came to India had to digest from 1820 onwards), it was natural that James Mill's strictures and judgement had even greater sway with the British who ruled India, than even the strictures of William Wilberforce.

James Mill was followed a few decades later by Karl Marx, who, though not a great admirer of British imperialism, was even much less an admirer of Indian civilisation. Perhaps, like many of us, he felt great scholarly anger regarding the material misery which British rule had brought to India, and being a humanist perhaps loved the Indians no less. But as a Western scientific theoretician, he saw no point in anything which the Indians did or had, and felt that however cruel the British might have been, India deserved all that the British did to her. To him the only solution for India was its westernisation, and such westernisation had to come only through the agency of a victorious European working class.

Because of her defeat, two things happened in India at the level of knowledge and its promotion. The first was that traditional Indian scholarship withdrew itself from the arena of social affairs, and, to the extent it could under the very adverse new circumstances, wholly immersed itself in the sacred texts or ritual. The second was that from about 1830, the British began to establish a new knowledge elite in India. This elite had to be brought up on a very selective British educational and cultural content. In time, it created various sub-elites; and thus, over 4–6 generations, the new literate and scholarly India mainly knew and believed what they had been taught by this selective British system. It is true that some of the brilliant ones amongst these elites began to treat themselves as equal to the British of similar education; and when the British tried to put such persons down, some of these brilliant Indians turned critical and hostile. It is in this context that a prominent governor of Bengal wrote in 1875:

“No doubt the alumni of our schools and colleges do become as a class discontented, but this arises partly from our higher education being too much in the direction of law, public administration and prose literature, where they may possibly imagine, however erroneously, that they may approach to competition with us. But we shall do more and more to direct their thoughts towards practical sciences, where they must inevitably feel their utter inferiority to us.”

I suppose it can be assumed that, when even this teaching of practical science did not fully serve the purpose, the next change was towards the teaching of the simple version of Western social sciences; and after that, to equally simple versions of Western philosophy; and later to the particularly literal brand of Marxism, which to a greater or lesser extent has been affecting the thinking and assumptions of our educated elite during the past half century.

Another point which may make many suspicious of the picture given earlier is our belief in *Satyameva Jayate* (that truth ever wins). If our pre-British society was so desirable, etc., why did it get defeated? There is no appropriate answer to it except perhaps that *Satyameva Jayate* must not be taken too literally, and has to be appreciated in relation to a much larger canvas. That the best organised and highly powerful societies do often lose to others, or to circumstances, is a commonplace of man's history.

## XVI

We can now perhaps attempt to establish some link between the past described so far and our present. It is in this context that one can perhaps say that the society and polity which was envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi for a free India (and by others who shared to a large extent Gandhiji's ideas and concepts) was very similar, at least in its structure and form, to the society and polity which had widely prevailed in India before the onset of British rule. It may be claimed that what Gandhiji envisaged was founded on much deeper and stronger foundations. It may also be argued that large parts of this 18th century society and polity, due to historical and spiritual causes, had perhaps been reduced, more or less, to a relatively hollow shell, without much real inner cohesion or recreative capacity by the time it came under European dominance.

It can perhaps also be claimed that, even if the 18th century type of Indian society and polity had retained its cohesion and a capacity for recuperation, it still may not have been possible for it, in the long run, to withstand sustained European pressure and encirclement. As I mentioned earlier on, most other civilisations in the world began to succumb to Europe from 1500 onwards.

Many of them which were numerically as large as Europe (as the civilisation of the Americas was until 1500) in fact got actually more or less annihilated by European pressure. A few others (like Japan) were to an extent able to save themselves only by isolating themselves for over two to three centuries from this European onslaught.

Moreover, it does not seem that it was the supposed scientific quest of late 15th century Europe, or the enlightenment produced by the European renaissance, or Europe's supposed democratic norms, which led to its expansion in the world from about the end of the 15th century. In the late 15th century, or even three centuries later in the late 18th century, Europe was in fact deficient in most of these in comparison to many other areas, like China, etc. The nearest parallel to the expansion of Europe from about 1500 onwards is to be found in the expansion of Islam soon after the death of Mohammed, or in our own times in the expansion of the Marxist states and categories from the time of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917. Contrary to popular notions, it is not the scientific or the democratic spirit which won the world for Europe, but rather characteristics contrary to them.

Because of the largeness of the area and population of India, and because of the impossibility of ever adequately colonising it with people of European stock—and much more because it was realised that India could be a source of great productive wealth to Europe, only if it had an immense number of people to labour but under total subjection—the British occupation of India was naturally primarily concerned with the subjection of India, and the drawing of the maximum possible tribute from it. In this process it eliminated whole populations where it needed to, or promoted or looked upon with indifference at unimaginable numbers of deaths by famine, hunger and consequent disease. To make such subjection prolonged, and relatively easier, it had to smash the earlier framework of Indian society and polity, and give it such new structures which India could neither comprehend nor master. Obviously, the basic elements of these new structures had long been tried and found to be of great utility in the establishment and maintenance of a steep hierarchical order in Britain itself. When applied to India, these were at times given an Indian garb, and variously mixed up with some similar Indian elements to make them look more legitimate.

In the early days of this archival exploration, Shri Jayaprakash Narayan, after going through some of the data relating to the dismemberment of India by the British, had once asked: If the British had gone thus far in their task of destruction, why did they not complete the job of total social dismemberment? I had no answer to it then, and consequently had mumbled that it seemed that

after a certain stage, perhaps after 1857, the British had felt exhausted, or had lost interest in making any new efforts, or innovations. But it seems to me today, that this seemingly half-done job of dismemberment was in reality very deliberate. Once having realised that India could not be adequately colonised by European stock, the job was to make India a permanent source of surplus-value, or a supplier of raw products (both in materials and men), or a market for certain types of British manufactures. This was possible if India was broken up and sufficiently atomised, with the broken up constituents placed in opposition to one another, and the whole left in a stagnating state. As any perceptive and experienced administrator of present-day India knows, this in-built situation of stagnation, where the total result of state action in most spheres more or less amounts to a holding-on operation, is true of the British-created system we retain in India even today. That the pre-1947 position was of even greater deliberately induced stagnation is obvious from the huge record, which I suppose is one of the major useful endowments that the British have left to us. That Mr. Winston Churchill even considered reducing Germany to a pastoral area after its defeat in 1945, merely indicates the working of the ways of the European and British states and the elite which manage them.

What was suggested by Mr. Churchill for Germany in 1945 had obviously been applied at various periods by Europe to its own people, as well as to the wider world, where Europe became dominant especially from 1500 onwards. What happened to the people of western and central Africa, and to the people of America (who were estimated at 9–12 crores around 1500) is too gruesome to recount here. But most of this was attempted in India too, possibly on a relatively moderate scale. The cannon-ball firing of disobedient Indian soldiers from the mouths of guns (from 1760 onwards), or the flogging of Indian officers of the state who for one reason or another displeased the superior British officer, or the more extensive flogging of village heads, or of domestic servants, and much more the flogging, branding and executing of those who resisted British rule, may be assumed to have been necessary to bring about and maintain total subjection and subordination. What played even greater havoc was the constant enforcement and institutionalisation (from 1760 to about 1920) of the practice of extensive forced labour and of extracting forced supplies, largely for military but also for civilian purposes. A high official of the government of India in the 1880s justified the practice by saying that the people have to bear some suffering for the good of the state. 25 years later, another high official, in rejecting the recommendation of the British commander-in-chief, that soldiers on leave might be exempted from such forced labour, stated that in the concerned area even the priests of the temples, much higher in status to mere soldiers, were liable to

give such forced labour. Even more than subjection and subordination, the need of the state created by the British was to reduce the people to such a condition that they got deprived not only of initiative but even more so of their sense of dignity. It seems that from some early period (perhaps from the time of the Romans) the dominant approach of Europe, and of those who exercised power, was to treat the world as a sort of zoo. Though indeed the holders of power in Europe were often kind and loving to those subjected to them, yet it seemed to have been inconceivable to them to grant any autonomy to those who happened to be weaker than themselves. This matter can perhaps best be investigated by our philosophers.

## XVII

One need not dwell long on the individual and physical suffering which the people of India experienced during some 8–10 generations of British rule. These were immense by any standard. One of the major consequences of such suffering has been that it has left the majority of the present descendants of these generations physically emaciated, without much hope, and rather in a state of coma. How a Bengali woman described what had happened to her, and her perception of it, is provided by the following, which was published in a Bengali newspaper in 1828:

The representation of a spinner:

To the Editor, *The Samachar*,

I am a spinner. After having suffered a great deal, I am writing this letter. Please publish this in your paper. I have heard that if it is published it will reach those who may lighten my distress and fulfill my desire. Please do not slight this letter from a poor sufferer.

I am very unfortunate. It will be a long story if I were to write all about my sufferings. Still I must write in brief.

When my age was five and a half *gudas* (22 years) I became a widow with three daughters. My husband left nothing at the time of his death wherewith to maintain my old father and mother-in-law and three daughters. He had several businesses. I sold my jewellery for the *shraddha* ceremony. At least as we were on the verge of starvation God showed me a way by which we could save ourselves. I began to spin on Takli and Charkha.

In the morning I used to do the usual work of clearing the household and then sit at the Charkha till noon and after cooking and feeding the old

parents and daughters I would have my fill and sit spinning fine yarn on the Takli. This I used to spin about a tola. The weavers used to visit our houses and buy the Charkha yarn at three *tolas* per rupee. Whatever amount I wanted as advance from the weavers, I could get for the asking. This saved us from cares about food and cloth.

In a few years time I got together seven *ganda* rupees (Rs.28). With this I married one daughter. And in the same way all three daughters. There was no departure from the caste customs. Nobody looked down upon these daughters because I gave all concerned, the *Ghatakas* and Caste people, what was due to them. When my father-in-law died I spent eleven *ganda* rupees (Rs.44) on his *shraddha*.

This money was lent me by the weavers which I repaid in a year and a half. And all this through the grace of the Charkha. Now for 3 years, we two women, mother-in-law and me, are in want of food. The weavers do not call at the house for buying yarn. Not only this, if the yarn is sent to market, still it is not sold even at one-fourth the old prices. I did not know how it happened. I asked many about it. They say that *Bilati* (English) yarn is being largely imported. The weavers buy that yarn and weave. I had a sense of pride that *Bilati* yarn could not be equal to my yarn, but when I got *Bilati* yarn I saw that it was better than any yarn. I heard that its price is Rs.3 or Rs.4 per seer. I beat my brow and said, Oh God, there are sisters more distressed than me. I know that all men of *Bilati* are rich but now I see that there are women there who are poorer than me. I fully realised the poverty which induced those women to spin. They have sent the product of so much toil out here because they could not sell it there. It would have been something if they were sold here at good prices. But it has brought our ruin only. Men cannot use the cloth out of this yarn even for two months. It rots away. I therefore entreat the spinners over there, that if they will consider this representation, they will be able to judge whether it is fair to send yarn here or not.

A representation from a suffering spinner.

Shantipur *Samachar Darpan*.

The above was reproduced by Gandhiji in *Young India* in 1931. It is possible that the women of Lancashire felt somewhat similarly after the post-1929 world-wide economic depression, and the boycott of foreign textiles by Indians as a result of the Indian non-cooperation movement. But it is perhaps correct to assume that when Gandhiji visited Lancashire in the latter part of 1931, and met many of the Lancashire women, he was able to make them see that Lancashire had made the condition of Indian women even much worse for more than a century.

As a corollary to the massive emaciation of the majority of Indians, the rest in India, who could somehow overstep the emaciating process, became socially separated from the majority of their fellow beings. As their own condition was based on fragile foundations it made them behave all the more callously—and at times brutally—towards this emaciated majority.

### XVIII

Even from amongst this remainder, who in material terms were relatively secure, even privileged, a very small section—perhaps only a quarter percent of the Indian population—became, in time, alienated from their own civilisation, and felt proud to be living like foreigners in the innumerable civil lines, military stations, and the post-1947 enclaves of India's metropolises, and of India's other major cities.

Their lifestyle became Western, with some of them grotesquely so, and with others in a less ostentatious manner. As early as the 1830s, the British Viceroy Bentinck was very pleased with such a development and was happy that the prosperous Hindu families of Bengal were giving up feeding Brahmins, or contributing to temples, and had taken to the ostentatious entertainment of Europeans instead.

A ridiculous fall-out of such alienation can be seen practically in every district headquarters, more so in northern India, where the governmental officer-core of about 200–400 persons, and their families lead lives which have little to do with the community they are supposed to serve. Their children live away from them in convent and college hostels, if the place of their postings has no convents, etc., and as most such districts cannot afford cultural appurtenances of modern life (good libraries, theatres, sangeet bhavans, art galleries, softly-lighted restaurants, etc.), and they have no way of mixing with the local people, or find it tedious and uncomfortable to do so, their life is indeed nearly barren. It is possible that it is they who uphold the might, power and grandeur of the state in their areas. The state that they uphold—except that it may be taken to represent some abstract ideas or fills the generality of the citizens with a sense of fear—has, however, even after freedom, not been able to acquire any deeper meaning. It may be said in defence of this officer elite that the manner of their lives, the uncomfortable and mostly ugly designs of the residences they are housed in, the amount of legitimate or even illegitimate money they are able to make, does not, in any major sense, qualify them (except perhaps just a few who occupy positions of relative decision-making) as objects of envy. It is rather that most of them seem harassed, even pathetic, and would be objects of pity in a society which was not so deprived and disorganised as ours.

Yet another consequence of British rule has been that practically no one, engaged in the service of the state or its dependent institutions, comprehends in any real sense what he or she is engaged in, even as regards the job which has been assigned to the particular person. Further, the way the job is done has no possible linkages with the general and social life of the community, or its priorities, or even with one's family life. The life of such people has got split in two unrelated compartments; instead of one enriching the other, what gets created at best is a general bewilderment. The general assumption that the huge army of those who are in the service of the state are having tremendously entertaining or luxurious lives, or that most of them at least enjoy the exercise of power which they are supposed to command, is mostly a fallacy, unless one treats occasional instances of individual sadism as entertainment.

This, of course, does not apply to some 10,000–20,000 persons who, in various capacities, decide major policies, or supervise or manage various departments and corporations of the state. Their life is indeed of material ease, of social graces, and will compare well with the lifestyle of persons of similar positions in the more prosperous lands. To them may be added another 50,000–100,000 families of proprietors and managers of industry, those running mercantile and trading concerns, some of those who have become prosperous through commercial agriculture, dairying and horticulture, and of course the more successful of the lawyers, medical doctors, academics and journalists.

While basically there never has been any animosity between society and polity in Indian tradition and history, the present Indian polity, built as it is on alien concepts and theories, has been reduced to the state of a huge dying dinosaur or, more or less, continues to be the monster which the British had put together some 150–200 years before.

## XIX

It is conceivable that in the circumstances of today we cannot have recourse to the socio-political institutions and structures of pre-British India; that in our rather spiritually and physically emaciated state, we would be even less capable of creating the sort of society and polity which most of our people had in view in Gandhiji's time. Living in the world as it is today and in a sense having been forced to feel during the last 3–4 decades as if we lived on the world's sufferance, it is obvious that until we have created a new conceptual frame for the functioning of our society and polity, and that such a frame has a brilliance of some kind for the rest of the world, we have to adjust ourselves to present circumstances. One form of adjustment is the one which we have been

pursuing since 1947, that is more or less walking in the grooves laid down by the West, while dreaming day-dreams that our time will come one day. Another version of the effort at adjustment, though presented more confidently and forcefully, is of bridging the so-called 300 years' gap which is said to separate us from the world of the West, and to aim at catching up with the West by the beginning of the year 2001, in order to achieve a position that would enable us to compete with others in the world in the way those who have not been left behind by history do.

Put in this latter phraseology, it is rather an attractive objective, especially for many of us who have had adequate education and training in the ways of Western science and technology, or to some extent in the working of its organisational structures. Yet, examined critically, such an objective is seldom achieved. In history, as in life, one does not catch up with anything. Those who are given to striving go their own way, and the very fact that they move according to their volition eliminates the question of the need of their catching up with anyone else. But in a situation where one has to face a powerful adversary or adversaries—whether they are so termed or not—and in our particular case the whole of Western civilisation is such an adversary, what one has to do is to aim at getting several paces ahead of it; and not merely aim at catching up or bridging some particular historical gap. In our own time, Gandhiji did just that, for at least 20–25 years, on the basis of what he could structure in the way of institutional forms, battle techniques, alternative modes of socio-economic life, etc., out of the indigenous constituents available to him, and by the genius of his great generalship. And as we know, what he created kept British power mostly on the defensive for over two decades. It is possible that what Gandhiji did is no longer repeatable—at least not in any literal sense; or even if it were, it might not be able to help us in the present situation.

Yet the sooner we get out of the present stagnation, and the state of hopelessness (both in our society and, even more so, in the manner in which our state functions), the better for the people of India and their state. In spite of the great freedom struggle, and four decades of political freedom, the Indian state has yet to wake up to the fact that it is not a colonial state; that it is not ruling a hostile people; that it in fact is amongst its own kith and kin; and that only to the extent these kith and kin feel a kinship with it, will it have legitimacy, as well as inner confidence and strength. To say this is not to condemn what has gone on in the past four decades. In a way what happened was on the cards; it was an obvious result of our two centuries' old subjection and alienation, and the diffidence we still had, until recently, in our relations with the world, or in our own capacities.

Our problems indeed are manifold. The problem of a rather excessive population growth without the means of an outlet, like the one Europe has had during the past 400–500 years, or Islam had before that, is only one of them and perhaps not the most intractable or urgent. Our major problem is to establish an organic linkage between our society and polity, both of which urgently require to be put on sounder and more indigenous foundations. To move in such a direction, we have to re-examine not only our past and its concepts, institutions and manner of solving issues, but also various solutions which have occurred to our people during the past century or so. The “Outline Scheme of Swaraj” prepared at the behest of an illustrious President of the Indian National Congress, and by an equally illustrious son of India [i.e. Gandhiji], in 1923, can perhaps be one such document which can help us initiate a serious debate on this issue of the relationship between society and polity.

## XX

The recent resolve to pay attention to our national heritage, of which the programme of cleaning the Ganga is one result, should indeed be welcome and receive nation-wide support. But a neglect of at least two centuries cannot be corrected by small gestures or symbolic programmes. The restoration of our heritage requires at least as much attention and perhaps as many resources as we devote to our defence system, and more importantly, an organisational framework with much greater agility and local initiative. It is possible that an awareness of our unbroken ancient heritage, its restoration, preservation and interpretation, and the self-knowledge which it will impart to our society, is of even greater primary importance to the security and defence of India than any national military system, important though the latter is in the present day.

Similarly, the resolve of bringing 5,000,000 hectares of waste land annually under fuel-wood plantation for the next ten years, if handled correctly, and if it leads to the planning of fuel-wood trees (instead of trees of more commercial and industrial utility, as seem to have been the fashion in recent years), would be of great practical value to our ordinary rural and small-town populace, and may help initiate many other local activities.

Though at present aimed at a different and much smaller section of society, a welcome can perhaps also be given to the proposal of starting institutions of excellence (in the fields of education, health, culture, etc.) in each and every district of India. But the very idea of initiating such programmes or institutions requires that the whole machinery of the state should soon undergo a well thought out reorganisation, and the army of 10,000–20,000 of state employees in each district be placed at the disposal of responsible district bodies. Further,

before such institutions of excellence can be of any national value, the service which they will impart, or the content of what they will teach or present has to undergo proper scrutiny. They have to be Indianised in every sense; and those who run them, and those whom they produce have to regain a sense of patriotism as well as a sense of compassion. As we know too well, patriotism as well as compassion are fast becoming scarce commodities in today's India.

Additionally, those engaged in the administration or development of an area should have local roots and loyalties. They have to realise, and appreciate that they must be answerable to the people they serve, if anything really worthwhile is to come out of the new resolves and programmes.

This obviously would imply that an end is put to the unnecessary transfer of official and other personnel from place to place. Simply because the British needed to continually move their armies over long distances to indicate their invincibility, and similarly to transfer their top civil officers (because either such officers became too unpopular or they got too mixed up in local affairs and so became less useful instruments of British authority), does not imply that we have to continue this senseless and wasteful practice. A medical doctor, an engineer or a teacher, and even a policeman, will certainly be much more useful to society and to those persons and purposes, whom he is supposed to serve, if he stays in one place over long periods, and conversely of much less use or value if he is transferred from place to place as frequently as happens today. The assumption that he will become corrupt, exploitative, inefficient, etc., unless he is so moved around, is one of the major fallacies of the administrative system, which we inherited at the time of the 'Transfer of Power' in 1947.

If the above steps were to be taken, and similar measures were adopted in the political and other spheres, it would also obviate the need of the vast real-estate, the construction and maintenance of which seem to have become the major function of the Indian state at all levels, and more so at the national. That as foreigners the British had to build houses, dak bungalows, etc. for the use of British military and civil officers and their immediate servitors and dependents, however wasteful of Indian state resources, can be understood in the context of the British conquest of India. The fact, however, that this real-estate has multiplied 10–20 times of its pre-1947 size can only be explained either as the result of total thoughtlessness on the part of those who have governed India since the British left, or because of the wholly mechanical working of their mind. India seems to be the only country, at least in the British Commonwealth, where even members of legislatures are provided permanent residences in the capital city. It is small wonder that, within a year or two of their being elected, most of them become part of the capital, and have little links left with those

who sent them to these legislatures. Given such an alien frame and practices, it is not surprising that the main function of the Indian state, as it has been operating until now, is to look after its decision-makers and the vast army of those who are expected to implement the decisions. The framework was created mainly to keep the populace in, what the British called, a state of tranquility, that is, the activities of the people were kept at a minimum so as not to disturb the state's tranquility. Given this frame the decision-makers, as well as their subordinates, obviously give first priority to their own security, comfort, etc. The decisions, therefore, are mostly of the kind which maintain tranquility, and provide security and differently graded comfort to those who surround the state, and try to keep it safe from the people whom it is supposed to represent. The result, more or less, is that, instead of the state existing for the people, it is the people who are seemingly permitted to exist for the convenience of the state. (That the real-estate is hideous and constantly falling apart is too evident to need any exposition.)

A step which can be taken fairly soon without waiting for the complete recasting of the polity (which in any case will be a long-drawn process) is to shed the unnecessary load which the state, more so the central state, has accumulated over the years. Many of the functions which the central state performs today can safely, and also more effectively, be performed at more local levels. The imbalance in terms of power and resources, which has become increasingly manifest between the government at the national level and the governments in the states, as also between the latter and more locally-based elected institutions, needs urgent correction. To the extent the national level reduces its load, and distributes a substantial portion of the resources at its disposal, the stronger and more efficient it will become in performing such tasks which can be performed by it alone. Over the years, it has accumulated too much fat and flabbiness. The job is for it to become slim and agile. Only such load-shedding can make it functional in the internal as well as in the external sphere.

## XXI

To achieve a better functioning, it may be necessary for India to opt for different and even contrary options in different spheres and for different tasks. While it is essential, indeed imperative, to encourage and promote recourse to older institutional forms, linkages, technologies, etc., it may also be essential for India to master modern theories and their products (like institutional forms, technology, etc.), and as far as possible to innovate and improve upon them. While the latter may secure an equal place for India in the world at large, it is only the former which can make India's people and talents come into their

own. Once this happens, it would be a far easier job for indigenous talent and priorities to borrow what they wish from elsewhere, to internalise what suits them within their own frame, and thus eventually arrive at the point where the contradictions of these diverse ways could be resolved without serious turmoil. When this has happened, whether it was the indigenous which governed Indian life, or it was the adopted and internalised which did so, would only be of academic value. What would have been achieved is that the effort would have helped India to renovate itself, and so feel confident about its own strivings and goals.

In the context of such a reshaping and re-linking of Indian society and polity, the exploration of the past can be of great practical value. Analysis and comprehension of data on our past can tell us how we acted in the past, and in what we succeeded and where we failed. Obviously only knowing about ourselves even in the minutest details, though it would lead to self-knowledge, may, however, not be enough for our future survival as a free and prosperous society and state. For that, we shall have to know much more about the world itself, and that not merely through the work and interpretations of others, but by that of our own. It is all to the good that scholars from the West, including the Soviet Union, or from Japan, or elsewhere are studying the old institutions and manners of India in great detail. Their studies can certainly give us some indications and starting points. But to be of any value to our society, such and other studies will primarily have to be taken up by our own scholars and academics.



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Indian Science and Technology in the  
Eighteenth Century (1971)



## Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century (1971)

This book, which bears the subtitle *Some Contemporary European Accounts* (Delhi: Impex India, 1971), constituted Shri Dharampal's first major publication. Providing a salient selection of documents (59-317 pp.) dating from the late 18th and early 19th century pertaining to observations on the state of science and technology in early modern India, it contained a foreword by Dr. D.S. Kothari (President of the Indian Science Academy), and an introduction by Dr. William A. Blanpied, a prominent American physicist. Shri Dharampal's own introduction (entitled 'Preface'), which is being reproduced here, presents lucid insights into the complex functioning of pre- and early colonial Indian society. The text historically contextualises and discursively analyses British reports on a vast range of scientific and technical achievements, relating to astronomy, mathematics, medicine, surgery, metallurgy, ice and paper manufacture, mortar making and advanced agricultural practices. References to chapters and documents in the volume are being omitted; hence it is recommended that the reader consult the original book in order to be more fully acquainted with the historical documentation. This work was well received (with reviews in the TLS [21.01.1972], by Arnold Pacey [*Journal of Appropriate Technology*, 1972, 28], David Pingree [*Journal of Asian Studies* 32/1, 1972, 178-179], P.J. Marshall [*South Asian Review* 1974, 255-256], by the Madras Group [*PPST Bulletin* 2/1, 1982, 45-80], by Ram Swarup ["A Newton among Brahmins", *Times of India*, 19.08.1984], by N. Krishnaswamy [*Bharatiya Vijnana Parampare*, Kannada, Utthana, May 1985, 19-32] just to name a few). Its pioneering research agenda was also discussed in a national seminar on "Science, Technology and Society in 18th century India" (New Delhi, November 1971), sponsored by the Gandhi Peace Foundation and the Gandhian Institute of Studies, with an inaugural address by Shri Jayaprakash Narayan. Moreover, this spearheading work formed the cornerstone for Claude Alvares' PhD research (published as *Homo Faber: Technology and Culture in India, China and the West. 1500 to the Present Day*, Bombay 1979), as well as providing inspiration to the *Patriot & People Oriented Science and Technology* (PPST) group. The volume was reprinted in 1983 by the Academy of Gandhian Studies, Hyderabad, and in: Dharampal, *Collected Writings*, Other India Press: Mapusa 2000 (reissued 2003 & 2007), vol.I. Translations into Gujarati and Hindi were published in *Dharampal Samagra Lekhan* (11 vols.), edited by Indumati Katdare, Punarutthan Trust, Ahmedabad 2005 and 2007, respectively.



# Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century (1971)

## Introduction

### I

The present volume is part of an attempt to understand the functioning of the Indian state and society some eight to ten generations back, i.e. around the period 1750, when India began to fall under European domination—firstly in the Tamil and Telugu areas, and afterwards in Bengal and elsewhere. This attempt consisted in a perusal, during 1966-1970, of some of the vast Indian archival material in the English language lodged in the archives of Britain. This volume presents some of the major eighteenth and early nineteenth century documents found during this search on the subject of science and technology.

The authors of these documents came to India in various capacities: as military, medical and civilian servants of the European governments; as travellers, sometimes coming on their own, but more often sent by wealthy patrons or the newly established learned societies (like the Royal Societies of Paris and London; the Society of Arts in London, etc.); and some, like the Jesuits, came on behalf of the various Christian religious orders. According to the European scholarly canons of the time, all these were experts in their respective fields and were considered to be competent to report on what they observed or studied. Most of those, included here, spent a substantial part of their active lives in different parts of India.

Practically all European scientific and technological accounts relating to the sciences and technologies of non-European countries (including the ones reproduced here) are an outcome of the seventeenth and eighteenth century European quest for useful knowledge in these fields. The nature of the quest itself got wider and more complex with the passing of practically each decade. Few things, except finished consumer goods or gold and diamonds, etc., were noticed in the non-European world by the earlier European travellers, servants of European states, and the scientists and technologists. Partly this was due to the short durations which most of them spent in any particular area. But the preponderant cause was the lack of requisite comprehension amongst the learned of Europe of the prevailing non-European practices and technologies. Such lack of understanding was still more evident amongst the learned of Britain who, until about 1800, seem to have lagged behind some of the other parts of Europe in many scientific and technological fields by about fifty years.

Two examples of such lack of comprehension pertain to the practice of inoculation against smallpox, and the use of the drill-plough. Until 1720, when the wife of the then British Ambassador in Turkey, having got her children successfully inoculated,<sup>1</sup> began to advocate its introduction into Britain, the practice of inoculation was unknown to the British medical and scientific world. Proving relatively successful, though for a considerable period vehemently opposed<sup>2</sup> by large sections of the medical profession and the theologians of Oxford, an awareness grew about its value and various medical men engaged themselves in enquiries concerning it in different lands. The two accounts of inoculation reproduced here are a result of this post-1720 quest.

Similarly about the drill-plough. The drill-plough is said to have been first used in Europe by one Joseph Locatelli of Carinthia (Austria) in 1662.<sup>3</sup> Its first introduction in England dates to 1730. But it took perhaps another 50 years before it was used on any scale. It was used in India (according to the authors cited) from time immemorial. Observations of its use, by the British, however could only begin in the last decades of the eighteenth century, after its awareness had dawned on the more observant amongst them.

Initially, the quest is limited and the queries which are put to those, staying or wandering in the non-European world, by the various European learned societies and individual patrons, are fairly simple. In course of time, as knowledge gets added to knowledge and newer formulations develop in Europe, the quest becomes wider and more sophisticated and the queries begin to be concerned with more complex matters—the interest in the Indian manufacture of Ice; in the making of the Madras Mortar; in the processes of Indian Iron and Steel manufacture; or the Observatory at Varanasi (Benares) (treated as one of the five “celebrated observatories” of the world by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in its editions until 1823)—these reports were the outcome of the wider quest and the new sophistication. The quest for newer chemicals and dyes, materials for the water-proofing of the bottom of ships (information and considerable quantities of which were sent as late as the 1790s by a Bombay correspondent to the President of the British Royal Society) and such like arose out of the rapidly multiplying specific European needs.

It is in the context of this widening horizon, coupled with growing sophistication and the urgent need (partly resulting from constant warfare in

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1 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: *Memoirs*.

2 See mid-eighteenth century *Tracts on Inoculation* in the British Museum.

3 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1910-11): Article on Sowing.

which the Europeans were engaged during the greater part of the eighteenth century) for materials and processes that accounts like most of the ones presented here were written and submitted by individual Europeans to their respective patrons. It is thus in the European writings of the period (i.e. from about 1720 to 1820) that one discovers the European observed details about non-European science and technology as well as about the societies, institutions, customs and laws of various parts of the non-European world. Before this period the European ability to comprehend this world was limited; and after about 1820 the knowledge and institutions of the non-European world began to have much less usefulness to the problems of Europe. Further, by the 1820s, most parts of the non-European world are no longer themselves. Their institutions, sciences and technologies are not what they were 50 or a 100 years earlier, and have met the same fate as their political systems and sovereignty. By the 1820s or so, most of the non-European world had become, at least in European theory and most history texts, if not altogether in actuality, 'backward and barbarian'.

But the imagery of backwardness and barbarism which still serves as a descriptive label for most of the non-European world was no sudden product of the 1820s or any other decade. It grew over a fairly long period, but at a much accelerated pace after about 1780. Many of the post-1780 accounts reflect the growth of this attitude amply.

The wide-spread prevalence (no less amongst the learned and scholarly) of European ethnocentric bias is dramatically demonstrated by the post-1780 writings on Indian astronomy and the Observatory at Benares. It comes through even in the very learned review which Prof. John Playfair, professor of mathematics at the University of Edinburgh, an academician of distinction, did of the then accumulated European knowledge on Indian astronomy. After detailed examination, he arrives at the conclusion that the Indian astronomical observations pertaining to the period 3102 B.C. appeared to be correct by every conceivable test. Such correctness of observation was possible either through complex astronomical calculations by the Indians or by direct observation in the year 3102 B.C. He chooses the latter explanation. The reason for the rejection of the explanation that these could have been arrived at by the Indians through astronomical calculation would have implied that "there had arisen a Newton among the Brahmins, to discover that universal principle which connects, not only the most distant regions of space, but the most remote periods of duration, and a De La Grange, to trace, through the immensity of both its most subtle and complicated operations." It became intellectually easier for him to concede this astronomy's antiquity rather than its sophistication and the scientific capacities of its underlying theories.

But even the conceding of its mere antiquity was of very short duration. With the strengthening of the fundamentalist and evangelical Christian tendencies, this concession began to look like blasphemy. Keeping in view the European historical premises, originating in the Old Testament, it was just not conceivable for anything except the stated items to have survived 'the Deluge' which was computed to have taken place in the year 2348 B.C. By 1814, though things Indian were still being half-heartedly defended by a journal like the *Edinburgh Review*, even the mere antiquity of Indian astronomy had received a final European dismissal.

While reviewing Cuvier's "The Theory of the Earth",<sup>4</sup> wherein Cuvier had ridiculed and dismissed the ancient date of the Indian tables, the *Edinburgh Review*, took cognizance of the changed attitudes and relationships between Europe and the non-European world and observed, "But though the tide of opinion seems, for some time past, to have set strongly against the high antiquity of the sciences of the East, it does not appear that the main arguments of the Historian of astronomy [i.e. Bailly] have ever been refuted." It tried to resolve the contradiction between the Mosaic and Christian belief, and the earlier date of the Indian tables, by advancing the proposition, that "the early date of that Astronomy, and the usual date of the Deluge, may be perfectly reconciled, on the supposition that the former is a fragment of antediluvian science, which had escaped the general destruction." Such a solution of the controversy was however no longer practicable, nor necessary from the view-point of European scholarship, in what had by then become an exclusively European century.

Even when the ancientness of Indian astronomy was being conceded, as was done by Prof. Playfair, it was difficult to admit that the eighteenth century Indian astronomers and scholars on the subject had any real competence. According to Playfair, the eighteenth century Indian astronomer had "little knowledge of the principles on which his rules are founded, and no anxiety to be better informed."<sup>5</sup> Yet it was only through intercourse with Indian astronomers and by means of instruction and data received from them that the European knowledge of Indian astronomy could be acquired. It was thus acquired by M. Le Gentil during his visit to India about 1769: according to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "During the time of his stay in Hindustan, the Brahmins had been much more familiar with him on account of his astronomical knowledge, than they usually were with Europeans, and he thus had an opportunity of obtaining considerable insight into their methods of calculation. In consequence of this

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4 *Edinburgh Review*, vol.22 (Jan.1814), pp.474-75.

5 "Remarks on the Astronomy of the Brahmins", 1790.

instruction he published tables and rules, according to the Indian method, in the Academy of Sciences for 1772.”<sup>6</sup>

It may be more reasonable to suppose that the general uncommunicativeness of eighteenth century Indian scholars, and specialists in the various fields, was more due, one, to the usual secretiveness of such persons, and, two, to the very sophistication and complexity of their theories which in their view (perhaps mistakenly) were not understandable by most Europeans, rather than their own ignorance of the basic premises of the system and methods used by them. It is possible that the various sciences and technologies were on a decline in India around 1750 and perhaps had been on a similar course for several centuries previously. But there seems little doubt that the processes, methods, theories and formulations described in the contemporary accounts included in this volume were very much a living reality in the areas of India to which they pertain. Whether these were also used or taught or discussed in most other parts is a matter for detailed investigation, not only into the English language records, but more so in the surviving indigenous Indian records of the period, and also the Indian archival material in other foreign languages. The question as to how the mid-eighteenth century Indian sciences and technologies compared with the sciences and technologies in earlier periods requires similar investigation.

The later eighteenth century European ethnocentric preoccupations had other dimensions also. Some of these are expressed in this volume whereby everything existing elsewhere is visualised to have had its origin in India. A different dimension was expressed in propositions like that “the Hindu religion had its origin in the British Isles,”<sup>7</sup> which was held to be the Sweta Dwipa of the Hindu classics. Though perhaps not so intended, all of these conflicting speculations and formulations ultimately led to the subversion of the non-European reality. Many directly confirmed the growing European view of the barbarism and ignorance of the non-Europeans; the others served the same purpose by becoming easy targets for European ridicule and contempt.

## II

Four of the accounts included in this volume deal with astronomy and two with mathematics. The Observatory at Benares described by Sir Robert Barker, after a visit to it in 1772, still exists more or less intact and is at present

6 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1823), Article on Hindoos, vol.X, p.477.

7 *Edinburgh Review*, vol. X (1810), p.387; also see ‘An Essay on the Sacred Isles in the West’ by Francis Wilford in the *Asiatic Researches*, vol.8 (1808), pp.246-7.

known as the Man Mandir and is only a few hundred yards away from the Dasasvamedha Ghat. Its appearance today seems even more neglected<sup>8</sup> than that described two centuries ago, except that a few plates have been fixed indicating the names of the various instruments (yantras) in Hindi and English. Two other plaques indicate the period of the building and the date of the erection of the Observatory. While the building is stated to have been built in the late sixteenth century, the relevant plaque states the erection of the Observatory in the early eighteenth.

Such playing with the dates of the founding of the Observatory has a curious tale to tell. Barker's account was published in the *Transactions* of the British Royal Society in 1777 and it put the erection of the Observatory some two centuries previously. In 1792, in conformity with the request of a Fellow of the Royal Society, another report on the Observatory was received from one J.L. Williams of Benares. This was published in the *Transactions* in 1793.<sup>9</sup>

One of the two main points which this later account, as if in passing, tried to make was that the Observatory only came into being some 50-60 years earlier and was not built in the sixteenth century, as stated by the Bengal commander-in-chief in his article published in 1777. To support this contention, it produced what it claimed to be the opinion of the Indian magistrate of Benares (who, incidentally, with his colleagues was in the process of being displaced by British judges and magistrates, in accordance with the newly enacted 'Cornwallis' Judicial Regulations); he is alleged to have said that, though the building was built by "Rajah Maunsing, for the repose of holy men and pilgrims", the "observatory was built, by the Rajah Jeysing". Further that it was begun in 1794 *sumbut* (A.D.1737) and finished in two years and that the Rajah died in 1800 *sumbut* (A.D.1743). To this was added the even 'weightier' opinion of the Brahmins of Benares, "one of whom is professor of astronomy in the new founded college". According to him, "they all agreed that this observatory never was used, nor did they think it capable of being used, for any nice observations; and believe it was built more for ostentation, than the promotion of useful knowledge." Besides these two points, the article gave the measurements of the various instruments but stated that "from the want of sufficient knowledge

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8 It is tragic that one of the five celebrated observatories of the world (and in India the most celebrated), though still intact, remains in complete neglect. Its counterparts in Britain, France, etc. are greatly cherished and serve as the repositories and centres of their respective astronomical knowledge. India owes that much to itself and its people that places like the 'Man Mandir' are duly cherished and looked after.

9 *Philosophical Transactions*, vol.83 (1793), Article by John Lloyd Williams, pp.45-49.

of the science of astronomy, I have not been able to describe the different instruments, and their uses, satisfactorily; however, you may rely on the measurements being taken with the greatest exactness.”

The subject of the Benares Observatory was again taken up in 1798 by William Hunter, an assistant to the British Resident at the Mahratta capital at Poona, in an article “Some account of the Astronomical labours of Jayasinha, Raja of Ambhere, or Jayanagar”. This interest in Raja Jayasinha (i.e. Jai Singh) is explained as follows: “Arising superior to the prejudices of education, of national pride and religion”, Jayasinha strove to enrich his country “with scientific truth derived from a foreign source”, in this particular instance, Europe. The writer was quite candid and outspoken about his purpose. He said: “I have always thought, that after having convinced the eastern nations of our superiority in policy and in arms, nothing can contribute more to the extension of our national glory, than the diffusion among them of a taste for European science. And as the means of promoting so desirable an end, those among the natives who have penetration to see, and ingenuousness to own its superior accuracy and evidence, ought to be cherished.”<sup>10</sup>

This article made an attempt to provide documentary evidence of the Benares Observatory, having been the creation of this early eighteenth century Raja Jayasinha by quoting from what is called the *Zeej Mohammedshahy*.<sup>11</sup> According to it, having “assembled the astronomers and geometricians of the faith of Islam and the Brahmins and Pundits, and the astronomers of Europe”, Jayasinha “bound the girdle of resolution about the loins of his soul, and constructed (at Dehly) several of the instruments of an observatory”. And “in order to confirm the truth of these observations”, i.e. at Dehly, “he constructed instruments of the same kind in Sewai Jeypoor and Matra, and Benares and Oujein”. With the foregoing statement from the *Zeej Mohammedshahy*, the documentary proof ended. For the rest, he added: “The observatory at Benares having been described by Sir Robert Barker and Mr. Williams, I have only a few remarks to offer, in addition to the account delivered by those gentlemen”,<sup>12</sup> and the writer made some more observations on its measurements, etc.

Various other Britishers seem to have gone and made reports on the Benares Observatory in the early decades of the nineteenth century, but the subject soon disappeared from public discussion. It was re-opened in 1920 by

10 *Asiatic Researches*, vol.5 (1798), Article by W. Hunter, pp.177-211.

11 If it still exists, much more needs to be known about this mid-eighteenth century document: how it came to be written, by whom, under whose patronage and in what year.

12 *Op. cit.*, cf. f.n.10.

the author of *A Guide to the Old Observatories*,<sup>13</sup> originally published by the Archaeological Survey of India. It stated that the 'Manmandir', i.e. the actual building of the Benares Observatory, "was built about the beginning of the seventeenth century. The astronomical instruments were added by Jai Singh about A.D.1737". It added: "the date is not certain, and nearly every writer gives a different one."

It further observed, "Prinsep wrote, 'The building was converted into an observatory by Jaysingh in A.D.1680' and refers to a supposed description of it by Tavernier". Dismissing all these other dates,<sup>14</sup> this author concluded that "Williams' date for the observatory at Benares, 1737, may be accepted" as he "on all points that can be verified, is extremely reliable", and quoted Hunter as speaking "of the accuracy of Mr. Williams' measurements".<sup>15</sup>

The eighteenth century dating of the Benares Observatory thus rests on the two articles published in 1793 and 1798, respectively, the first at the instance of a Fellow of the Royal Society and the second in a longer piece wishing to convince the Eastern nations of the superiority of European eighteenth century science with a view to "contribute more to the extension of our national glory". What Tavernier said in his published *Travels* was: "Near to this great Pagod, upon the summer-west, stands a kind of a college which the Raja Jesseing, the most potent of all the idolaters in the Mogul's empire, built for the education of the youth of the better sort."<sup>16</sup> Tavernier visited Benares in 1655-1656. It may be added that quite a few 'Jayasinha' (spelt variously) have been Rajas of 'Ambhere' through the centuries. It is possible that this fact has also contributed to different writers claiming widely separate dates for the construction of the Benares Observatory.

A rather curious point arises here out of this chronology about the dating of the Benares Observatory: Barker along with Pearse, and A. Campbell visited the Observatory in 1772. If the Observatory was actually built in 1737, it was only 35 years old at this date. Both Barker and Pearse specifically state that it had been there for some two centuries. They must have arrived at this statement after meeting and conversing with persons who, if the Observatory had been constructed only 35 years previously, must have been eye-witnesses to its construction. As there was no controversy in 1772 about the date of the

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13 G.R. Kaye (honorary correspondent of Archaeological Department of India), Calcutta, Government Printing Press, 1920.

14 Prinsep adds a footnote: "Tavernier died in 1689, three years after Jai Singh's birth".

15 Op.cit., cf. f.n.13.

16 J.P. Tavernier: *Travels in India*, Calcutta, 1905, p.425.

construction of the Observatory, it is inconceivable that Barker's informants misled him on this point. The conversion of two centuries into 35 years is the most fabulous aspect of this later controversy.

Next is the long and learned review, "Remarks on the Astronomy of the Brahmins", by John Playfair, read by him in 1789. In this article, the author begins by referring to certain astronomical tables received from the East Indies by European scholars at an early stage in their contact with the East. Some of these tables were received from Siam and their 'epoch' corresponded to 21st March, 638 A.D. But the point to note was that the 'meridian' of these tables was not Siam but Benares!

Other tables received from South India had one thing in common. Their 'epoch' coincides with the era of 'Kaliyuga', that is, with the beginning of the year 3102 B.C. Professor Playfair begins by enquiring whether the 'epoch' was real or fictitious; that is, whether the planetary positions at that time were actually observed or were merely calculated back from the 'epochs' of more modern tables to coincide with a mythical Kaliyuga.

Professor Playfair observes that it is not for astronomy, even in its most perfect state, to go back 46 centuries and to ascertain the situation of the heavenly bodies at so remote a period, except with the help of lately developed Integral Calculus and the Theory of Gravitation. He finds that the position of the planets, as given in these tables, is very close to the positions as calculated back with the help of modern Integral Calculus and the Theory of Gravitation. All other systems of calculation, whether Chaldean or Egyptian or Greek which the Hindus might have used for their purpose, gave very different results. So for him, the inescapable conclusion is that these positions were observed by the Brahmins, and it is rather a wonder that the Brahmins could do so quite precisely at so distant a past. Professor Playfair also observed that the construction of these tables implied a good knowledge of geometry and arithmetic, as well as the possession of a Calculus equal to Trigonometry.

The paper by Colonel T.D. Pearse (1783), sent by him to the Royal Society, London, and surviving in their archives, refers to Indian knowledge of the four Satellites of Jupiter and the seven Satellites of Saturn. Pearse further felt that the Indians must have possessed some kind of telescopic instruments to have acquired such detailed knowledge. The author of Pearse's memoirs, while including a slightly modified version of this piece in the memoirs, states:

"We cannot pass this interesting communication without offering some reflection upon the subjects it embraces. The circumstance of the

four girls dancing round the figure of Jupiter, as they ought to be according to the Brahmin's statement to Colonel Pearse, is a strong argument in favour of the superior knowledge of the heavenly bodies which the ancient Arabians and Hindus possessed. The four dancing girls evidently represent the four satellites of Jupiter. These circumjovial satellites (as they are styled by modern astronomers from the quirk of their motions in their orbits) were not known in Europe before the year 1609, and the third and fourth only are visible, and this but rarely and in the clearest atmosphere to the naked eye. But it is truly interesting and curious that the figure of Saturn should be represented with seven arms. At the time Colonel Pearse wrote his letter to the Royal Society, the sixth satellite of Saturn had not been discovered: it was first discovered by Herschel on the 28th August 1789; and the seventh satellite, which the seventh arm of the figure, without dispute, must be intended to represent, was not discovered by Herschel until he had completed his grand telescope of 40 feet focal-length, when it was first observed by him on the 17th September 1789. All the satellites of Saturn are so small, and the planet is so remote from the earth, that the best telescopes are necessary for observing them. May not the seventh arm *having hold of the ring* denote a circumstance connected with the orbits of these planets, which is that the planes of their orbits so nearly accord with that of the ring, that the difference is not perceptible? Undoubtedly, the ancient astronomers must have possessed the best instruments: probably differing from modern ones, but fully as powerful."

The writer added further: "We are not aware that the Royal Society in any of its printed papers have noticed Colonel Pearse's communication, but our imagination, warmly interested as it has been in all that relates to the subject of the present memoir, has pictured the probability that Colonel Pearse's paper may have met the eye of Herschel, and may have been an additional spur to the indefatigable and wonderful labours of that great man."<sup>17</sup>

Reuben Burrow's unpublished paper on "Hints concerning the Observatory at Benares" (ca.1783) was addressed to the British Governor General Warren Hastings soon after Burrow had come to India to take up his new job at Calcutta. It is highly speculative and in a way is more in line with the contemporary intellectual tradition of the European enlightenment

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17 *Bengal: Past and Present*, vol.6, pp.279-80.

of the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Though in itself it does not provide much factual data, and perhaps comes to several erroneous conclusions (viewed from the vantage point of the twentieth century), yet its very speculativeness seems to have provided inspiration and stimulus to a number of subsequent enquiries about Indian sciences, particularly mathematics. The article “A Proof that the Hindus had the Binomial Theorem” (1790) by Burrow himself, and the 1817 dissertation by H.T. Colebrooke on “Hindu Algebra” (given as an introduction to his translation of *Algebra with Arithmetic and Mensuration* of Brahme-gupta and Bhascara) decidedly follow such speculativeness. Acknowledging Burrow’s contribution, particularly in bringing Indian Algebra to the notice of Europeans, the article on “Algebra” in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (8th edition) stated:

“We are indebted, we believe, to Mr. Reuben Burrow for some of the earliest notices which reached Europe on this very curious subject. His eagerness to illustrate the history of the mathematical sciences led him to collect oriental manuscripts, some of which in the Persian language, with partial translations, were bequeathed to his friend Mr. Dalby of the Royal Military College, who communicated them to such as took an interest in the subject, about the year 1800.”<sup>19</sup>

The article on “the Binomial Theorem” was published in 1790 in Calcutta. Until then, and in British reference books like the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* until well into the twentieth century, the discovery of this theorem has been credited to Newton.<sup>20</sup> Some thirty years later, Burrow’s article was followed by another titled “Essay on the Binomial Theorem; as known to the Arabs”.<sup>21</sup> This later article was a sequel to the first by R. Burrow, and it concluded that “it plainly appears, that whatever may have been the case in Europe, yet long before the time of Briggs the Arabians were acquainted with the Binomial Theorem.” (Briggs was teaching around 1600, about a century before Newton).

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18 The tradition in fact has well continued to the present time; only as time passed, it has become more and more eurocentric. The late 19th century dictum, “Except the blind forces of nature, nothing moves in this world which is not Greek in its origin”, enunciated by Maine (one-time Law Member of the Governor General’s Council in India), was merely an intellectual and scholarly expression of the mounting eurocentric character of this speculativeness.

19 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: 8th Edition (1850), Article on Algebra.

20 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: 11th Edition (1910-11), Article on Binomial Theorem.

21 *Asiatic Researches*, vol.13 (1820), Article by R. Tytler, M.D., pp.456-67.

This later author quoted Dr. Hutton, concerning the origin of the Binomial Theorem in Europe. The following, from the longer extract of Hutton's account, is worth quoting:

“Lucas De Burgo extracted the cube root by the same coefficients, about the year 1470. [...] Briggs was the first who taught the rule for generating the coefficients of the terms, successively one from another, of any powers of a binomial, independent of those of any other power. [...] This theorem then being thus plainly taught by Briggs about the year 1600, it is surprising how a man of such general reading as Dr. Wallis was, could be ignorant of it [...] and fully ascribe the invention to Newton. [...] But I do not wonder that Briggs' remark was unknown to Newton, who owed almost everything to genius and deep meditation, but very little to reading: and I have no doubt that he made the discovery himself, without any light from Briggs.”<sup>22</sup>

H.T. Colebrooke's dissertation on “Hindu Algebra”, resulting from all the preceding investigations by men like R. Burrow, F. Wilford, S. Davis, Edward Strachey, John Taylor, etc., and from his own considerable knowledge, is a learned survey and comparison of the developments in Europe and India. But the conclusion that “Indian Algebra”, etc. may have had an independent development, proves difficult for him to digest. Reversing the speculations of Burrow, he comes to the conclusion that the “Algebra of the Greeks” imperfect though he admits it to be, “was made known to the Hindus by their Grecian instructors in improved astronomy.”<sup>23</sup> But wishing to be gracious and charitable, he infers that “by the ingenuity of the Hindu scholars, the hint was rendered fruitful and the algebraic method was soon ripened from that slender beginning to the advanced state of a well arranged science.”

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22 Ibid.

23 The reviewer of *Algebra, with Arithmetic and Mensuration*, in the *Edinburgh Review* (November 1817) however thought differently and stated that it “could not have been derived from Greece”. Commenting on Colebrooke's opinion he added: “Mr. Colebrooke, after demonstrating the excellence of this algebra, and comparing its more perfect algorithm and its superior advancement with the Greek algebra, as explained in the work of Diophantus, seems nevertheless willing to admit, that some communication about the time of the last mentioned author, may have come from Greece to India, on the subject of the Algebraic Analysis. Of this we are inclined to doubt; for this simple reason, that the Greeks had nothing to give on that subject which it was worth the while of the Indians to receive. Mr. Colebrooke seems inclined to this concession, by the strength of a philological argument, of the force of which we are perhaps not sufficiently sensible. It seems however certain, that the facts in the history of Algebraic Analysis, taken by themselves, give no countenance to the supposition.”

### III

As contrasted with the eighteenth century European consideration and discussion on Indian sciences, the accounts of Indian technology did not give rise to passionate controversy. Perhaps such passion was neither necessary nor possible, as it ordinarily did not challenge any fundamental European dogma or belief. The results of the technology were there for all to observe and utilise. And it may incidentally be the lack of such controversy itself that explains the total current ignorance of most aspects of this technology.

It appears that Indian medical men (with whatever names they may be designated at the end of the eighteenth century) made considerable use of surgical techniques in different parts of India. According to Colonel Kyd in "Chirurgery (in which they are considered by us the least advanced) they often succeed, in removing ulcers and cutaneous irruptions of the worst kind, which have baffled the skill of our surgeons, by the process of inducing inflammation and by means directly opposite to ours, and which they have probably long been in possession of."<sup>24</sup> Dr. H. Scott seems to corroborate the above and further reports the prevalence of plastic surgery in Western India, in his letters to the then President of the Royal Society, London. In 1792, he states:

"In medicine I shall not be able to praise their science very much. It is one of those arts which is too delicate in its nature to bear war and oppression and the revolutions of governments. The effects of surgical operation are more obvious, more easily acquired and lost by no means so readily. Here I should have much to praise. They practice with great success the operation of depressing the crystalline lens when become opaque and from time immemorial they have cut for the stone at the same place which they now do in Europe. These are curious facts and I believe unknown before to us."

Two years later he refers to the "putting on noses on those who lost them" and sends to London a quantity of "Caute", the cement used for "uniting animal parts".

Inoculation against the smallpox seems to have been universal, if not throughout, in large parts of northern and southern India, until it was banned in Calcutta and other places under the Bengal Presidency (and perhaps elsewhere)

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24 India Office Records (IOR): MSS Eur F/95/I, 'Some Remarks on the Soil and Cultivation on the Western Side of the River Hooghly', ff.81r.

from around 1802-1803. Its banning, undoubtedly, was done in the name of 'humanity', and justified by the Superintendent General of Vaccine<sup>25</sup> Inoculation in his first report in March 1804.<sup>26</sup>

The most detailed account of the practice of inoculation against the smallpox in India is by J.Z. Holwell (1767), written by him for the College of Physicians in London. After giving the details of the indigenous practice, Holwell stated "When the before recited treatment of the inoculated is strictly followed, it is next to a miracle to hear, that one in a million fails of receiving the infection, or of one that miscarries under it." It is possible that Holwell's information was not as accurate as of the newly appointed Superintendent General of Vaccine Inoculation in 1804. According to the latter, fatalities amongst the inoculated were around one in two hundred amongst the Indian population and amongst the Europeans in Calcutta, etc. "one in sixty or seventy".<sup>27</sup> The wider risk, however, seems to have been in the spreading of disease by contagion from the inoculated themselves to those who for one reason or another had not been thus inoculated.

It is possible that there were some areas in India where inoculation did not prevail. This, of course, is a matter for further investigation. But wherever it did, it appears to have been universal over a whole tract. After the imposition of British rule in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, areas of Madras Presidency, etc., this situation seems to alter. According to the Superintendent General of Vaccine Inoculation, a section of the people, either "from indigence" or "from principle", did not any longer (ca.1800) receive the inoculation.<sup>28</sup> Those who did not receive it "from principle" seem to have been the Europeans in Calcutta, etc. Partly this may have been due to the greater mortality (i.e. one in sixty or seventy, as indicated above) amongst them. Further it may have also resulted from the persistence of Christian theological objections to any inoculation amongst them.<sup>29</sup>

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25 A vaccine (from the Latin *vacca*, meaning cow), from the cow, for use in inoculating against smallpox, was manufactured by Dr. E. Jenner in 1798. From then on, this vaccine replaced the previous 'variolous' matter, taken from human agents. Hence the method using the 'vaccine' came to be called 'Vaccine Inoculation'.

26 Report on the Progress of Vaccine Inoculation in Bengal, Calcutta, 1804.

27 Ibid, p.27-28.

28 Ibid, p.94.

29 See *Tracts on Inoculation*, referred to above, for the theological reasons advanced against inoculation in Britain in the eighteenth century.

Not receiving it “from indigence”, on the other hand, pertained to sections of the Indian population. Like many other categories of specialists (including school teachers, doctors, establishments of religious institutions and places, village establishments, etc.), it is probable that the inoculators in India had also been maintained on subventions from public revenues. With the imposition of British rule, the Indian fiscal system began to collapse and various categories of specialists and functionaries were thrown out on the streets and left to wholly fend for themselves. It is this development, and the simultaneous deepening of poverty amongst the people, that most probably resulted in many not being inoculated “from indigence”. Such a situation must have naturally made the practice of inoculation seem even more undesirable to the Europeans who, while they themselves did not like to be inoculated, could not however function without whole contingents of Indian domestic servants.

So what, until the latter part of the eighteenth century, when practised universally in any tract, was a relatively successful method involving no contagious effects (since all were then similarly inoculated), by 1800 had begun to seem a great hazard to the Europeans in Calcutta. But in spite of the bannings, prohibitions, etc. resorted to in Calcutta and other cities and towns, the introduction of vaccine inoculation was very halting. Such halting development must have been caused by insufficient provision of resources or by sheer indifference. Or, as hinted by the officiating Superintendent General of Vaccination for N.W.P. (the present U.P.) in 1870, it may also have been caused by the peoples’ reluctance to get vaccinated as, according to this authority, the indigenous inoculation possessed “more protective power than is possessed by vaccination performed in a damp climate.”<sup>30</sup> Whatever the causes, the indigenous inoculation seems to have been still practised around 1870. For areas near Calcutta, those who were not so inoculated are estimated at 10 per cent of the population around 1870, and for the Benares area at 36 per cent.<sup>31</sup> The frequent smallpox epidemics which were rampant in various parts of India in the nineteenth and early twentieth century may largely be traced back, on the one hand, to the state’s backwardness and indifference in making the requisite arrangement for universal vaccination; and on the other hand, to having made the existence of the indigenous practice of inoculation most difficult by not only withdrawing all support to it, but also by forcing it to be practised secretly and stealthily.

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30 IOR: Practice of Inoculation in the Benares Division: From Officiating Superintendent General of Vaccination to Government N.W.P., dated 6th June 1870, p.77.

31 Ibid., Report by R.M. Milne, Officiating Superintendent of Vaccination, dated 1st April 1870, p.72.

Another important point which emerges from Mr. Holwell's account of the Indian method of inoculation relates to the prevalence of some theory of bacterial infection amongst the mid-eighteenth century Indian inoculators. According to them: "the small-pox is more or less epidemical, more mild or malignant, in proportion as the air is charged with these animalculae", i.e. bacteria, and that these "adhere more closely, and in greater numbers, to glutinous, fat, and oily substances". That these "*imperceptible animalculae* floating in the atmosphere [...] are the cause of all epidemical diseases, but more particularly of the small-pox", that "they pass and repass in and out of the bodies of all animals in the act of respiration, without injury to themselves, or the bodies they pass through", but "such is not the case with those that are taken in with food", as these "are conveyed into the blood, where, in a certain time, their malignant juices excite a fermentation", and end "in an eruption on the skin".

The observation by Alexander Walker in his article "On Indian Agriculture" (ca.1820), that "the practice of watering and irrigation is not peculiar to the husbandry of India, but it has probably been carried there to a greater extent, and more laborious ingenuity displayed in it than in any other country", is in dramatic contrast to present day text-book accounts of "the comparative absence of artificial irrigation" in eighteenth century India.<sup>32</sup> How Indian agricultural principles, implements and practices (and these may have somewhat varied in different parts of India itself) compared with those elsewhere, in China, Egypt, various countries of Europe, etc., can only be known after detailed comparative study of the subject. The causes of relative scarcity of resources constantly facing the Indian husbandman also need to be enquired into. It is probable that in most parts of India such scarcity was of late eighteenth century origin, and directly resulted from political causes. But it seems clear that besides widespread artificial irrigation, the practices of (i) crop rotation, (ii) manuring, (iii) sowing by means of the drill-plough, and (iv) the use of a variety of other implements were fairly widespread. The nature and quality of soils seemed to be well understood and in areas like Malabar, certain species of paddy are propagated by cuttings. The use of the drill plough, however, (and perhaps also of some other implements and practices), varied from husbandman to husbandman, the poor not being in a position to use it as it required larger resources not only in implements but also in draught cattle. The latter-day decline in the variety and efficiency of agricultural implements seems to be a result of the general economic

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32 Rameshchandra Majumdar, H.C. Raychaudhuri, Kalikinkar Datta: *An Advanced History of India*, 3rd edition (1967), p.564.

impoverishment brought about by the state appropriating all it possibly could in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup>

The composition of the “Madrass Mortar” (1732) is very curious, while the process of making paper (1774) is perhaps not very different from that currently in use in the manufacture of hand-made paper. The report on the process of making ice, however, is still more fascinating. It was first published in 1775 in London. But it appears that this subject and the manner in which ice was made had been observed even earlier by a number of Britishers in India and had given rise to considerable scientific curiosity in England. The artificial making of ice seems to have been until then unknown in Britain (and perhaps also in other European countries). The observation that “boiling the water is esteemed a necessary preparative to this method of congelation” aroused particular interest. Sir Robert Barker, the author of this article, while referring to this point wondered “how far this may be consonant with philosophical reasoning” (i.e., with scientific proof). As a consequence, after carrying out various experiments, the professor of Chemistry at Edinburgh University provided the following explanation:

“The boiled and common water differ from one another in this respect; that whereas the common water, when exposed in a state of tranquility to air that is a few degrees colder than the freezing point, may easily be cooled to the degree of such air, and still continue perfectly fluid, provided it still remains undisturbed; the boiled water, on the contrary, cannot be preserved fluid in these circumstances; but when cooled down to the freezing point, if we attempt to make it the least colder, a part of it is immediately changed into ice; after which, by the continued action of the cold air upon it, more ice is formed in it every moment, until the whole of it gradually congealed before it can become as cold as the air that surrounds it. From this discovery it is easy to understand, why they find it necessary to boil the water in India, in order to obtain ice.”<sup>34</sup>

Dr. H. Scott (in his paper on “Aspects of Technology in Western India”, 1790-1801) makes mention of many other processes as well as of dyeing and other agents and substances. “Dammer: a substance in universal use through

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33 The material concerning the proportion taken away by the state of the gross produce of agriculture constitutes a major portion of British Indian archival documents. Theoretically, the land revenue due to government was fixed at 50 per cent. For large parts of India under British rule, until 1855 or so, the proportion which during most years actually went towards governmental land revenue was appreciably higher. For instance, according to certain enquiries in the Madras Presidency Ryotwary areas during the 1850s, about one-third of the irrigated land had over the years altogether gone out of cultivation, as the amount of land revenue on such land had begun to approximate the gross produce itself, and at times even exceeded it.

34 *Philosophical Transactions*, vol.65 (1775), Article by Joseph Black, M.D., pp.124-8.

the whole Eastern world”, for covering the bottom of ships and for other uses where water proofing was required, was one such.

But the substance which seems to have evoked most scientific and technical interest in Britain of the 1790s was the sample of *wootz* steel sent by Dr. Scott to Sir Joseph Banks, President of the British Royal Society. The sample went through examination and analysis by several experts.<sup>35</sup> It was found in general to match the best steel then available in Britain, and according to one user, “promises to be of importance to the manufactures of”<sup>36</sup> Britain. He found it “excellently adapted for the purpose of fine cutlery, and particularly for all edge instruments used for surgical purposes”. After its being sent as a sample in 1794 and its examination and analysis in late 1794 and early 1795, it began to be much in demand; and some 18 years later the afore-quoted user of steel stated, “I have at this time a liberal supply of *wootz*, and I intend to use it for many purposes. If a better steel is offered to me, I will gladly attend to it; but the steel of India is decidedly the best I have yet met with.”<sup>37</sup>

Until well into the nineteenth century, Britain produced very little of the steel it required and imported it mostly from Sweden, Russia, etc. Partly, Britain’s lag in steel production was due to the inferior quality of its iron ore, and the fuel, i.e. coal, it used.<sup>38</sup> Possibly such lag also resulted from Britain’s backwardness in the comprehension of processes and theories on which the production of good steel depended.

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35 *Philosophical Transactions*, vol.85 (1795), ‘Experiments and Observations to investigate the Nature of a Kind of Steel, manufactured at Bombay, and there called Wootz: with Remarks on the Properties and Composition of the different States of Iron’, by George Pearson, M.D., F.R.S., pp.322-346. See also D. Mushet: *Experiments on Wootz or Indian Steel* (British Museum 727. k.3), pp.650-62.

36 Stodart to B. Heyne: Quoted in Heyne’s *Tracts on India*, 1814, p.363. According to Robert Hadfield, Stodart was probably ‘the same Mr Stodart who many years later assisted Faraday in preparing and investigating a large number of steel alloys’ (*Journal of Iron and Steel Institute*, Vol.85). According to Heyne, Stodart was ‘an eminent instrument-maker’, and according to Pearson, whom he assisted in conducting the experiments on Wootz in 1794-5, Stodart was an ‘ingenious artist’.

37 *Ibid.* p.364.

38 Writing in 1824, J.M. Heath, later a leading manufacturer of iron and steel at Sheffield, stated: “It is well known that England is entirely dependent upon foreign countries for all the iron required for this purpose, and last year the importation of foreign iron into England, for the purpose of making steel alone, exceeded 12,000 tons. [...] Year after year does the Society for the Encouragement of Arts offer a premium for the manufacture of English Iron fit for steel making, and to this time the premium has never been claimed; nor is it likely that it ever will, from the nature of the English ores, and the inferior quality of the English fuel.” (*Madras Public Proceedings*, January 1825)

Whatever may have been the understanding in the other European countries regarding the details of the processes employed in the manufacture of Indian steel, the British, at the time *wootz* was examined and analysed by them, concluded “that it is made directly from the ore; and consequently that it has never been in the state of wrought iron.”<sup>39</sup> Its qualities were thus ascribed to the quality of the ore from which it came and these qualities were considered to have little to do with the techniques and processes employed by the Indian manufacturers. In fact it was felt that the various cakes of *wootz* were of uneven texture and the cause of such imperfection and defects was thought to lie in the crudeness of the techniques employed.

It was only some three decades later that this view was revised. An earlier revision in fact, even when confronted with contrary evidence as was made available by other observers of the Indian techniques and processes, was an intellectual impossibility. “That iron could be converted into cast steel by fusing it in a close vessel in contact with carbon” was yet to be discovered, and it was only in 1825 that a British manufacturer “took out a patent for converting iron into steel by exposing it to the action of carburetted hydrogen gas in a closed vessel, at a very high temperature, by which means the process of conversion is completed in a few hours, while by the old method, it was the work of from 14 to 20 days.”<sup>40</sup>

According to J.M. Heath, founder of the Indian Iron and Steel Company, and later prominently connected with the development of steel making in Sheffield, the Indian process appeared to combine both of the above early nineteenth century British discoveries. He observed:

“Now it appears to me that the Indian process combines the principles of both the above described methods. On elevating the temperature of the crucible containing pure iron, and dry wood, and green leaves, an abundant evolution of carburetted hydrogen gas would take place from the vegetable matter, and as its escape would be prevented by the luting at the mouth of the crucible, it would be retained in contact with the iron, which, at a high temperature, appears [from the above-mentioned patent process] to have a much greater affinity for gaseous than for concrete carbon; this would greatly shorten the operation, and probably at a much lower temperature than were the iron in contact with charcoal powder.”<sup>41</sup>

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39 *Philosophical Transactions*, vol.85, Pearson's Experiments, p.345.

40 J.M. Heath: 'On Indian Iron and Steel', quoted in D. Mushet, *op.cit.*, FN 35, p.671.

41 *Ibid.*

And he added:

“In no other way can I account for the fact that iron is converted into cast steel by the natives of India, in two hours and a half, with an application of heat, that, in this country, would be considered quite inadequate to produce such an effect; while at Sheffield it requires at least four hours to melt blistered steel in wind-furnaces of the best construction, although the crucibles in which the steel is melted, are at a white heat when the metal is put into them, and in the Indian process, the crucibles are put into the furnace quite cold.”<sup>42</sup>

The above quoted British authority however did not imply that the Indian practice was based on a knowledge “of the theory of his operations” by the Indian manufacturer. He felt it to be impossible “that the process was discovered by any scientific induction, for the theory of it can only be explained by the lights of modern chemistry”.<sup>43</sup> And feeling that “all speculation upon the origin of the discovery seems useless”, he proceeded to deal with the more practical matters.

Several scores of British accounts (some more, some less detailed) pertaining to widely separated areas of India, and perhaps pertaining to about a hundred districts, are available on the Indian manufacture of iron and steel. Though some date from the 1790s, most were written during the period 1820-1855. Major Franklin’s report (1829) is probably the most graphic and detailed amongst them, while Captain Campbell’s (1842) tries to provide some perspective and comparison of the different processes and corresponding details prevailing in different countries. Though there seem to be some fairly detailed accounts of the process of Indian iron and steel manufacture in other European languages dating back to the late seventeenth century,<sup>44</sup> Dr. Heyne’s report (1795) is probably one of the earliest British accounts of it.

The design, measurements, and construction of the furnaces and accessory implements, described by Franklin, require much detailed examination by experts. Similar examination is essential for the large amounts of data provided in all these reports. But a cursory examination of the data seems to indicate that the proportion of iron recovered from the ore and the amount of charcoal required to produce a given quantity of crude iron in Central India is comparable with the respective ratios pertaining to the manufacture of iron and steel in

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42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., pp.669, 671.

44 See, for instance, an English version of D. Havart’s *Rise and Decline of Coromandel* (from the original Dutch, Utrecht 1692/1693), pp.291-94, 401-3, in Mackenzie MSS (Private), vol.88, in IOR.

Sweden, etc. It is possible that these quantities varied considerably in different parts of India. Maybe, with the continuous deterioration which had set in, the consumption of fuel in the production of iron increased considerably. It is perhaps due to this later development, or based on the data from some selected areas, that Mahadeva Govind Ranade remarked (in the 1890s) that indigenous Indian “processes involve a great waste of power and resources, as much as fourteen tons of fuel being required to produce one ton of iron”. And thus he concluded that “besides the effects of foreign competitors, the collapse of the iron industry has been brought about by the increasing scarcity of fuel.”<sup>45</sup>

According to Franklin, 140 seers of charcoal produced 70 seers of crude iron at Aggeriya, in the district of Jabalpur. At Jowli, in the same district, 165 seers of charcoal were required to produce 77 seers of crude iron. How much charcoal was required to convert the crude into malleable and wrought iron is not indicated in this report, but considering that the amount of charcoal required to convert the ore into crude iron is of the same order as the quantities required in European countries, it may be inferred that the requirement of fuel in subsequent processes would not have been very different.

It is not easy to estimate the total number of such furnaces which may have been in operation in various parts of India in the eighteenth century. Certain mid-nineteenth century enumerations, however, place the number of furnaces operating in certain districts, talooks, etc. in hundreds. It is, therefore, probable that the number of iron and steel furnaces functioning throughout India in the latter part of the eighteenth century was in the region of 10,000. According to the data given by Franklin, the production of iron per furnace amounted to somewhat above half a ton per week. Assuming that a furnace on an average worked about 35-40 weeks a year, the potential production of iron per furnace may be assumed at 20 tons annually.

Besides the furnaces and accessories so graphically described by Franklin, certain other devices varying from area to area also appear to have been used in Indian metallurgy. One such was the use of the *Panchakki* (water-mill) in the crushing of ore by the manufacturers of Kumaon and Garhwal. According to J.D. Herbert and J. Manson, “in reducing the ore to fragments, the Dhunpoor miners employ the *Panchakki* or water-mill. When water is present no better plan can be devised.”<sup>46</sup>

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45 M.G. Ranade: *Essays on Indian Economics*, 3rd edition, 1916, p.155.

46 National Archives of India (NAI): Home, Misc. Records, vol.437, Report of the Mineralogical Survey of the Himalaya Mountains, 1826, p.627.

Several questions arise out of the material on technology described and discussed here. One of them originates from the generally shared European opinion, and at times assertion, that the Indian manufacturer of iron and steel, and in other instances of other commodities or practitioners in other professions, could not have had any knowledge “of the theory of his operations”. Though such opinions essentially originated from the ethnocentric views and inclinations<sup>47</sup> of the societies to which such observers belonged, and were not in their essence derived from the subject observed and described, these, as mere statements which generally hold true at all times, need not be disputed. But most practitioners of a profession which they have learnt after a long apprenticeship and in which their essential job is to repeat ever more perfectly what they had done before, never require, and seldom possess, such knowledge. The possession of such knowledge and its development and refinement is, at all times, the function of a separate, though interlinked, group. Such division between the practitioners and the theoreticians is currently more evident than ever before.

It is possible that the link between the practitioners of the various techniques or professions and the professors of the theoretical knowledge relating to them had largely snapped in India by the end of the eighteenth century. It is even probable that, though not altogether snapped, such a break had begun to take place centuries earlier. This, however, is a view which cannot be determined by mere conjecture. Its substantiation requires detailed studies of Indian techniques and processes as they operated over several centuries until the early nineteenth.

But even if these links had already snapped, but the practices had continued, it is very probable that in a changed political climate, resulting from the success of the early eighteenth century resurgence, such links as demanded by the situations, would either have been re-established between the practitioners and the surviving professors of the theoretical knowledge, or been newly forged by the emergence of appropriate formulations.

Another question that arises from the above discussion on the manufacture of Indian iron and steel is that if Indian iron and steel manufacturing processes were so very superior and spread throughout the country, why did they

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47 Even the British Royal Society does not seem to have remained untouched by such inclinations. Referring to the letter of Dr. Scott on *wootz* it quoted him as having written that it “admits of a harder temper than anything known in that part of India”. What Dr. Scott had actually stated was that “it appears to admit of a harder temper than anything we are acquainted with”. As is obvious, Dr. Scott’s ‘we’ implied ‘we in Europe’. But as this must have seemed inadmissible in the pages of the *Philosophical Transactions*, the observation got altered to “than anything known in that part of India”. (See *Philosophical Transactions*, vol.85, p.322)

disappear? So far, our knowledge of such widespread manufacture has itself been very scanty. Therefore, answers to such a question at present can merely be tentative. The disappearance seems to have resulted mainly from large-scale economic breakdown and hostile state policy. From about 1800 onwards, India was to be treated as a consumer of British manufactures. Yet some of the British in India did visualise the undertaking of large scale production of iron and steel in India. But even they, when they came forth with such plans, took great pains in stating that such production would in no way injure the production in Britain or the consumption of British iron in India. Even this type of proposition was, however, difficult for the British Government to contemplate. For example, replying to an early application for setting up such works in the Bengal area, the London authorities in 1814 stated: "But as we entertain strong doubts as to the policy of encouraging the prosecution of such works to any extent, we direct that no further expense may be incurred."<sup>48</sup>

#### IV

Many other aspects of science and technology are not at all referred to in the accounts which are reproduced in the following pages. Textiles, armaments, horticultural techniques, breeding of animals are some of those omitted aspects. The designing and construction of boats and other sea-faring vessels are also not referred to. A mention in this respect may, however, be made of an observation by Solvyns in *Les Hindous*. Introducing the 40 or so sketches of boats and river vessels in use in northern India in the 1790s, he observed: "the English, attentive to everything which relates to naval architecture, have borrowed from the Hindoos many improvements which they have adapted with success to their own shipping."<sup>49</sup> Commenting on Indian rowing, an early eighteenth century observer remarked: "Their water-men row after a different manner from ours. They move the oar with their feet, and their hands serve instead of the *hypomochlion*, or roller on which it turns."<sup>50</sup>

It is not as if nothing at all is known of the various accounts reproduced in this volume. The reports dealing with astronomy and mathematics are perhaps known to many concerned scholars. The accounts dealing with the manufacture of paper, the composition of the 'Madrass Mortar' and Iron Works at Ramanakapettah are possibly known to a still wider circle. Even the practice of inoculation against the smallpox is known to have existed in ancient times in India, for, according to one modern writer, "Preventive inoculation against the

48 IOR: *Public Despatch to Bengal*, July 29, 1814, para 9.

49 Frans Balthazar Solvyns: *Les Hindous*, Paris 1808-1812, 4 vols.

50 *Philosophical Transactions*, vol.28, from Fr. Papin, Bengale, December 18, 1709, p.226.

smallpox, which was practised in China from the eleventh century, apparently came from India”.<sup>51</sup> Something also seems to be known about the manufacture of iron and steel in Salem through the writings about it by Campbell, the Assistant Surveyor General, Madras. Ranade himself seems to have been fairly well informed about the export of *wootz* to England and other countries, though he leaves the time vague.

But all this knowledge among the scholars and prominent writers on Indian economics has not so far created any general awareness of the teaching and practice of these sciences and technologies, nor the questioning of the prevailing hypothesis of “the eighteenth century” being “the darkest period” in Indian history.<sup>52</sup> The reasons for the lack of appropriate awareness or for the prevailing indifference are perhaps manifold. Primarily the responsibility for such a situation lies with the system of education prevailing in India, which by nurturing indifference, even contempt, for everything indigenous effectively blocks such enquiries.

The intellectual basis of the contempt and indifference, which began to grow around the close of the eighteenth century itself, is perhaps best illustrated by the article on “Algebra” in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in its 8th edition (1850). Discussing Indian Algebra, it referred to a review by Prof. John Playfair of Colebrooke’s work on Indian Algebra, and observed:

“This last article, published in 1817, may be supposed to contain the matured opinions of one of the most ardent, able, and we must say most candid, enquirers into the history of Hindoo mathematical science. There is here certainly an abatement of his first confidence in the opinion of Bailly on the Indian astronomy, and a corresponding caution in his own opinion as to the antiquity of the mathematical sciences. The very remote origin of the Indian Astronomy had been strongly questioned by many in this country, and also on the Continent; particularly by Laplace, also by Delambre in his *Histoire de l’Astronomie Ancienne*, tome I, p.400, &c., and again *Histoire de l’Astronomie du Moyen Age, discours préliminaire*, p.18, &c., where he speaks slightly of their algebra.”

The article added: “and in this country, Professor Leslie, in his very learned work on *The Philosophy of Arithmetic*, p.225 and 226, calls the *Lilavati* ‘a very poor performance, containing merely a few scanty precepts couched in obscure memorial verses’”. Playfair’s observations, alluded to on this occasion,

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51 Kurt Pollak: *The Healers: The Doctor, Then and Now*, English Edition 1968, pp.37-38.

52 R.C. Majumdar, et al.: *An Advanced History of India*, op.cit., p.561.

while differing from the views of Leslie etc., expressed some scholarly scepticism of the Indians' capacity in mathematical sciences. He had said:

“Among many subjects of wonder which the study of these ancient fragments cannot fail to suggest, it is not one of the least that algebra has existed in India, and has been cultivated for more than 1200 years, without any signal improvement, or the addition of any material discovery. The works of the ancient teachers of science have been commented on, elucidated, and explained with skill and learning; but no new methods have been invented, nor any new principle introduced. The method of resolving indeterminate problems, that constitute the highest merit of their analytical science, were known to Brahme Gupta hardly less accurately than to Bhascara; and they appear to have been understood even by Aryabhatta, more ancient by several centuries than either. A long series of scholiasts display in their annotations great acuteness, intelligence, and judgement; but they never pass far beyond the line drawn by their predecessors, which probably seemed even to those learned and intelligent men as the barrier within which it was to be confined. In India, indeed, everything seems equally insurmountable, and truth and error are equally assured of permanence in the stations they have once occupied. The politics, the laws, the religion, the science, and the manners, seem all nearly the same as at the remotest period to which history extends. Is it because the power which brought about a certain degree of civilisation, and advanced science to a certain height, has either ceased to act, or has met with such a resistance as it is barely able to overcome? Or is it because the discoveries which the Hindoos are in possession of are an inheritance from some more inventive and more ancient people, of whom no memorial remains but some of their attainments in science?”<sup>53</sup>

The choice of this passage during the 1850s by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was in keeping with the sentiments of the period. But the 24 page unsigned article in the *Edinburgh Review* (Nov. 1817), from which this sceptical passage is taken, had also said many other things. Earlier in the article, Playfair observed:

“A commentary on the *Vija Ganita*, bearing the date of 1602, contains a full exposition of the sense, with complete demonstrations of the rules, much in the manner of Ganesa; and there is a scholiast of a still later date, who appears to have flourished about the year 1621. If, therefore, it be true, that the Hindus of the present time understand nothing

53 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: 8th edition, Article on Algebra.

of their scientific books the decline of knowledge among them must have been very rapid, as it is plain that, at the distance, of less than two centuries from the present time, the light of science was shining in India with considerable lustre.”

Proceeding further while deploring the lack of ‘analysis’ even in the *Vija Ganita*, he noted that Brahme Gupta had given “a solution that appears quite general” concerning “Indeterminate Problems”. And he observed: “The solution then of a very difficult problem given by an Indian Algebraist, more than 1200 years ago, is such as can vie with those of two of the mathematicians the most distinguished for genius and invention which Europe could boast of ever having seen, at the end of the eighteenth century.” Dismissing that the finding of such a solution by Brahme Gupta may have been due to chance, he added, “there are inquiries where chance and accident have great influence and where a man of very inferior genius and knowledge may make great discoveries. But the subject we are treating of here, is not of that number; it is one where no one *finds*, who does not know how to *search*; and where there is no reward but for intense thought, and patient inquiry.”

Given the doubts of academicians like Playfair and of Laplace, Delambre, etc. (as well as the supporting role of the fast multiplying tribe of ‘oriental scholars’ amongst the servants of the British authorities in India, including those amongst the missionaries), Macaulay’s verdict on Indian sciences and learning was inevitable. Only Macaulay expresses such doubts and contempt with greater drama and bombast. But what he said, in his Minute of February 2, 1835, was shared fully not only by the then British Governor General of India, Bentinck (“I give my entire concurrence to the sentiments expressed in this minute”), but practically by every other learned or powerful European. Referring to the orientalist, Macaulay observed:

“I have never found one amongst them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee [of Public Instruction] who support the oriental plan of education.”

And then he added:

“It will hardly be disputed, I suppose, that the department of literature in which the Eastern writers stand highest is poetry. And I certainly never met with any orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanskrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. But when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts

are recorded and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgement used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same.”

Concluding, Macaulay refused to associate himself with any support or assistance to Indian learning and declaimed:

“If on the other hand, it be the opinion of the Government that the present system ought to remain unchanged, I beg that I may be permitted to retire from the chair of the committee. I feel that I could not be of the smallest use to them. I feel also that I should be lending my countenance to what I firmly believe to be a mere delusion. I believe that the present system tends not to accelerate the progress of truth but to delay the natural death of expiring errors. I conceive that we have at present no right to the respectable name of a Board of Public Instruction. We are a Board for wasting the public money, for printing books which are of less value than the paper on which they are printed was while it was blank,— for giving artificial encouragement to absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics, absurd theology,— for raising up a breed of scholars who find their scholarship an incumbrance and a blemish, who live on the public while they are receiving their education, and whose education is so utterly useless to them that, when they have received it, they must either starve or live on the public all the rest of their lives. Entertaining these opinions I am naturally desirous to decline all share in the responsibility of a body which, unless it alters its whole mode of proceedings, I must consider not merely as useless, but as positively noxious.”<sup>54</sup>

Remarks, observations, threats and declamations, like those quoted above, have shaped all the writing and teaching about India, and more or less continue to do so, in the manner and direction indicated by Macaulay and by his more (though less known in India) powerful precursors like William Wilberforce and James Mill.<sup>55</sup> Ignorance, apathy and utter mental confusion, particularly about

54 NAI: India Public Proceedings, March 7, 1835, Minutes on Public Instruction.

55 See, amongst others, *Speeches of William Wilberforce on India in the British House of Commons in 1813*, also James Mill's *History of British India*, 1817, particularly vol.I.

life and society in the eighteenth century, not only in India but in West Europe itself, are the natural products of such writing and teaching.

The doubts and declamations (of Playfair, Laplace, Macaulay, etc.), however, are not the sole causes of this ignorance and apathy. These seem to arise, partly, from much deeper issues which pertain to the conflicting hypotheses about state and society. The seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century European view of society, and thus of science, technology, politics, etc., was diametrically at variance with the views about them held by non-European societies during the same period.

Consequently, the sciences and technologies of the non-European world also had different seekings and developments to those of Europe. Further, in countries like India, their organisation was in tune with their more decentralist politics and there was no seeking to make their tools and work places unnecessarily gigantic and grandiose. Smallness and simplicity of construction, as of the iron and steel furnaces or of the drill-ploughs, was in fact due to social and political maturity as well as arising from an understanding of the principles and processes involved. Instead of being crude, the processes and tools of eighteenth century India appear to have developed from a great deal of sophistication in theory and a heightened sense of the aesthetic.

It is in such a context that a man like Voltaire considered India “famous for its laws and sciences”, and deplored the mounting European preoccupation (both individual and national) of those in India with the amassing of “immense fortunes”. This quest for riches intensified the struggles, plunder, etc., during his own time, and made him remark that “If the Indians had remained unknown to the Tartars and to us, they would have been the happiest people in the world.”<sup>56</sup> Looking back at what has happened since he wrote these lines, Voltaire seems to have been very perceptive in his judgment. But the whole world, if such contacts had not occurred, would have been very different not only in politics and society but also in science and technology. Speculations about how it may have been, though fascinating, are far beyond the scope of this volume.

A question yet remains. This is about how sciences and technologies which seem to have been very much alive about eight to ten generations ago have been wholly eclipsed. The causes of such eclipse are very complex. Some of them are also, until there is systematic and detailed research about Indian science and society, largely speculative. A few of them may, however, be suggested here.

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56 Voltaire: *Collected Works*, vol.38 (BM 1341 d 8), pp.83-84, 87.

Firstly, the notion that all these sciences and technologies have wholly disappeared is not altogether true. Residues of many of them still exist and function but at a most neglected and impoverished level. For instance, it is said that some aspects of indigenous plastic surgery were being practised until recently in places as far apart as Kangra and Junagadh.<sup>57</sup>

The second point relates to the economic breakdown of India during 1750-1900. Whatever may have been the nature and extent of exploitation of the agricultural and manufacturing population, or the question of what happened to the extorted money and goods (the 50 percent of the gross agricultural product taken as governmental land revenue was one such), the point that the breakdown of the economy was overwhelming and total is indisputable. No sciences or technologies can survive intact such catastrophe.

A third point, which may be indicated, relates to the contrary nature of the new state fiscal system as compared to the indigenous system (or systems) prevailing at the beginning of European impact. It seems that, on the one hand, the indigenous budgeting of state revenues (whether for larger or smaller political entities) left the overwhelming proportion of revenue, through various in-built devices, at the local levels. The British-created fiscal system, on the other hand, not only doubled or trebled the rates of various assessments and effectively brought all people under its sway, but it took away the overwhelming proportions to the central exchequers and the metropolises and places above them. The studied neglect and contempt, referred to above, added to the economic breakdown and the transformation of the fiscal system, seems to have completed the uprooting and elimination of indigenous sciences and technologies, not only from society, but from Indian memory itself.

There are many philosophical formulations about the growth and decline of human societies (or the various stages which they are supposed to pass through). The theory of atrophy, as usually applied to India, is one of them. It is possible that it also has some relevance in explaining the growth, flowering and decline of Indian society. Though the contemporary data, as separate from opinions and formulations, does not seem to indicate that the eighteenth century sciences and technologies in India were in a state of atrophy, some of them may well have been in such a state. It is possible, too, that various other current or past formulations on the subject of growth and decline of human societies also have some contribution to make in explaining what happened to Indian science and society over the millennia.

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57 See S.C. Almast: 'History and Evolution of Indian Method of Rhinoplasty', in *Proceedings of Fourth International Congress on Plastic Surgery*, Rome, 1967, Excerpta Medica Foundation, Amsterdam, 1969.

Whatever may be the actual relevance of the theory of atrophy or other theories of European origin in explaining the development of Indian society, it appears much more probable that in most respects the sciences and technologies of India had reached a desirable balance and equilibrium much before the eighteenth century. In the context of the values and aptitudes of Indian culture and social norms (and the consequent political structure and institutions), the sciences and technologies of India, instead of being in a state of atrophy, were in actuality usefully performing the tasks desired by Indian society. It is the application of unrelated standards and judgments (particularly those emanating from eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe) which hide and distort the actual situation and relationship.

## V

It appears to the present researcher that, though organisationally weak in a military-political sense, in most respects the political and social ideas of India, its legal and administrative arrangements as well as sciences and technologies had achieved maturity and balance at some time previous to its early modern contact with the European world. Its social and political structure at this period, though seemingly different from those that obtain in the European world of today, was able to provide basically a similar sort of freedom, well-being and social security as is at present available in much of the European world. It also seems to have had somewhat similar ideas about the ruler-ruled relationship, the resolution of disputes, legal punishments, sexual mores, protests against those in authority, etc. But while the whole led to more freedom and equality, these characteristics, added to a basically decentralised political and military structure, contributed to this society becoming more prone to external attack.

During the centuries, particularly between the twelfth and seventeenth, there is no dearth of such external onslaughts. The onslaughts to an extent are absorbed and accommodated by Indian society. Yet over a time, they contribute not only to further political and military weakness, but also to damaging the various integrating factors which had provided the necessary intellectual and spiritual links between different regions as well as specialist and ethnic groups. But over all, though considerably weaker and perhaps also psychologically at a low ebb, the major arrangements and expressions continued to serve the physical, social and spiritual needs of the Indian people satisfactorily.

At the time of the European onslaught, the indigenous tendencies in India seem to have been in a state of slow resurgence. The resurgence, while it

restored a measure of confidence, weakened at the same time the political and military structure. With the beginning of European dominance in India, the resurgence got transformed into depression and unimaginable disorganisation. Foreign aggression and dominance was not wholly unknown in India before the resort to it by Europe in the mid-eighteenth century. But the Europeans of this period belonged to a wholly alien world in relation to India. They were not only armed with the concepts and hierarchical institutions of a long feudal European past, but had also been preparing for the occasion for two to three centuries. The subsequent application of their concepts and values completed the destruction of Indian science and society which had been started by the political and military defeat of India at their hands.

What has developed in India in the field of science and technology during the past century, and at a greater pace since 1947, is mainly a transplanting of some of that which has developed during this period in the European world. Such transplanting has happened not only at the level of theories, but even more so as regards the organisation of technology and the direction of research. It is largely due to such transplanting and its unthinking acceptance that, though many individual Indian scientists and technologists are as creative and inventive as their colleagues in the European world, the impact of this science and technology on the larger society of India is in fact minimal. It is perhaps no exaggeration to add that the field of science and technology in India, as far as it concerns its ordinary life, is only a little less barren than the fields of India's state system as well as its politics.

Borrowing of ideas and practices in themselves need not be obstructive to development or creativity. During the centuries, India must have borrowed many ideas and practices from other lands in the same way as Europe received much in the field of science and technology from the Arabs etc., or the Arabs and others did from India. To the extent that such borrowings lead to further innovation and creativity they are to be greatly welcomed. Unfortunately, so far, the past century's unthinking transplanting of European sciences and technologies in India has resulted mainly in retarding and blunting indigenous innovation and creativity.

The problem for India today, as perhaps for many other lands which are still recovering from the effects of eighteenth and nineteenth century European dominance, is how to achieve and increase such innovation and creativity. Such innovation and creativity can arise, however, only from a widespread indigenous base. Such a base has yet to be identified (and the superstructure accordingly

modified and linked with it) in countries like India. For that, knowledge and comprehension of how they functioned before the beginning of this dominance seem to be essential. Even for the purposeful adaptations from European (or for that matter Japanese, Chinese or any other) science and technology and the integration of these with the more indigenous concepts, knowledge and forms, it is necessary that these countries achieve such knowledge and comprehension at the earliest possible.

3

Civil Disobedience and Indian  
Tradition (1971)



## Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition (1971)

This slim volume (bearing the subtitle: *With Some Early Nineteenth Century Documents*, Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh, 1971) provides empirical evidence for the historical roots of Gandhian *satyagraha* on the basis of colonial reports about wide-scale protests during the period 1810-1811 in the city of Varanasi and the surrounding districts. The book's foreword is by Jayaprakash Narayan, and its detailed introduction by Dharampal is being reproduced here. The text, in delineating the historical and political context for the popular resistance to the colonial imposition of a new house-tax, considered arbitrary and unjust, underscores the dynamics of non-cooperation and civil disobedience as still being practised in early 19th century India. Significantly, Shri Dharampal discusses the traditional concept of the ruler-ruled relationship which allowed for the possibility of negotiation to redress grievances against injustice, an ethico-political mechanism which became increasingly tenuous as a result of colonial hegemony. References in the text to the official documents in the volume (pp.1-115) are being omitted. For an analysis of this documentary evidence, the reader is invited to consult the original volume, or its reprint in: Dharampal, *Collected Writings*, Other India Press: Mapusa 2000 (reissued 2003 & 2007), vol.II. Translations into Gujarati and Hindi were published in *Dharampal Samagra Lekhan* (11 vols.), edited by Indumati Katdare, Punarutthan Trust, Ahmedabad 2005 and 2007, respectively. This work, constituting an innovative approach to understanding the politico-cultural traditions of Mahatma Gandhi's political ethics and strategy, received a highly acclaimed review entitled "People's right to disobey", in: *Resurgence* (edited by Satish Kumar), November / December 1973.



# Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition (1971)

## Introduction

### I

Traditionally, what has been the attitude of the Indian people, collectively as well as individually, towards state power or political authority? The prevalent view seems to be that, with some rare exceptions, the people of India have been docile, inert and submissive in the extreme. It is implied that they look up to their governments as children do towards their parents. Text books on Indian history abound with such views.

The past half century or so, however, does not substantiate this image of docility and submissiveness. Many, in fact, regret the supposed transformation. But all, whether they deplore or welcome it, attribute it to the spread of European ideas of disaffection, and most of all to the role of Mahatma Gandhi in the public life of India. According to them, the people of India would have remained inert, docile and submissive if they somehow could have been protected from the European infection and from Mahatma Gandhi.

The twentieth century Indian people's protest against governmental injustice, callousness and tyranny (actual or supposed) has expressed itself in two forms: one with the aid of some arms, the other unarmed. The protest and resistance with arms has by and large been limited to a few individuals or very small groups of a highly disciplined cadre. Aurobindo, Savarkar, Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekar Azad (to name some) have, in their time, been the spectacular symbols of such armed protest. Unarmed protest and resistance is better known under the names of non-cooperation, civil disobedience and satyagraha. This latter mode of protest owes its twentieth century origin, organisation and practice to Mahatma Gandhi.

In the main, there are two views about the origins of non-cooperation and civil disobedience initiated by Gandhi, firstly in South Africa and later in India. According to one group of scholars, Gandhi learnt them from Thoreau, Tolstoy, Ruskin, etc. According to the other, non-cooperation and civil disobedience were Gandhi's own unique discovery, born out of his own creative genius and heightened spirituality. Mahatma Gandhi's own indication of his primary inspiration is provided in *Hind Swaraj*.

There are many statements about the European or American origin of Mahatma Gandhi's civil disobedience. According to one authority on Thoreau,

Thoreau's "essay, *Resistance to Civil Government*, a sharp statement of the duty of resistance to governmental authority when it is unjustly exercised, has become the foundation of the Indian civil disobedience movement."<sup>1</sup> According to a recent writer, "Gandhi got non-cooperation from Thoreau, and he agreed with Ruskin on cooperation."<sup>2</sup> According to yet another writer, "Gandhi agreed with Seeley only in order to apply the lesson learned from Thoreau, William Lloyd Garrison and Tolstoy. The lesson was that the withdrawal of Indian support from the British would bring on the collapse of their rule."<sup>3</sup>

The protagonists of the second view are equally large in number, the more scholarly amongst them linking Gandhi's inspiration to Prahalada or other figures of antiquity. According to R.R. Diwakar, taking his inspiration from Prahalada, Socrates, etc., Gandhi adapted "a nebulous, semi-religious doctrine to the solution of the problems of day-to-day life and thus gave to humanity a new weapon to fight evil and injustice non-violently." Taking note of the traditional Indian practices of *dharna*, *hartal* and *dasatyaga* (leaving the land with all one's belongings), Diwakar comes to the conclusion that "their chief concern was the extramundane life and that too of the individual, not of the group or community", and states that "there are no recorded instances in Indian history of long-drawn strikes of the nature of the modern 'general strike'."<sup>4</sup> According to an analyst of Gandhi's political philosophy, "the Gandhian method of non-violent resistance was novel in the history of mass actions waged to resist encroachments upon human freedom."<sup>5</sup> According to another recent student of Gandhi, Gandhian non-cooperation and civil disobedience "was a natural growth and flowering of a practical philosophy implicit in his social milieu."<sup>6</sup>

These two views are integrated in a recent introduction to Thoreau's essay *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, referred to above. The writer of this introduction states:

"Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience marked a significant transition in the development of non-violent action. Before Thoreau, civil disobedience was largely practised by individuals and groups who desired simply to remain true to their beliefs in an evil world. There was little or

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1 *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (1963), article on Thoreau by Max Lerner.

2 Atulananda Chakravarti, *The Lonesome Pilgrim* (1969), p.32.

3 C.D.S. Devanesan, *The Making of the Mahatma* (1969), pp.378-9.

4 R.R. Diwakar, *Saga of Satyagraha* (1969), pp.8-11.

5 Buddhadeva Bhattacharya, *Evolution of the Political Philosophy of Gandhi* (1969), p.286.

6 V.V. Ramana Murthi, *Non-Violence in Politics* (1958), p.148.

no thought given to civil disobedience for producing social and political change. Sixty years later, with Gandhi, civil disobedience became, in addition to this, a means of mass action for political ends. Reluctantly, and unrecognised at the time, Thoreau helped make the transition between these two approaches.”<sup>7</sup>

Other writers, like Kaka Kalelkar<sup>8</sup> and R. Payne<sup>9</sup>, though visualising some link which Gandhi’s non-cooperation and civil disobedience had with India’s antiquity, nevertheless feel, as Kalelkar does, that it was “a unique contribution of Mahatma Gandhi to the world community”. Kalelkar, however, does visualise the possibility that the practices of *traga*, *dharna*, and *baharvatiya*, prevailing in Gandhi’s home area, Saurashtra, may have “influenced the Mahatma’s mind”.<sup>10</sup>

Recent works on ancient Indian polity, and the rights and duties of kings or other political authorities also seem to be in some conflict with the prevalent view of the traditional submissiveness of the Indian people. According to some, the very word ‘Raja’ meant ‘one who pleases’ and therefore any right of the king was subject to the fulfillment of duties and was forfeited if such duties were not performed. Further, an oft-quoted verse of the Mahabharata states:

“The people should gird themselves up and kill a cruel king who does not protect his subjects, who extracts taxes and simply robs them of their wealth, who gives no lead. Such a king is *Kali* (evil and strife) incarnate. The king who after declaring, ‘I shall protect you’, does not protect his subjects should be killed (by the people) after forming a confederacy, like a dog that is afflicted with madness.”<sup>11</sup>

Whatever may have been the ruler-ruled relationship in ancient times or during the few centuries of Turk or Mughal dominance, in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, according to James Mill, “in the ordinary state of things

7 Gene Sharp, *Thoreau: On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* (1963), p.1.

8 Kaka Kalelkar, ‘Evolution of the Philosophy of Satyagraha’ (1969), published in *Gandhi Darshan, (1869-1969), October 2, 1969–February 2, 1970. A Souvenir.*

9 R. Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi* (1969), p.217.

10 Kaka Kalelkar: *op. cit.* Kaka Kalelkar incidentally appears to be the only modern writer aware of the practice of *traga*.

11 अरक्षितारं हर्तारं विलोप्तारमनायकम् । तं वै राजकलिं हन्युः प्रजाः सन्नध्य निर्घृणम् ॥  
अहं वो रक्षितेत्युक्तवा यो न रक्षति भूमिपः । स संहत्य निहन्तव्यः श्रेव सोन्माद आतुरः ॥ (अनुशासन 61. 32-33)

असत्यपिष्ठासचिवो वध्यो लोकस्य धर्महा । (शान्ति 92.19) *The Mahabharata*, quoted by P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol.III (1946), p.26.

in India, the princes stood in awe of their subjects.”<sup>12</sup> Further, according to Gandhi, that “we should obey laws whether good or bad is a new fangled notion. There was no such thing in former days. The people disregarded those laws they did not like.”<sup>13</sup> Elaborating on the idea of passive resistance, Gandhi stated:

“The fact is that, in India, the nation at large has generally used passive resistance in all departments of life. We cease to cooperate with our rulers when they displease us. This is passive resistance.”<sup>14</sup>

Giving a personally known instance of such non-cooperation, he added:

“In a small principality, the villagers were offended by some command issued by the prince. The former immediately began vacating the village. The prince became nervous, apologised to his subjects and withdrew his command. Many such instances can be found in India.”<sup>15</sup>

It is not necessary to add that Gandhi’s discovery of civil disobedience is not just a borrowing from his own tradition. In a way it came out of his own being. His knowledge of its advocacy or limited practice in Europe and America may have provided him further confirmation. But it is the preceding Indian historical tradition of non-cooperation and civil disobedience which made possible the application of them on the vast scale that happened under his leadership.

It appears that Gandhi as well as Mill had a more correct idea of the ruler-ruled relationship in India than conventional historians. Even without going far back in Indian history, a systematic search of Indian and British source materials pertaining to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries should provide ample evidence of the correctness of Gandhi’s and Mill’s view. Further, it would probably also indicate that civil disobedience and non-cooperation were traditionally the key methods used by the Indian people against oppressive and unjust actions of government. Even by a relatively cursory search, a number of

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12 James Mill, Evidence to House of Commons Committee, in *House of Commons Papers*, 1831-32, Vol.XIV, pp.6-7.

13 *Hind Swaraj* (1946), p.58.

14 *Ibid*, p.60.

15 *Ibid*, p.61. It is possible that such recourse to the vacating of villages, towns, etc., as instanced by Gandhi and as threatened in 1810-11 at Murshedabad etc., was of a much later origin than the various other forms of non-cooperation and civil disobedience described in this volume. Resort to such an extreme step as the vacating of villages etc., indicates increasing alienation of the rulers from the ruled and further a substantial weakening of the strength of the latter. Such a situation is in glaring contrast to the situation where “the princes stood in awe of their subjects”. Though such an extreme step at times may have still worked in relation to Indian rulers who were not yet completely alienated from the ruled, in Gandhi’s youth, its potentiality against completely alien rulers, such as the British, must have become very small indeed.

instances of civil disobedience and non-cooperation readily emerge. These are recorded primarily in the correspondence maintained within the British ruling apparatus. For example, the Proceedings of the British Governor and Council at Madras, dated November 1680, record the following response by “the disaffected persons” in the town of Madraspatnam to what they considered arbitrary actions on the part of the British rulers:

“The painters and others gathered at St. Thoma having sent several letters to the several castes of Gentues in town, and to several in the Company’s service as dubasses, cherucons or chief peons, merchants, washers and others and threatened several to murder them if they came not out to them, now they stopt goods and provisions coming to town throwing the cloth off of the oxen and laying the dury, and in all the towns about us hired by Pedda Yenkatadry, etc: the drum has beaten forbidding all people to carry any provisions or wood to Chenapatnam alias Madraspatnam and the men’s houses that burnt chunam for us are tyed up and they forbid to burn any more, or to gather more shells for that purpose.”<sup>16</sup>

This tussle lasted for quite some time. The British recruited the additional force of the ‘Black Portuguese’, played the less protesting groups against the more vehement, arrested the wives and children of those engaged in the protest, and threatened one hundred of the more prominent amongst the protestors with dire punishment. Finally, the incident seems to have ended in a compromise.

At a much later period, reporting on a peasant movement in Canara in 1830-31, the district assistant collector wrote:

“Things are here getting worse. The people were quiet till within a few days, but the assemblies have been daily increasing in number. Nearly 11,000 persons met yesterday at Yenoor. About an hour ago 300 ryots came here, entered the tahsildar’s cutcherry, and avowed their determination not to give a single pice, and that they would be contented with nothing but a total remission. The tahsildar told them that the jumwabundy was light and their crops good. They said they complained of neither of these, but of the Government generally; that they were oppressed by the court, stamp regulation, salt and tobacco monopolies, and that they must be taken off.”<sup>17</sup>

16 Fort St. George: *Diary and Consultations*, November 1680.

17 India Office Records (I.O.R.), *Board’s Collections: F/4/ vol.1415, No.55844A*, Assistant Collector to Principal Collector, Canara, January 17, 1831, pp.158-61.

Referring to the instructions which he gave to the tahsildar, the assistant collector added:

“I have also told him to issue instructions to all persons, to prevent by all means in their power the assemblies which are taking place daily, and if possible to intercept the inflammatory letters which are at present being despatched to the different talooks.”<sup>18</sup>

He further stated:

“The ryots say that they cannot all be ‘punished’, and the conspirators have as it were excommunicated one Mogany, who commenced paying their Kists. The ferment has got as far as Baroor and will soon reach Cundapoor. As the dissatisfaction seems to be against the Government generally and not against the heaviness of the jummabundy, speedy measures should, I think, be taken to quench the flame at once. But in this district not a cooley can be procured. The tahsildar arrived here yesterday with the greatest difficulty.”<sup>19</sup>

These protests were at times tinged with violence. Most often, however, what is termed violence was the resort to *traga*, *koor*, etc. (which are also familiar under other names), inflicted by individuals upon themselves as a means of protest. On the occasions when the people actually resorted to violence, it was mostly a reaction to governmental terror, as in the case of the various ‘Bunds’ in Maharashtra during the 1820-1840s.<sup>20</sup> At what point the people reacted to terror and repression by resorting to violence is a subject for separate study.<sup>21</sup>

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18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 The Bombay Presidency Political and Judicial Records for the period 1820-40 contain voluminous material on the numerous ‘Bunds’ organised by the people in Maharashtra against the British. One of these was the ‘Poorundhur Bund’ organised largely by the Ramoosees during 1826-1828.

21 Taking into consideration the amount of violence which, at times, is manifested in modern movements of civil disobedience and investigating its relationship with the violent measures adopted by the authorities may to some extent help in comprehending this problem. According to Charles Tilly in *Collective Violence in European Perspective* (1978, p.49): “A large proportion of the [...] disturbances we have been surveying turned violent at exactly the moment when the authorities intervened to stop an illegal but non-violent action [...] the great bulk of the killing and wounding [...] was done by troops or police rather than by insurgents or demonstrators.” Commenting on this, Michael Walzer believes that “the case is the same [...] in the United States.” (*Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War, and Citizenship*, 1970, p.32).

Overall, the civil disobedience campaigns against the new British rulers, including the one documented in this volume, did not succeed. The reasons for this must be manifold. Partly, the effectiveness of such protests was dependent upon there being a commonality of values between the rulers and the ruled. With the replacement of the indigenous rulers by the British (whether *dé jure* or *de facto* is hardly material), such commonality of values disappeared. The British rulers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century did not at all share the same moral and psychological world as their subjects. Over time, what James Mill termed the “general practice” of “insurrection against oppression”<sup>22</sup>, which had prevailed up to the period of British rule, was gradually replaced by “unconditional submission to public authority”. In the early 1900s, it seemed to Gopal Krishna Gokhale “as though the people existed simply to obey.”<sup>23</sup>

## II

Before we proceed further, it may be useful to make a brief reference to the way in which the governance of India was organised in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries.

Contrary to popular opinion, from 1784 onwards (if not from an earlier date), the East India Company hardly played a major role in decisions made in England about India. The job of decision making and, in many instances, even the first drafting of the more crucial detailed instructions became, from 1784 onwards, a responsibility of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India, set up by an Act of the British legislature and composed of members of government. This responsibility was painstakingly executed by this Board until 1858. The change which 1858 brought was the elimination of the essentially clerical role of the Company, and the entrusting of this task also to an expanded establishment in the office of the Board, and styling the whole thenceforward as the department of the Secretary of State for India.

The supreme head of British administration in the Bengal Presidency was the Governor-General-in-Council, who functioned through the several departments of Government, initially constituted in 1785 on instructions from the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India. The Secret, the Political, the Military, the Public, the Revenue, and the Judicial were the major departments, all operating from Fort William (i.e. Calcutta). The Governor-General-in-Council (in the absence of the Governor-General, the Commander-in-Chief acting as president) met on specific days in the week to transact business in the particular department. The decisions and orders made were conveyed to the concerned

22 J. Mill, *op.cit.*, Evidence, 1831-1832.

23 Gopal Krishna Gokhale, quoted in *The Development of Indian Polity* by M. Ramchandra Rao, B.A. BL., M.L.C. (Madras, 1917), p.291.

subordinate bodies or individuals by the secretaries of each department, who attended the council and maintained its records. Besides these departments, the instructions of 1785 had also established several Boards, subordinate to the Governor-General-in-Council. Usually, each of these was presided over by a member of the Council; the Boards were to direct and superintend some of the more extensive activities of Government. The Military Board and the Board of Revenue were the two most important amongst these subordinate Boards. (Corresponding arrangements had also been instituted in 1785 in the Madras and Bombay Presidencies.)

At this period, the job of the district 'collector' (in Bengal, Behar, Benares, etc.) was mainly concerned with matters relating to revenue assessment and collection, while the superintendence of the police and the performance of law and order functions were exercised by a separate official termed the 'magistrate' of the particular district. Ordinarily, the collector corresponded with and received his instructions from the Board of Revenue. The magistrate, on the other hand, corresponded with and received his instructions directly from the Governor-General-in-Council in the Judicial Department. Both the collector and the magistrate were independent and supreme in their respective spheres within their jurisdictions. It appears, however, from the nature of their respective links with the supreme presidency authority that the magistrate at this period had a slight edge over the authority of the collector. Benares, and perhaps many other districts also, had two other independent, and superior, authorities: the court of appeal and circuit, and the military establishments. Some aspects of their mutual relationships and also difference in approach clearly come through in the documents.

The documents in this volume, consisting of the correspondence between the various governmental authorities<sup>24</sup>, describe a now mostly forgotten civil disobedience campaign carried out by the people of Benares, Patna, Sarun, Moorshedabad, and Bhagalpur against the British authorities during 1810-11. This is the best documented pre-Gandhian non-cooperation and civil disobedience campaign thus far uncovered. For this reason, it is being discussed at some length in the pages that follow.

In 1810, on the instructions of the directing authorities in England, the Government of Bengal (Fort William) decided to levy a new series of taxes in the provinces of Bengal, Behar, Orissa, Benares and the Ceded and Conquered

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24 These documents, however, do not include any correspondence on the subject of this narrative, if any such exists, between the court of appeal and circuit or the military authorities in Benares, etc., on the one hand, and the Government or the Military Board at the Presidency, on the other.

territories (these latter now constitute part of Uttar Pradesh). One of these, recommended by its Committee of Finance, was a tax on houses and shops. This tax was enacted on October 6, 1810, by Regulation XV, 1810. According to its preamble, the Regulation was enacted “with a view to the improvement of the public resources” and to extend “to the several cities and principal towns in the provinces of Bengal, Behar, Orissa and Benares, the tax which for a considerable period, has been levied on houses, situated within the town of Calcutta.” The Regulation provided for a levy of “five percent on the annual rent” on all dwelling houses (except the exempted categories) built of whatever material, and a levy of “10 percent on the annual rent” on all shops. Where the houses or shops were not rented but occupied by the proprietors themselves, the tax to be levied was to be determined “from a consideration of the rent actually paid for other houses (and shops) of the same size and description in the neighbourhood”.

The exempted categories included “houses, bungalows, or other buildings” occupied by military personnel; houses and buildings admitted to be “religious edifices”; and any houses or shops which were altogether unoccupied. The tax was to be collected every three months and it was laid down that when it remained unpaid “the personal effects of the occupant shall in the first instance be alone liable to be sold for the recovery of the arrear of tax”. Further, if some arrear still remained, “the residue shall be recovered by the distress and sale of the goods, and chattels of the proprietor”. Though appeals were admissible against unjust levy, etc., “to discourage litigious appeals, the judges” were “authorised to impose a fine” (the amount of which depended on the circumstances of the applicant) on all those whose appeals “may prove on investigation to be evidently groundless and litigious”.

The collector of the district was “allowed a commission of five percent” on the net receipts. Incidentally, such a commission accorded to the collectors was not unusual at this time. The collectors received similar commissions on net collections of land revenue.

The total additional revenue estimated to arise from this tax was rupees three lakhs in a full year. Comparatively speaking, this was not very large. Of the total expected receipts from the various new or additional levies enacted around this time, the house tax was to contribute around ten percent. In relation to the total tax revenue of the Bengal Presidency for 1810-11 (₹ 10.68 crores), most of it derived from the rural areas, the house tax amount was insignificant. But taken along with the other levies imposed about this time, large portions of which fell on the urban areas, this tax became a rallying point for widespread protest.

## Events at Benares

The protest begins at Benares. As Benares was then the largest city in northern India and possibly the best preserved in terms of traditional organisation and functioning, this was most natural. It may also have been due to the Benares governmental authorities being more prompt in taking steps towards enforcing the house tax.

The following were the main arguments against the levy of the tax as they emerge from the documented correspondence, and from the petition of the inhabitants of Benares (rejected by the court of appeal and circuit, partly because its “style and contents” were “disrespectful”<sup>25</sup>):

- (i) “Former sooltauns never extended the rights of Government (commonly called malgoozaree) to the habitations of their subjects acquired by them by descent or transfer. It is on this account that in selling estates the habitations of the proprietors are excepted from the sales. Therefore the operation of this tax infringes upon the rights of the whole community, which is contrary to the first principles of justice.”
- (ii) “It is clear that the house tax was enacted only for the purpose of defraying the expenses of the police. In the provinces of Bengal and Behar, the police expenses are defrayed out of the stamp and other duties, and in Benares the police expenses are defrayed from the land revenue (malgoozaree). Then on what grounds is this tax instituted?”
- (iii) “If the Shastra be consulted it will be found that Benares to within five coss round is a place of worship and by Regulation XV, 1810 places of worship are exempted from the tax.”
- (iv) “There are supposed to be in Benares about 50,000 houses, near three parts of which are composed of places of worship of Hindoos and Mussulman and other sects and houses given in charity by Mussulman and Hindoos. The tax on the rest of the houses will little more than cover the expenses of the Phatuckbundee. Then the institution of a tax which is calculated to vex and distress a number of people is not proper or consistent with the benevolence of Government.”

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25 West Bengal State Archives: ‘Bengal Judicial Criminal Proceedings’, February 8, 1811, *Original Consultations*, No.6.

- (v) “There are many householders who are not able to repair or rebuild their houses when they fall to ruin and many who with difficulty subsist on the rent derived therefrom, how is it possible for such people to pay the tax?”
- (vi) “Instead of the welfare and happiness of your poor petitioners having been promoted, we have sustained repeated injuries, in being debarred from all advantages and means of profit and in being subject to excessive imposts which have progressively increased.”
- (vii) “It is difficult to find means of subsistence and the stamp duties, court fees, transit and town duties which have increased tenfold, afflict and affect everyone rich and poor and this tax, like salt scattered on a wound, is a cause of pain and depression to everyone both Hindoo and Mussulman; let it be taken into consideration that as a consequence of these imposts the price of provisions has within these ten years increased sixteenfold. In such case how is it possible for us who have no means of earning a livelihood to subsist?”

The authorities of Benares appear to have been the first to implement the house-tax regulation. Possibly, this promptness resulted from their being better organised with regard to civil establishment as well as military support. Whatever the reasons for their speedy compliance, within a mere seven weeks after the passing of the regulation the collector of Benares, as the authority responsible for levying and collecting the house tax, started to take detailed steps towards the regulation's enforcement. On November 26, he informed the acting magistrate of the steps he was taking to determine the assessment on each house and requested him to place copies of the regulation in the several thanas for general information. He further requested the magistrate for police support for his assessors when they began their work in the mohallas. On December 6, the collector gave further details to the magistrate and requested speedy assistance from the thannadars etc. The acting magistrate, replying to the collector on December 11, informed him of the instructions he had issued but stated that for the time being he did not feel that the police should accompany the assessors. He assured the collector, however, that “should any obstacle or impediment on the part of the house-holders be opposed to your officers in the legal execution of their duties, I shall, of course, upon intimation from you, issue specific instructions to the officers of police to enforce acquiescence.”

The assessment having started, and meeting with instant opposition, the acting magistrate thus wrote to the Government at Calcutta on December 25:

“I should not be justified in withholding from the knowledge of the Right Hon’ble the Governor-General-in-Council, that a very serious situation has been excited among all ranks and descriptions of the inhabitants of the city by the promulgation of Regulation XV, 1810.”

After giving the background, he added:

“The people are extremely clamorous; they have shut up their shops, abandoned their usual occupations, and assembled in multitudes with a view to extorting from me an immediate compliance with their demands, and to prevail with me to direct the collector to withdraw the assessors until I receive the orders of Government. With this demand I have not thought proper to comply. I have signified to the people that their petitions shall be transmitted to the Government but that, until the orders of Government arrive, the Regulation must continue in force, and that I shall oppose every combination to resist it. By conceding to the general clamour I should only have encouraged expectation which must be eventually disappointed, and have multiplied the difficulties which the introduction of the tax has already to contend with.”

Three days later, on the 28th, he sent another report:

“The tumultuous mobs which were collected in various places between the city and Secrole, on the evening of the 20th instant, and which dispersed on the first appearance of preparations among the troops, did not reassemble on the morning of the 26th and I was induced to hope that the people in general were disposed to return to order and obedience.

But in the afternoon the agitation was revived: an oath was administered throughout the city both among the Hindoos and the Mahommedans, enjoining all classes to neglect their respective occupations until I should consent to direct the collector to remove the assessors and give a positive assurance that the tax should be abolished. It was expected that the outcry and distress occasioned by this general conspiracy would extort from me the concession they required. The Lohars, the Mistrees, the Hujams, the Durzees, the Kahars, Bearers, every class of workmen engaged unanimously in this conspiracy and it was carried to such an extent, that during the 26th the dead bodies were actually cast neglected into the Ganges, because the proper people could

not be prevailed upon to administer the customary rites. These several classes of people, attended by a multitude of others of all ranks and descriptions, have collected together at a place in the vicinity of the city, from whence they declare nothing but force shall remove them unless I consent to yield the point for which they are contending.”

On December 31, the acting magistrate further reported:

“Several thousands of people continue day and night collected at a particular spot in the vicinity of the city, where, divided according to their respective classes, they inflict penalties upon those who hesitate to join in the combination. Such appears to be the general repugnance to the operation of the Regulation, that the slightest disposition evinced by any individual to withdraw from the conspiracy, is marked not only by general opprobrium but even ejection from his caste.”

The ‘conspiracy’ continued despite all efforts of the authorities. In the meantime, the acting magistrate had written to the collector, as well as to the senior judge of the court of appeal and circuit, who was said to have had much influence on the Rajah of Benares and other ‘principal natives’, to return immediately from their tours. The collector returned on January 1, 1811 and the following day he too reported to the Government at Calcutta. The acting magistrate submitted:

“The combination formed against the introduction of the house tax becomes daily more extended, and has assumed a very serious appearance. The people continue to desert the city, and collect in increasing numbers at the spot, where they have resolved to remain in expectation of the orders of Government: no assurance on my part or on the part of the civil authorities at this station has the slightest effect.

There is too much reason to apprehend that this combination extends throughout the province. The Lohars, who originally assembled for another purpose, soon took a principal part in the conspiracy and have collected here in great numbers from all parts of the province. The inconvenience suffered in consequence by ryots threatens serious impediment to cultivation, and multiplies the number of the discontented. At the same time, the people are integrated to persevere by the notion which prevails, that the inhabitants of other cities have engaged to conform to the issue of the struggle at Benares.”

On the same day, the collector further elaborated on the foregoing. He wrote:

“I am given to understand that considerably above 20,000 persons are sitting (it may be called Dhurna), declaring that they will not separate till the tax shall be abolished. Their numbers are daily increasing from the moffusil whence each caste has summoned its brethren and adjured them to unite in the cause. If one party be more obstinate and more determined upon extending the mischief than another, the Lohars, or blacksmiths, may be so charged, for they were not only the first to convoke the assembly of their near brethren but they have far and wide called upon other Lohars to join them with the intent that no implement of cultivation or of harvest (which is fast approaching) be either made or mended, and thus that the zamindars and ryots may be induced to take part with the malcontents, in short, that the whole of the country shall directly or indirectly be urged to insist on the repeal of the tax.

With these Lohars, almost all other castes, sects and persuasions are in league and, I am informed, under a most binding oath amongst each other.

At present open violence does not seem their aim, they seem rather to vaunt their security in being unarmed in that a military force would not use deadly weapons against such inoffensive foes. And in this confidence they collect and increase, knowing that the civil power cannot disperse them, and thinking that the military will not.”

Referring to the links which the protest had with other towns, he stated:

“I have learnt from good authority that the inhabitants of Patna have written to Benares to the effect that they shall be guided by these. That being more numerous, the Benares city is better able to make exertions against the tax and if it shall succeed in procuring abrogation the city of Azimabad would become exempted of course: in like manner if the Benares city submits that Patna will immediately follow its example.”

By January 4, the situation seemed to have quietened down and the acting magistrate had begun to be pleased with the result of the steps he had taken of exerting his pressure on the landholders to recall the Lohars and by the assistance he had received from a few of the “principal inhabitants”. Yet he felt:

“Much dependence however cannot at present be placed upon these favourable circumstances, for the religious orders of the people, and the men of rank and respectability, continue unalterable in their resolution, and encourage the multitude to persevere by every kind of artifice and persuasion. The principal people of every class are compelled to eject all

those who are detected in attempting to withdraw from the combination. They also send forth spies in all parts of the city to seize the delinquent and I have apprehended many employed upon the service. I have of course inflicted upon such persons very severe punishment, but it does not deter others from committing similar outrages.”

By January 8, the situation appeared really to have changed to such an extent that it made the acting magistrate report “with the greatest satisfaction” that the “inhabitants of this city begin to be sensible of the inutility and danger of continuing in a state of insubordination to the authority of Government.” Explaining the circumstances of the ‘alarming situation’ which he thought he had overcome, he stated:

“The people of all description, collected according to their several classes in the vicinity of the city, had bound themselves by oath never to disperse without extorting the object they were extending for, and they seemed to increase daily in numbers and resolution. They employed emissaries to convey a Dhurm Puttree to every village in the province, summoning one individual of each family to repair to the assembly at Benares. Several thousand Lohars, Koonbees, and Korees, were enticed from their houses, and collected here by the excitement. At the same time, the inhabitants continued to withdraw from the city, and even those who were unwilling were compelled to abandon their pursuits, to avoid the opprobrium and punishment denounced against all and inflicted upon many, who declined joining in the conspiracy. The individuals of every class, contributed each in proportion to his means, to enable them to persevere, and considerable sums of money were thus raised for the support of those, whose families depended for subsistence on their daily labour.”

He further explained:

“The multitudes thus assembled were abundantly supplied with firewood, oil, and provisions, while nothing in the city except grain was procurable. The religious orders exerted all their power over the prejudices of the people to keep them unanimous, and the combination was so general, that the police were scarcely able to protect the few who had courage to secede, from being plundered and insulted.”

Referring to the role of the mullahs (boatmen), he added:

“Much public inconvenience was likely to arise from the Mullahs being drawn into the conspiracy, the communication with the opposite

bank of the river was almost interrupted and I was compelled to proclaim that every boat abandoned by the proprietor should be forfeited to Government. The Mullahs in consequence soon returned to their duties. At the same time several persons of different classes employed to extend the combination were detected by the police, and punished with exemplary severity. These examples, often repeated, began at length to deter others from incurring the consequence of similar offences.”

He ended with a reference to the additional factors of “fatigue and privations which began to be felt seriously by all” and of the effect of his advice that “it is only by dispersing that the people can expect indulgence from the Government.” He concluded his report by stating that he had “little doubt that in the course of a few days this combination, now no longer formidable, will be totally dissolved.”

By now the reports of the earlier situation had reached the Government at Calcutta. The event was first noticed by the Governor-General-in-Council on January 5, when, after acknowledging the receipts of the reports up to December 31 as well as the petitions which had been received from Benares, the Government observed that it did not “discern any substantial reasons for the abolition of the tax” and thought “it would be extremely unwise to sacrifice to riot and clamour a tax, the abolition of which is not dictated by any considerations of general policy.” After approving the measures taken by the acting magistrate, the letter from Government added:

“You will of course take the same opportunity of impressing on their minds the serious evils which they are liable to bring upon themselves by further perseverance in resistance to the authority of Government. It may at the same time be expedient to apprise them that with every disposition to afford to the people every reasonable indulgence and to protect them in the enjoyment of every right, the Governor-General-in-Council never can yield to lawless combinations or to attempts made to enforce a compliance with their applications by tumultuary meetings and proceedings.”

The “reasonable indulgence” to be afforded was that the people “should be relieved” from the Phatuckbundee which they contributed, collected and defrayed for the repair of gateways and the payment of chokeydars on their own volition and according to their own arrangements, and that its expenses in future “should be defrayed from the general resources of Government”. News of this indulgence was to be conveyed to them, after consultation and appropriate arrangements with the military authorities, simultaneously to the conveying of the sentiments expressed in the foregoing passage.

On the receipt of the report of January 2, which pointed out the seriousness of the situation, the Government sent further instructions on the 7th about the manner of the use of the military force. Feeling “that a proclamation issued by the direct authority of the Government itself may be of service in reclaiming the people” or in “appraising them of the evils which they may bring upon themselves by a further perseverance in those lawless measures”, it enclosed a proclamation leaving the discretion about the time of its use to the Benares authorities. After declaring that the Government did not “discern any substantial reasons for repealing the provisions of that Regulation”, the proclamation added that orders “have been issued to the officer commanding the troops to support the magistrate and collector in the discharge of that duty”, and concluded:

“It is with deep concern that the Governor-General-in-Council feels himself obliged to warn the refractory part of the community of the serious evils, which, under the foregoing orders, they are liable to bring upon themselves by a further perseverance in their present seditious conduct. The disposition of the Government to attend to all reasonable applications and to afford equal protection to all classes of people is universally acknowledged but it never can be induced to forego what it has deemed a just and reasonable exercise of its authority in consequence of unlawful combination and tumult.”

Between January 7, the date of the proclamation, and January 11 (as reported in their Revenue letter of February 12, 1811, to the directing authorities in England), it appeared to the Governor-General-in-Council “on mature consideration that the tax was susceptible of some modifications as calculated to obviate any just grounds of complaint on the part of those classes of the people who from their situation in life were most liable to be affected by its operation”. Consequently, on receipt of the somewhat encouraging report of January 4 from the magistrate, the Government through their two letters of the 11th drew the attention of the Benares authorities to the section pertaining to religious edifices and further decided to exempt the “dwellings of the lowest orders of the people”, whose “produce from the very inconsiderable value of the buildings could not be an object to Government”. With regard to the conveying of the news of these indulgences to the people, it added:

“Previously to communicating the present orders to the different classes of the people, who may be benefitted by their operation, you will naturally consider in what mode it can be done, without compromising the public authority or weakening the sentiments of respect which it is so

essential that the community should feel, especially at the present juncture, for the Government.”

The instructions in conclusion added:

“His Lordship-in-Council would hope that the people may have shown themselves deserving of the indulgence proposed to be extended to them by the relinquishment of their late seditious and criminal designs and by a just submission to public authority.”

Government orders of January 5, wholly rejecting the petitions, were communicated to the people of Benares on the 13th. From the 14th, “people began again to collect together”. By now the Government proclamation of the 7th had reached Benares and, “thinking that it would be of service in reclaiming the people from their unjustifiable proceedings”, the acting magistrate, as he reported to Government on the 18th, “proposed to publish it”. The officer commanding the troops, however, “did not consider himself in a state to afford” the support required until he had received reinforcements from Lucknow. By now the orders of Government of the 11th (excusing religious edifices, etc., from the payment of the tax) had also reached the Benares authorities, but the acting magistrate felt: “As long as the people persevere in these unjustifiable proceedings, they are totally undeserving of indulgence, and it is impossible to communicate to them the benevolent intentions of the Government.”

Two days later, on January 20, the magistrate reported “little alteration” in the situation and saw “little reason to hope for any very favourable change”. He was anxious for the additional force to arrive, so that he “may carry into effect the orders of Government”, particularly as he felt, “it becomes everyday an object of greater importance to disperse the people, and compel them to put an end to their seditious and unwarrantable proceedings”. He further added:

“I cannot but feel very forcibly, that such a state of things being permitted to continue in defiance of public authority, has already weakened, and weakens daily still more and more, those sentiments of respect, which it is so essential that the community should entertain for the government of the country.”

In the same letter he reported:

“Soon after the resolution of Government not to rescind Regulation XV, 1810 was promulgated, inflammatory papers of the most objectionable tendency appeared placarded about the streets. I have the honour to enclose copies of two of these papers to be laid before the Government.

I have offered a reward of 500 Rs. for every man on whom such a paper may be found, and hope that this will not be thought more considerable than the nature and exigency of the case required.”

The massive measures taken by the authorities had, however, begun to erode the unity and confidence of the people and the despondency of the magistrate was rather misplaced. Within a few days of the foregoing report, the impact of the various efforts of the Benares authorities became apparent.

As the magistrate reported later, the people had proposed “to proceed in a body to Calcutta, through all the cities subject in common with themselves” to the house tax, and that “they determined that the proprietor of every house in the city should either go himself, or send a person to represent him, or contribute, in proportion to his means, to defray the expenses of those who might be disposed to go”. But he explained:

“When it came to the point, few were found disposed to undertake a journey on which they were likely to be obstructed, nor were they willing to contribute to promote a scheme, the object of which, they were fully convinced, would never be accomplished.”

Meanwhile, another petition, presented this time to the court of appeal and circuit, brought the verdict:

“This petition has been presented on the part of the people who are determinately engaged in mobs and assemblies contrary to the regulations, which is highly improper, also the style and contents of this petition are disrespectful, which is an additional reason for not allowing of it.”

All these developments, according to the magistrate, led to dissension, withdrawal of support and consequently to a general breakdown of the people’s morale. In such a situation the services of some “old and faithful public servants” created further embarrassments for the people and ultimately made them seek, through the medium of the Rajah of Benares, “the indulgence of the Government”. Yet, though the people had been humbled, the situation was far from normal. The acting magistrate in his report of January 28, therefore, suggested “a general pardon”, particularly “as the hearts of every man in this city are united with them” and as “enough perhaps had been already done for the support of the public authority”.

Taking note of the report of the acting magistrate, the Government on February 4 expressed its ‘great satisfaction’ at the submission of the people, gave highest approbation to the conduct of the acting magistrate; he decided to

bestow khelauts on persons who had supported the Government cause, and agreed to the suggestion of the magistrate that the Phatuckbundee should remain undisturbed; and, in place of the earlier order of Government, remission of an amount equal to its collection would be allowed from the assessment of the tax on houses and shops to those who contributed to the Phatuckbundee. Disagreeing with the general pardon suggested by the magistrate, the Government stated:

“The Governor-General-in-Council does not discern any substantial grounds for granting a general pardon to the people of Benares for their late unwarrantable and seditious proceedings. On the contrary, His Lordship-in-Council is of opinion, that public justice and obvious expediency of preventing by seasonal examples the recurrence of such evils in future, require that the persons, who have been chiefly instrumental in exciting the late disturbances, should be regularly brought to trial for that offence.”

At the same time, it instructed the acting magistrate that “the prosecutions need not be numerous”.

Meanwhile, the humbling process, initiated through the Rajah of Benares and the other ‘loyal’ and ‘faithful public servants’, continued. On February 7, the acting magistrate forwarded to the Government a petition, presented to him by the Rajah of Benares in the name of its inhabitants. This he described as an “ultimate appeal” by means of which the petitioners, in the words of the petition, “present themselves at last before His Lordship-in-Council” and “humbly” represented that disobedience “was never within our imagination”. Instead, they added, “in implicit obedience” to the proclamation of the magistrate of January 13 “as to the decree of fate, we got up, and returned to our homes, in full dependence upon the indulgence of the Government”.

The Government, however, still did not “think proper to comply with the application of the inhabitants” to a “greater extent than will be done” by the operation of its orders of January 11. This order of Government, along with the information of the earlier modifications, was conveyed a week later, on February 23, to the Rajah and principal inhabitants of Benares by the magistrate, who in his proclamation to the inhabitants of Benares of the same date concluded with the view “that no ground now remains for the complaint or discontent”.

The people in general, notwithstanding their having submitted to the orders of Government “as to the decree of fate”, as stated in their petition submitted through the Rajah of Benares, did not share the magistrate’s view and exhortation. Nearly a year later, on December 28, 1811, the collector reported:

“On an early period I directed my native officers to tender to all the householders or tenants whose houses had already been assessed, a note purporting the computed rate of rent of each house, and the rate of tax fixed; and I issued at the same time a proclamation directing all persons who had objections of any nature to offer to the rates of rent or tax mentioned in such note to attend and make known the same that every necessary enquiry might be made and all consistent redress afforded. In the above mentioned proclamation, I fixed a day in the week for specially hearing such cases and repaired to the city for that purpose. Neither would any householder or tenant receive such note nor did any one attend to present petition or offer objection. The most in sullen silence permitted the assessors to proceed as they pleased rigidly observing the rule to give no information or to answer any questions respecting the tax; in determination that they would not in any wise be consenting to the measure, that the assessors might assess and the executive officers of the tax might realise by distraint of personal or real property; they could not resist but they would not concur.”

But, as a consolation for the authorities, the collector added:

“A few exceptions were found in some of the principal inhabitants of the city either in the immediate employ of Government or in some degree connected with the concerns of Government or otherwise individually interested in manifesting their obedience and loyalty. These persons waited on me and delivered in a statement of their houses and premises and the actual or computed rent of the same and acknowledged the assessment of tax.”

Yet such exceptions did not seem to console much and, in concluding his report, the collector “strenuously” urged “as an indispensable measure of precaution, that no collection be attempted without the presence of a much larger military force than is now at the station”.

Such withholding of concurrence and cooperation was apparent even earlier in February. While forwarding the “ultimate appeal” of the inhabitants, the acting magistrate had stated:

“I believe the objection, which they entertain against the measure in question, is pointed exclusively at the nature and principle of the tax, and not in the least at the rate of assessment by which it will be realised. The inhabitants of this city appear to consider it as an innovation, which, according to the laws and usages of the country, they imagine no

government has the right to introduce; and that unless they protest against it, the tax will speedily be increased, and the principle of it extended so as to affect everything which they will call their own. Under the circumstances, I fear, they will not easily reconcile themselves to the measure.”

### **Events at Patna**

Now let us turn to the other towns. As stated by the Benares collector in his letter of January 2, the inhabitants of these other towns seemed to have been watching the events at Benares. On January 2, the magistrate of Patna forwarded 12 petitions regarding the house tax from the city's inhabitants, the Government informing him on the 8th of their rejection, but cautioning the magistrate to use “gentle and conciliatory means” in stopping the inhabitants from convening meetings or petitioning “while the discussion is depending at Benares”. It instructed him, however, to use the various means he possessed under his general powers and to report without delay to Government any “tumultuary meetings” or “illegal cabals”.

### **Events at Sarun**

A week later (January 9) it was the turn of the Sarun magistrate to write to Government; he not only forwarded a petition from the inhabitants but stated:

“When the collector deputed assessors to arrange the assessment a still greater degree of alarm was created; and notwithstanding all I could do, all the shops of every description were actually shut up, and there was every indication of some very serious disturbances taking place.”

Explaining his reasons for suspending the making of the assessment, he added:

“As there is no military force at this place, and I was apprehensive of acts derogatory to the authority of Government being committed, I was induced to request the collector to suspend the arrangement of the assessment till I could receive instructions from Government.”

The instructions from Government “that no encouragement may be given to the inhabitants of Sarun to expect any general relinquishment of the tax”, except what had been determined as modifications on January 11, were sent on January 18. The Government further observed:

“The Governor-General-in-Council is unwilling to believe that the inhabitants of Sarun will attempt to offer any open resistance to the establishment of the tax.”

Notwithstanding such belief, it directed:

“Should circumstances however render it actually necessary, you will of course apply to the officer commanding the troops at Dinapore for such military force as may be requisite to support the public officers in giving effect to the regulations and orders of Government.”

### **Events at Moorshedabad**

Similar sentiments and exhortations and instructions were repeated on March 2 in the case of Moorshedabad, but the situation here was more serious. On February 25, while enclosing two petitions from the inhabitants, the magistrate reported:

“Rumours of a combination among the principal merchants to avoid, rather than oppose the tax, by withdrawing from their houses, reached me some days ago. The plan was carried into execution by some of the leading men, and by more of inferior note, but I am happy to add, that I have prevailed on them to return to their houses.”

Forwarding their petitions he stated that finding “that the disposition to leave the city was gaining ground”, he wrote, “I have deemed it my duty, objectionable as the language is, to forward” the petition, and “in return for this concession those Mahajans, who had taken up their residence in the fields, promised to return to their homes”. The objectionably worded petition stated:

“By the blessing of God, the English Gentlemen know, that no king of the earth had oppressed his subjects, and the Almighty preserves his creatures from harm. [...] For some years it has been our unhappy fate to suffer both from affliction and oppressions. First from the prevalence of sickness for several successive years, the city has been depopulated, so much so, that not one half of the inhabitants remain. [...] The oppression of the Town Duties and Customs is so great, that property of the value of 100 Rs. cannot be purchased for 200, the rate of duty is increased twofold and even fourfold, and if any one wish to remove property from the city to its environs, he cannot do it without the payment of a fresh duty. [...] Fourth, order has been passed for levying a tax on houses and shops, which is a new oppression. [...] the order of the Government has in truth struck us like a destructive blast.”

Concluding his report, the magistrate added: "The discontent caused by the house tax is, I am convinced to add, very deep and very general, for it extends over all ranks and descriptions of people." He therefore solicited the Government's instructions "in the event" of "its breaking out into a ferment".

There seems to have been no actual breakout of the discontent as feared by the magistrate of Moorshedabad. But as revealed at the time of the events in Bhagalpur, neither was there any collection of the tax anywhere until seven months later. On October 19, the subject was reopened for further consideration through a letter to the Government from a retiring senior member of the Board of Revenue who simultaneously functioned as secretary to the Judicial and Revenue Departments and was a party to all the foregoing orders and instructions which had been issued under his signature. Referring to the house tax, he wrote:

"From the experience hitherto obtained on the subject, it appears clear that the tax cannot be an object to Government except at the city and suburbs of Calcutta. At other places (at least at the cities), I am led to believe, from all that I have heard on the subject, that a considerable degree of irritation still prevails on account of the tax, and that years must elapse before that irritation will altogether subside."

Consequently, as this implied "the sacrifice of 2 or 3 lacs of rupees" only, he suggested the discontinuation of the tax to "conciliate the affection of the large bodies of people". The suggestion was accepted by the Government on October 22, and it informed the Board of Revenue:

"The Vice-President-in-Council is satisfied at the expediency of abrogating the tax on houses established by Regulation XV, 1810, and with that view is pleased to direct, that in the first instance the process of assessment at the stations where it may not have been completed be stayed and that the collection of the tax where it may have been commenced be stopped, with exception however of any places at which commotions originating in a resistance to the operation of the tax, may exist at the period of the receipt of the present orders."

It further called for reports from the district collectors on the situation in their districts to be submitted to the Government, "who on the receipt of them will pass orders for the final abrogation of the tax, unless the existence of any open oppositions should render it necessary either wholly or partially to enforce the collection of it."

## Events at Bhagalpur

Great opposition to the tax was, however, manifested in Bhagalpur at this time. On October 2, the collector of Bhagalpur reported:

“The day before yesterday, being Monday, the 30th September, the collection was to have commenced but on the appearance of the tahseeldar, they one and all shut up shops and houses. Yesterday, the officers of Government were unable to make any progress in their business, and in the evening while I was driving out in my carriage, several thousands of the inhabitants were standing on either side of the road. They neither committed nor offered any violence, but poured forth complaints of the hardness of their situation, and clamorously declared their inability to pay the tax.”

This was further corroborated by the magistrate in his letter to Government on the following day. After detailing the facts of the shutting of the shops, the magistrate stated:

“I consequently yesterday morning summoned the principal people before me and explained to them the impropriety of their conduct and how useless it was for them to resist the orders of Government. They however declared in a body that they would give up their houses, and leave the town, but never would consent voluntarily to pay the tax, the nature of which had not even been explained to them.”

The magistrate, however, added that, notwithstanding their opposition, “they were ready to pay it whenever the collections should commence at Moorshedabad”, or any adjacent zillah and he, therefore, deemed it advisable to ask the collector to suspend the collection for a few days. The collector resenting the interference of the magistrate, and thinking that the magistrate’s setting himself “against its operation in its very first stage, because a lawless rabble assembles, is striking at the root of that power, which the Government ought to possess over the subject”, sought the guidance of the Government. The Government, in its deliberations on the subject of October 11, concurred with the collector and, expressing its ‘disapproval’ of the conduct of the magistrate, felt that the steps he had taken in suspending the collection of the tax was “naturally calculated to excite a combination among the inhabitants of Bhaugulpore, and the inhabitants of Moorshedabad, Patna and other places”. It ordered the magistrate to “withdraw the order forthwith” in “the most public manner possible” and “to afford every aid and support to the collector” in “regard to the collection of the house tax”.

The order reached Bhagalpur around October 20. At 10 p.m. on the 21st, the collector informed the Government:

“I am sorry to acquaint you that in carrying into execution the collection of the house tax, I was this evening most grossly assaulted in my carriage. Bricks, stone and every description of offensive missile was [sic] hurled at my head. I am most severely cut in my face, and in my head; and had I not effected my escape into Mr. Glass’s house, nothing on earth could have saved my life.”

The account of this particular incident as reported by the magistrate and by his assistant, the later acting magistrate, was wholly different. In his letter of November 15, the magistrate stated that he had “every reason to believe (and this is also the opinion of the other gentlemen in the town), that had he [i.e. the collector] not irritated the mob, by flogging them, the assault never could have taken place”, and further that the collector “deviates from the truth” when he stated to the Government that “he was assaulted in carrying into execution the collection of the house tax”. Such statements at this stage, however, appeared to the Government “as taking advantage of a mere inaccuracy of expression employed in the preparation of a hurried and urgent dispatch”.

Even the belated recognition of “a mere inaccuracy of expression” did not exist on the day the Government at Calcutta received the express communication of the collector reporting the assault on himself “in carrying into execution the collection of the house tax”. It immediately adopted a detailed resolution recalling its earlier order of October 11, and suspended the magistrate, as it felt “that the native inhabitants of Bhaugulpore would not have ventured to offer the insults and outrages, described in the foregoing letter, to the collector and in his person to the Government itself, had the magistrate” adopted “necessary precautions for the maintenance of the public peace and for the due support of the collector” with “regard to the collection of the house tax”. It further decided, as it informed the directing authorities in England on October 29, 1811, “to depute an officer of greater firmness and activity to take charge” of the magistrate’s office and desired the person so deputed to “make it an object of his particular attention to enforce payment of the tax”. This direction, incidentally, as stated previously, had four days earlier been preceded with the Government’s view of the expediency of abrogating the tax. Finally, it requested the military authorities to arrange the sending of additional military force to Bhagalpur “with the view of supporting the collector and the officers of police in the discharge of their public duty”, if felt necessary by them.

The resolution of the Government was of little consequence to the immediate events at Bhagalpur, as it did not reach the local authorities before the people's protests were put down. Yet the overcoming or crumbling of "opposition or resistance" had caused a considerable headache and anxiety to the local authorities. Some of it arose from the divergent views held by the collector and the magistrate about how to handle the situation, where the collector stood for effective and "vigorous effort in support of the authority of Government", while the magistrate, who had actual responsibility for police and military action, tended to follow a quieter and somewhat less violent course.

Regarding the meetings of the people on the 22nd, the magistrate reported on the 24th:

"[I] sent for some troops to meet me at Shahjunghy, whither I proceeded after waiting a short time to allow them to arrive. We there found about eight thousand persons assembled, but totally unarmed. The principal of them kept in the centre of the crowd so that it was impossible to apprehend them, and as I was informed on the spot were performing funeral ceremonies. They, however, dispersed after having been repeatedly told that if they remained they would be fired at. They then requested permission to present a petition the next morning which I agreed to receive giving them fully to understand that the collection of the tax would not be suspended, nor the petition received unless presented to me in court in a regular and respectful manner. After the dispersions, there remained a numerous rabble consisting partly of weavers and other artificers, the rest old women and children. I spoke to some of them who expressed an apprehension that if they began to disperse those who remained last would be fired upon. But on being assured that this would not be done they agreed to disperse, left the place at the same time we did, and returned respectively to their houses."

Further, the commanding officer of the Hill Rangers stated:

"When the principal people retired last evening, the remaining part of the mob, women and their children seemed to have no dread of the consequence of firing among them, but rather sought it."

He advised the magistrate to have "all the desirable force" at hand when the people came to present the petition, or "better not to receive them" but "to desire that their *arzee* may be sent to you when you can act accordingly". Next day, the magistrate reported to the Government that he "had no account of the petition mentioned the evening before". On the evening of the 23rd, distraint with the support of the military was resorted to and, as the collector reported

24 hours later, “last night’s transaction has indeed changed the face of things”. Meanwhile, the magistrate had also taken other measures and further requested the magistrates of adjacent districts to prevent “people proceeding from your district to Bhaugulpore in bodies exceeding the number of ten and to intercept all arms which may be supposed to be intended for Bhaugulpore”, and further “to intercept all native communications of a suspicious tendency and forward the same” to him. Some confusion, however, arose soon after this pacification. Following the resolution of the Government of October 22, regarding its intention of suspending the collection of the house tax, the Board of Revenue had informed the Bhagalpur collector to discontinue the collection. Such instruction to Bhagalpur evoked strong censure from the Government, and the collection of the tax was resumed.

In January 1812, it was reported that the European residents of Bhagalpur declined to pay the house tax. As it was felt by Government that they were in no respect “implicated in the circumstances which rendered the continuance of the house tax necessary at that station”, the collector was instructed not to enforce payment of the house tax from the Europeans residing in that district. Still earlier, the European residents from the suburbs of Calcutta had also refused payment of the tax and the advocate-general opined that he was doubtful if it could be enforced on them through distraint of property. Consequently, its operation from the suburbs of Calcutta, where the Government had earlier intended to continue it even after its abrogation in other cities and towns, was also suspended. While communicating this order on 21 January 1812, the Government further informed the Board of Revenue that “the Governor-General-in-Council has it in contemplation to pass a Regulation for abolishing Regulation XV, 1810”. The abolishing Regulation was passed on May 8, 1812, as Regulation VII, 1812.

The first intimation of the protests arising from the imposition of the house tax was conveyed to the directing authorities in London by the Bengal Government through its Revenue letter of February 12, 1811. Its receipt and consideration led to the preparation of Draft No. 218 of 1811-12 on May 23, 1812. A passage in the original draft (which was expunged by the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India in the final stages, only for the reason that it became redundant due to the intended abrogation of the house tax) ran as follows:

“Having most attentively and seriously deliberated upon the subject, as you must be convinced from the present discussion, we should have felt

inclined to direct the abolition of the house tax. But from an apprehension we entertain that this measure might be mistakenly considered as originating in a disposition on the part of your Government to yield to the influence of popular clamour [...] we are willing therefore to hope that under the modifications which you had it in contemplation to adopt [...] the same has, since the date of your letter, been quietly collected.”

This passage further stated:

“But if notwithstanding these modifications [...] it has continued to be obnoxious [...] we think you ought to adopt the most speedy measures for its repeal, and which you think it will be possible for you to carry into execution, without compromising in too conspicuous a manner the authority of Government.”

But there was really little need for communicating such sentiments to Calcutta. The Government in Calcutta had a similar view and wholly shared the sentiment that any “repeal” of the tax should only be carried “into execution, without compromising in too conspicuous a manner the authority of Government”. Months before London prepared and considered the relevant dispatch, the Revenue letter from Bengal of December 14, 1811 had stated:

“Arguments indeed were not wanting for the continuance of the tax, founded on the necessity of supporting the authority of Government and repressing the spirit of resistance which had been manifested to the exercise of its legitimate powers. The inhabitants of Benares however had long ago yielded an unconditional submission to public authority; and exclusively of that consideration it will be observed, that we neither intended to proceed to the immediate abolition of the tax, nor to extend the benefits of that measure to any place at which (to use the terms of our instructions to the Board of Revenue) ‘commotions originating in a resistance to the operation of the tax might exist at the period of the receipt of these orders’.”

### III

This story of the 1810-11 protest in Benares and other towns, as it emerges in more vivid detail from the documents, seems not really very different from what has happened during the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements of the 1920s and 1930s in different parts of India. It may, however, be worthwhile here to recapture the main elements of the 1810-11 happenings at Benares and other places.

The immediate cause of the protest was the levy of the house tax. Yet unhappiness and revulsion had been simmering for a considerable time previous to this levy. By 1810, these areas had been under British domination for about 50 years and the people in general (whether at Benares, Bhagalpur or Murshedabad) had begun to be apprehensive of the doings of Government. As stated by the people of Benares, the levy of the house tax felt “like salt scattered on a wound”. The people of Murshedabad considered it to be “a new oppression” and stated that it had “in truth struck us like a destructive blast”.

The main elements behind the organisation of civil disobedience at Benares were:

1. Closing of all shops and activity to the extent that even “the dead bodies were actually cast neglected into the Ganges, because the proper people could not be prevailed upon to administer the customary rites”.
2. Continuous assemblage of people in thousands (one estimate<sup>26</sup> puts the number at more than 200,000 for many days) sitting in *dharna*, “declaring that they will not separate till the tax shall be abolished”.
3. The close links made by the various artisans and craftsmen with the protest through their craft guilds and associations.
4. The *lohars*, at that time a strong and well-knit group, taking the lead, calling upon other *lohars* in different areas to join them.
5. A total close-down by the *mullahs* (boatmen).
6. The assembled people who “bound themselves by oath never to disperse” till they had achieved their object.
7. The dispatch of emissaries “to convey a *Dhurm Puttree* to every village in the province, summoning one individual of each family to repair to the assembly at Benares”.
8. “Individuals of every class contributed each in proportion to his means to enable them to persevere”, and “for the support of those whose families depended for subsistence on their daily labour”.
9. “The religious orders” exerting all their influence to keep the people “unanimous”.

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26 J. Mill (ed. by H.H. Wilson), *History of British India*, vol.VII, p.467.

10. "The combination was so general, that" according to the magistrate, "the police were scarcely able to protect the few who had courage to secede, from being plundered and insulted".
11. The displaying of protesting posters about the streets of Benares. The magistrate called them "inflammatory papers of the most objectionable tendency" and "offered a reward of Rs.500 for every man on whom such a paper may be found".

Regarding the people's own view of the unarmed resistance they had put up, the collector reported: "Open violence does not seem their aim, they seem rather to vaunt their security in being unarmed in that a military force would not use deadly weapons against such inoffensive foes. And in this confidence they collect and increase, knowing that the civil power cannot disperse them, and thinking that the military will not." The taking of such steps seems to have come to them naturally. Further, their protesting in this manner in itself did not imply any enmity between them and state power. It is in this context that the rejected petition quoted some prevalent saying: "to whom can appeal for redress of what I have sustained from you, to whom but to you who have inflicted it". The concept of ruler-ruled relationship which they seem to have held, and which till then had perhaps been widely accepted, was of continuing interaction between the two. Such a dialogue seems to have been resorted to whenever required, and its instrumentalities included all that the people of Benares employed in this particular protest.

It was, perhaps, only belatedly that the people of India began to comprehend the futility of such traditional protests in relation to authorities wholly subscribing to an alien value system and who thus had nothing in common with themselves. Such a realisation, on the one hand, would have made them turn to violence; and, on the other, reduced them more and more to passivity and inertness.

The happenings at Patna, Saran, Murshedabad (though seemingly of lesser intensity) and at Bhagalpur appear to have been of the same nature and were similarly conducted as at Benares. Even at Bhagalpur, where the collector, seemingly forgetting where he was, began to mete out summary justice in the manner of contemporary British justices of the peace, the people, though enraged, remained peaceful. They continued assembling in thousands, totally unarmed, and even the "women, and their children seemed to have no dread of the consequences of firing among them, but rather sought it".

If the dates (1810-12) were just advanced by some 110 to 120 years, the name of the tax altered and a few other verbal changes made, this narrative

could be taken as a fair recital of most events in the still remembered civil disobedience campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s. The way the people organised themselves, the measures they adopted, the steps they took to sustain their unity and the underlying logic in their minds, from which all else flowed, are essentially similar in the two periods.<sup>27</sup>

There is one major difference, however. While the people in 1810-11 could still act and move on their own, the people of India a century later could not. The century which intervened between the two (or a longer or shorter period for some other areas) wholly sapped their courage and confidence and, at least apparently, made them docile, inert and submissive in the extreme. It is this condition which Gandhi overcame and put the people back on the path of courage and confidence.

A contributory factor leading to the extensive adoption and success of Gandhian non-cooperation and civil disobedience has perhaps been the relative mellowness and a certain reflective quality which the twentieth century British rulers had acquired by the time Mahatma Gandhi came to launch his various movements. His own personality may have further added to this reflective quality inducing many of the British in their more private moments to share his views about the great injury which British rule had done to the Indian people. In contrast, the British rulers of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century were, by and large, not only the agents of a most callous and inhuman state system, but individually and collectively subscribed to and practised such callousness and inhumanity. What primarily brought about the change and the comparatively mellow attitudes is a matter for a different enquiry.

#### IV

The story of the 1810-11 protests at Benares and other towns does not necessarily include every form of protest resorted to by the Indian people in relation to governmental or other authority. A more systematic exploration of eighteenth and early nineteenth century primary records (as well as records of

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27 It is by no means implied here that there are no differences at all between the non-cooperation and civil disobedience in 1810-11 and what is termed "Satyagraha". To an extent the concept of satyagraha, since this term was coined by Mahatma Gandhi, has become more and more involved. For many, it cannot be resorted to by any who have not been trained to an ashram life, etc. But ordinarily satyagraha can only mean non-cooperation and civil disobedience of the type resorted to in Benares in 1810-11. And when Gandhi recommended to the Czechs and the Poles to resort to satyagraha, it could only have been this Benares type of protest (suitably modified according to their talents) which he had in mind.

still earlier periods—if such exist) may well disclose several other forms such protest took as well as the principles of their organisation. Yet it should establish beyond any doubt that the resort to non-cooperation and civil disobedience against injustice, etc. is in the tradition of India. It also confirms Gandhi's observation that "in India the nation at large has generally used passive resistance in all departments of life. We cease to cooperate with our rulers when they displease us." It further suggests that, either intuitively or through knowledge of specific instances, Mahatma Gandhi was very much aware of such a tradition.

Does the knowledge that non-cooperation and civil disobedience are in the tradition of India have any relevance to present-day India? It appears to the present writer that this knowledge is relevant both for the people as well as for governments and other authorities. A realisation of it in fact seems crucial in the sphere of a people-government relationship, and its acceptance is imperative for the health and smooth functioning of Indian polity even today.

Before proceeding further, it is useful to indicate two major characteristics of the present polity which India has inherited from two centuries of British rule. The first pertains to the persistence of eighteenth and nineteenth century British notions and attitudes regarding the place of the people vis-à-vis their governments.

As the documents show, there is frequent expression by the governmental authorities in 1810-11 of the sentiments that the people must give "unconditional submission to public authority"; that the Government must not seem "to yield to the influence of popular clamour"; that if Government had to yield, it must be "without compromising in too conspicuous a manner the authority of Government". To the Bhagalpur collector, even the postponing of the collection of the tax "because a lawless rabble assembles, is striking at the root of that power, which the Government ought to possess over the subject". The magistrate of Benares expressed a similar sentiment with even more anguish when reporting the situation on January 20, 1811. He wrote: "I cannot but feel very forcibly, that such a state of things, being permitted to continue in defiance of public authority, has already weakened, and weakens daily still more and more, those sentiments of respect, which it is so essential that the community should entertain for the government of the country." Such notions and sentiments are still enshrined in the rules, codes and laws of Indian governments.

Secondly, in spite of Gandhi, the revival of courage and confidence has not been equally manifest amongst all people of India. As appearances go, many seem to have hardly been touched by it. Or perhaps, after an initial flicker

of hope, like the people of Benares after they had been cowed down, they too have given in to “sullen silence”, feeling that though “they could not resist but they will not concur”.

Since 1947, a controversy has been going on in India about the relevance of non-cooperation and civil disobedience in a free country. It seems to agitate all those concerned with the problems of Indian polity, including those who stand for social and political transformation or accelerated change. According to one view, there is no place for non-cooperation and civil disobedience in a free country with representative legislative bodies. According to another, these may still be resorted to in certain situations. Yet the situations which qualify for such resort are also a matter of controversy. According to some, the permissibility applies only when resorted to in order to enforce accepted norms. Others feel that it is permissible to resort to non-cooperation and civil disobedience for advocating the changing of certain norms themselves.

But this is really no new controversy. It started at the same time as the idea of non-cooperation and civil disobedience was revived in India early in this century. Besides men in the governmental apparatus, those who opposed it then included persons like Srinivas Sastri and Rabindranath Tagore. Sastri felt he could not but be apprehensive of “any movement which has the tendency to overthrow, the tendency to disestablish, the tendency to bring about a stage of anarchy in the country, the tendency which destroys law, the tendency which destroys order and ordered government.”<sup>28</sup> Tagore regarded it as inconsistent with the dignity of India and was fearful of the dangers inherent in its practice.<sup>29</sup>

The most vehement and argued opposition to it, however, was voiced by R.P. Paranjpye in his presidential address at the Indian National Liberal Federation at Lucknow on December 26, 1924. As it is very revealing of the thinking and attitudes opposed to non-cooperation and civil disobedience, it may be quoted here at some length. Paranjpye stated:

“The idea of civil disobedience as the highest form of patriotism that is being implanted among a large number of semi-educated people is perhaps the most mischievous feature of the present extremist propaganda. Under the names satyagraha, non-cooperation or civil disobedience, it is being sedulously advocated all over. The deleterious effects are already being seen. [...] It inevitably leads to outbursts of violence whether on one side or the other. [...] It may perhaps provide occasionally a suitable handle against Government, but the effect on the people is permanent.

28 P. Kodanda Rao, *V. S. Srinivasa Sastri: A Political Biography* (1963), p.195.

29 D.G. Tendulkar, *The Mahatma* (1951-54), vol.II, pp.59-60.

Respect for law and order disappears once and for all and all the criminal elements in the population are led to think that they are becoming patriotic by imitating the so-called patriots in their actions. It must be remembered that this want of respect for law and order on the part of the masses will continue even if all the ideas of the Mahatma, Maulvis, or Deshbandhus are fully achieved. They will find, when they are responsible for the Government of the country, that these seeds, that they have now sown to cause trouble to Government, will grow into a pest which they will be unable to get rid of. I cannot think of a policy more short-sighted than this of preparing for infinite trouble for oneself in order to obtain a problematical momentary advantage. The extremist leaders may chuckle at a campaign for the refusal of taxes, [...] taxes will have to be levied and paid by the people under all Governments. But once the people are taught to consider that refusal to pay taxes is the highest form of patriotism, the task of future Government will become almost impossible.”<sup>30</sup>

But as time passed and Gandhi became the sole symbol of Indian nationalism, such opposition became less vocal. While individuals still disagreed with particular expressions of it, by the mid-1930s non-cooperation and civil disobedience emerged as the accepted Indian method of dealing with injustice. With the removal of British power from India, however, the views of Sastri, Tagore, Paranjpye, etc. once again came to the forefront. As perhaps should have been expected, the opposition or dissent has mostly been expressed by those associated with the ruling apparatus. The only curious part of it is that many of such dissenting persons, in the earlier period, had themselves been participants in the Gandhian non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements. But, at the same time, there was no lack of other public men who challenged this new attitude towards non-cooperation and civil disobedience. The following statement by J.B. Kripalani perhaps sums up this challenge. In December 1953, Kripalani said:

“I repudiate the view developed by Congress bosses in the Government that satyagraha can have no place in a democracy. Satyagraha as commended by Gandhiji was not merely a political weapon. It could be used in the economic and social fields and even against friends and family members. Gandhiji commended it as a principle of life. Therefore, it is absurd to say that it has no place in a democracy, specially of the kind that we now have, bureaucratic centralised.”

He added:

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30 R.P. Paranjpye, *Selected Writings and Speeches* (1940), pp.176-177.

“All questions cannot await the next elections nor can a government be overthrown on the basis of local grievances, which for sections of the people may be questions of life and death. The denial of the right of satyagraha would mean unresisting submission to tyranny for long stretches of time.”<sup>31</sup>

The new opposition and dissent has, however, been more complex and somewhat less vehement. Most of it has not rejected non-cooperation and civil disobedience completely. Only it finds it irrelevant and injurious in what K. Santhanam calls “democratic government”.<sup>32</sup> According to him, subject to some marginal cases, “general satyagraha against a democratic government cannot be justified”.<sup>33</sup> According to U.N. Dhebar in 1955 (President of the Indian National Congress at the time): “In the context of democracy or democratically run institutions, there is, generally speaking, very little occasion for satyagraha.”<sup>34</sup> But even persons like Santhanam visualise the need of individuals resorting to it in particular situations requiring the defense of fundamental rights. A former Chief Justice of India, P.B. Gajendragadkar, also seems to share such views and, as recently as March 1967, stated:

“Satyagraha or non-cooperation can also be regarded as a legitimate weapon in democracy, provided of course it is adopted as a last resort, after all other remedies have been exhausted.”<sup>35</sup>

Thus, compared to the 1920s, the present opposition is substantially different. While persons in authority and positions of responsibility do not still much cherish the prospect of non-cooperation and civil disobedience, there has begun to be a general acceptance in India; that instead of being destructive, they are in fact complementary to democracy. Few would today contest Santhanam’s view that “it is essential for democratic rulers to realise that true satyagraha is complementary to true democracy.”<sup>36</sup> Yet such a view has still to sink into the consciousness of those who manage the ruling apparatus or other centres of authority. It is largely because of this dichotomy, strange though it may appear, that present-day non-cooperation and civil disobedience has become more and more involved with the trivial.

31 *Janata* (weekly): January 26, 1954: J.B. Kripalani’s speech quoted in leading article; also text on January 17, 1954, p.3.

32 K. Santhanam, *Satyagraha and the State* (1960), p.62.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Times of India*: September 22, 1955: U.N. Dhebar’s article on ‘The Rationale of Satyagraha’.

35 *Free Press Journal*: March 3, 1967: Press Report of Lecture.

36 K. Santhanam: *op.cit.*, p. 67.

Without perhaps fully comprehending the implications of their observations, both U.N. Dhebar and K. Santhanam have pointed to the central issue. According to Dhebar, “The question of satyagraha [in the context of democracy] can only arise from the perpetuation of an act or the undertaking of an activity which destroys the very foundation of the state or its constitution.”<sup>37</sup> For Santhanam, “satyagraha may be the quickest means of defending”<sup>38</sup> the fundamental rights of the people. Where they, along with many others, have erred, is in taking a mechanical view of what acts destroy “the very foundation of the state or its constitution” or what constitutes “fundamental rights”.

What acts of state destroy a state, or what constitutes a denial of fundamental rights, cannot be determined by recourse to mere legality. To take one glaring example: large-scale hunger and insecurity are both fast corroding the foundations of the Indian state and its constitution, as well as constituting a denial of the most fundamental human right. Hunger, impossible living conditions and insecurity amongst about 40 percent of the people of India, of course, is not a creation of the present Indian state and its constitution. It is a product of the past two centuries. Nevertheless, the inability or insensitivity of the state in eliminating them, if by no other means, by a distribution of some poverty amongst all, is fast leading India to a subversion of the constitution and state structure. The practice of non-cooperation and civil disobedience for eliminating hunger and insecurity (by demanding “effective provision for securing the right of work” and “public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want”, as provided in the constitution itself),<sup>39</sup> could have made (and may yet if initiated in time) such subversion much more difficult, if not impossible.<sup>40</sup>

The reasons why the British would not attend to such protests (a habit which at least apparently the present governments in India which succeeded them continue to cherish) are closely linked with the lack of assurance which the British possessed till the very end about the legitimacy of their rule in India.

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37 *Times of India: op. cit.*

38 K. Santhanam: *op. cit.*, p.67.

39 *The Constitution of India: Article 41.*

40 Even according to someone as responsible and law-abiding as Vinoba Bhave, “in the situation where an act is advocated by law and favoured by public opinion and yet it is not being put into practice, satyagraha for its implementation should be deemed appropriate.” (*Satyagraha Vichar* p.65) There is nothing less controversial in India than the immediate elimination of widespread hunger and insecurity. Its legal approval and advocacy arises from the constitution of the republic itself.

In contrast, most Indian political authorities prior to British rule had much greater assurance about such legitimacy. Hence, their surrendering to the protests of the people and altering or abandoning the decisions or enactments concerned did not in any material sense challenge the legitimacy of their rule. Rather, the willingness to listen and the ability to retract unpopular acts and decisions further confirmed such habit and legitimacy both in their own view and that of the people. Only a legitimate ruler, i.e. one who was accepted to be such by the populace could in fact make such surrender and retraction.

The British in India, on the other hand, even when in certain areas they might have been temporarily conceded some legitimacy by some or all of the ruled, never seem to have felt that their right to rule had any other sanction and legitimacy than that of conquest and an occupying armed force. It is true that their conquests were achieved by a relatively adroit and economical use of force. Still these forces were not all that small.<sup>41</sup>

This feeling about the lack of legitimacy prevailed throughout British rule and was shared by men as different and separate in time as Robert Clive, Thomas Munro, John Malcolm and Charles Metcalfe. 1857 made it even more apparent. The fundamental maxim for British rule in India, according to Clive, was “that as our influence and possessions were acquired, so they must be maintained by force; and that the princes of the country are only to be kept in order by fear”.<sup>42</sup> Fifty-seven years later, Charles Metcalfe did not feel any differently; in fact he was more explicit. In a Minute in 1829 he remarked:

“We are in appearance more powerful in India now than we ever were. Nevertheless, our downfall may be short work. When it commences it will probably be rapid: and the world will wonder more at the suddenness with which our immense Indian Empire may vanish than it has done at the surprising conquest that we have achieved.”<sup>43</sup>

Metcalfe continued:

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41 Until 1857, the European component of British occupying forces in India was one European to four Indians and at times dropped to one European to six Indians. After 1857, when the British became completely panicky and frightened, the composition was altered to one European to two Indians and that ratio was maintained until after 1900. The number of European troops in India was 45,104 in 1856; 92,866 in 1860; and 75,702 in 1908. While the number of Indian troops in 1856 was 235,221; it was 148,996 in 1908. (*British Parliamentary Papers*, 1908, vol.74)

42 I.O.R: *Francis Papers*: MSS Eur E. 12, p. 37: *Hints of a Political System for the Government of India* (ca.1772).

43 London Public Record Office: *Ellenborough Papers*: PRO/30/9/4/Part II/2. Minute dated October 11, 1829 by C.J. Metcalfe.

“The cause of this precariousness is, that our power does not rest on actual strength, but on impression. Our whole real strength consists in the European regiments, speaking comparatively, that are scattered singly over the vast space of subjugated India. That is the only portion of our soldiery whose hearts are with us, and whose constancy can be relied on in the hour of trial. All our native establishments, military or civil, are the followers of fortune. They serve us for their livelihood and generally serve us well. From a sense of what is due to the hand that feeds them, which is one of the virtues that they most extol, they may often display fidelity under trying circumstances, but in their inward feelings they partake more or less of the universal disaffection, which prevails against us, not from bad government, but from natural and irresistible antipathy; and were the wind to change, to use a native expression, and set in steadily against us, we could not expect that their sense of honour, although there might be splendid instances of devotion, would keep the men on our side, in opposition to the common feeling, which, with one view, might for a time unite all India, from one end to the other.”<sup>44</sup>

Metcalf further added:

“Our greatest danger is not from a Russian invasion, but from the fading of the impression of an invincibility from the minds of the native inhabitants of India. The disaffection, which would willingly root us out, exists abundantly. The concurrence of circumstances sufficient to call it into general action may at any time happen.”<sup>45</sup>

A few months earlier, Metcalfe had advised: “I am further convinced that our position must always be precarious, unless we take root by having an influential portion of the population attached to our government by common interests and sympathies” and advocated the taking of every measure which was “calculated to facilitate the settlement of our countrymen in India”.<sup>46</sup>

Such an assessment of the situation was universally shared by the British in India and reflected in government policy and enactments. Consequently, devoid of any other sanction and legitimacy, except the “European regiments” and the “impression of invincibility”, the British could not afford to make any concessions, much less surrender to popular protests. Concession of any sort, in their view,

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44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Durham, Department of Paleography and Diplomatic: *Earl Grey Papers*: Box 36/File 1, Minute dated February 19, 1829 by C.J. Metcalfe.

implied (as in the case of the protests against the house tax during 1810-11), “the exciting in the minds of the natives an expectation of still further concessions”, which eventually (they felt) led to the erosion of every principle of their government. Therefore, in situations when tactical concessions or surrender could not be avoided, these were to be carried “into execution, without compromising in too conspicuous a manner the authority of government”.

This principle of infallibility of state structure (and consequently of other units of power and authority) established by the British continues to survive in India even after the elimination of British power. It is true that, finding itself very vulnerable, the state structure occasionally condescends to consider the complaints of those protesting after they agree to suspend or abandon their protests. Thus, while the reality of the principle of infallibility has been more or less abandoned, the rules, the codes and the laws which enshrine it stay. And it is these latter that appear to provide the state system its real legitimacy and sanctity. Such a state of affairs has led to a most dangerous situation. It not only keeps intact the distrustful, hostile and alien stances of the state system vis-à-vis the people, but also makes the latter feel that it is violence alone which enables them to be heard. The happenings of the past twenty years in no way belie such a feeling.

The opposition to non-cooperation and civil disobedience or the denial of even their theoretical relevance, as expressed by the wielders of the state apparatus from time to time or by men like Srinivas Sastri, Tagore, Paranjpye before 1947, is the outcome of the British nurtured doctrine of the infallibility of the state system. Though now feeble and considered wholly ridiculous, this doctrine is not yet dead and buried. Its roots, while shaky, still remain. And many amongst the wielders of the state structure and the theoreticians of the present Indian state system devote much of their talent and attention to nurturing them.

It is partly as a result of attachment to such a doctrine that while it is admitted that non-cooperation and civil disobedience are legitimate and valid when used against foreign rule, they are treated as illegitimate and invalid when used against indigenous governments and authorities. It is in this context that various leaders of India (not to mention teachers of history, political theory, etc.), while in general standing for an eventually classless and egalitarian society and a welfare state, have in effect allowed themselves to become the new exponents of the infallibility of the present state system. Such a doctrine—and more so support for it—not only goes against all that Gandhi advocated and did during his long public life, but it is also contrary to the psyche of the Indian people which primarily gives rise to and sustains the practice of non-cooperation and civil disobedience.

The above is not to imply that non-cooperation and civil disobedience are to be waged perpetually—as is advocated of ‘revolution’ by certain current doctrines. They are used when there is such a need. The more the ruling apparatus and other centres of authority are in tune with the ruled or those affected, the less the need to resort to them.

It must also be admitted that non-cooperation and civil disobedience, like everything else, do not solve everything. There are social and political situations when they may not at all be applicable. As said earlier, to be successful non-cooperation and civil disobedience seem to require a certain commonality of values between the opposed parties. Such parties must share, even if temporarily, certain common socio-political or religious values. This, however, does not seem to happen in all situations. The late eighteenth and nineteenth century India provides one such instance when the rulers and the ruled had little in common. Similar situations seem to have obtained when most of Europe faced Hitler’s power, or northern India faced Timur centuries ago. It was due to Mahatma Gandhi’s genius, indomitable courage and unmatched organisational capacity that he could visualise and make effective use of instrumentalities (originally fashioned for internal situations) to deal with an alien power. Circumstances (the British having become relatively mellowed by the early twentieth century being one such), and much more his personality, enabled him to make the British see, at least at certain moments, the rightness and justice of the Indian stand. Step by step (from the issue of land revenue, to the boycott of foreign goods, to the abrogation of salt tax, to the banning of liquor shops, to the protests against India being forced into war) he led to the ultimate demand that the British ‘Quit India’. He even recommended these methods to the Czechs and to the Poles against Hitler. But such use or its advocacy against an alien power in no way implied the irrelevance of non-cooperation and civil disobedience against rulers or authorities who are elected or appointed by the ruled themselves.

It is suggested that non-cooperation and civil disobedience are integral to the well functioning and even to the security of a free and democratic society. In a way, they are even more crucial than stratified courts of law, the present forms of periodic local, state-level or national elections, or the rather stilted and constrained debates and considerations within such elected bodies. Instead of being hostile and inimical, those who resort to non-cooperation and civil disobedience against callousness, authoritarianism and injustice are the protectors of their state and societies. Without them, a society will end up at best performing some mechanical ritual, or, more often, in tyranny, leading to anarchy and armed insurrection.



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The Madras Panchayat System (1972),  
vol.II



## The Madras Panchayat System (1972), vol.II

This volume (with the subtitle: *A General Assessment*, Delhi: Impex India, 1972, sponsored by the Balwantraji Mehta Panchayati Raj Foundation, New Delhi) was part of a two-volumed survey (vol. I was authored by S. Saraswati) which resulted from extensive archival and fieldwork undertaken when, from 1963, Dharampal was appointed Director of Study and Research of the All India Panchayat Parishad. A main regional focus was in Tamil Nadu where he carried out a detailed examination of the Madras Panchayat system, for which he also consulted the colonial documentation in the Tamil Nadu State Archives (TNSA). In his pioneering study—of which the Introduction and the concluding section “The Problem” are being reproduced here—Dharampal underscores not only how the indigenous Panchayat-based polity was destroyed as a result of the colonial land revenue system, but also how the colonial bureaucratic apparatus, though out of synch with the real needs of the local communities, was maintained even after Independence. It was the debilitating influence of this dysfunctional system which, according to Dharampal, constituted one of the main causes for the highly detrimental disjuncture between the need for self-empowerment at the grass-roots level (as propagated by Gandhiji) and Nehruvian centralised statist planning. Incisive reviews of this study were written among others by R.K. Patil (*Interdiscipline*, 10/2, 1972, 121-128) and by P.C. Mathur (*Political Science Review* 12/1,2, 1973, 161-167). The volume has been reprinted in: Dharampal, *Collected Writings*, Other India Press: Mapusa 2000 (reissued 2003 & 2007), vol.IV, pp.97-300. Translations into Gujarati and Hindi were published in *Dharampal Samagra Lekhan* (11 vols.), edited by Indumati Katdare, Punarutthan Trust, Ahmedabad 2005 and 2007, respectively.



# The Madras Panchayat System (1972), vol.II

## Introduction

Scholars on India hold conflicting opinions about the connotation and origin of the term 'panchayat'. According to some of them, the term has historically implied more or less self-governing village bodies looking after the manifold civic, administrative and political needs of the citizens in their area. A number of such scholars even go as far as to equate the term 'panchayat' with what has been rather dramatically called 'village republic' by some of the early British district administrators, including the more well-known Charles Metcalfe (1785-1846). The majority of scholars on India, on the other hand, believe that the term 'panchayat' never conveyed any such meaning; and that the function of panchayats was merely to act as judicial bodies in civil or criminal cases at the village or other levels, as well as to settle religious and ritual problems of various kinds.

While a perusal of early (late eighteenth and early nineteenth century) British Indian records leaves little doubt that in most parts of India, the village (and perhaps also the towns, etc.) possessed an organised institutional framework which looked after the civic, administrative and political needs of the community, and was endowed with necessary powers and resources to perform the various tasks,<sup>1</sup> it may yet be true that the word used for such a framework then was not the term 'panchayat' but some other term(s). It is possible that the use of the name 'panchayat' for such a structure is altogether of British origin. Anyhow, whatever may be the original connotation of the term 'panchayat', the present-day statutorily established panchayat bodies in all parts of India, instead of being an inheritance from India's long past, are merely the products of the late nineteenth century British rulers.

During the past eight decades of the panchayat system in Madras, thrice there has been detailed examination of the whole system leading to fresh structures and total reorganisation. Three major attempts in 1880, 1907 and

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1 What exactly was the nature of this framework and how it stood in relation to the central state system, how authority and resources were distributed between them are questions that need an enquiry far beyond the scope of this study. This would require thorough research into the archival and allied material pertaining to the period prior to the establishment of British rule and institutions in various parts of India. The subject is briefly touched upon in the last chapter, "The Problem" [reproduced as a subsequent text].

1946 are traceable during which abstract ideas or theories have formed the basis of local institutions. The structures established then were different in their composition, their institutional relationship to the people of their respective areas, their functions and to a lesser extent in their income and expenditure pattern. But in each of these attempts, the institutions started with relative freedom and, in the course of time, were hedged and restricted ending in an impasse. The growth and decline of the panchayat system in three phases during a period of eighty years is strikingly similar.

Following the individual district attempts at forming some less formal local bodies for local funds during 1850 and 1880, the governmental authorities of that time in the India Office in London, in the Government of India at Calcutta, and in the Presidency of Madras began to be concerned about some form of self-governing institutions at the local levels. Several ideas seem to have led to the same conclusion, the three major ideas being (i) to help raise additional resources at local levels to do the various things which it was felt were needed to be done, either by starting new schemes or pursuing old ones more vigorously, (ii) to create a system of local government which would be relatively independent of the routine governmental machinery and would enable those who operated the system, particularly the collectors of the concerned areas, to undertake desirable tasks in a flexible and freer manner, and (iii) to enable the people of different areas from the village to the district level to have a part or say in doing things for their own individual and social well-being. The first two of these seem to have evolved from the need of the situation and the experience of countless British administrators in the previous half a century. The third had much less to do with the administrators either in Madras or in the Imperial Government of India at Calcutta (as it was then called). It was really an extension of Gladstonian ideas and abstractions by the then Viceroy Lord Ripon. It is true that, following in the footsteps of Ripon, similar sentiments were also aired by various other persons and committees. Some even expressed a desire to put some life into the fast dying village communities and their councils; or even to recreate such communities where they had seemingly become extinct. Madras certainly did not lag behind in such sentiments. Yet this Gladstonian idea did not really go very far. It ended with the celebrated Ripon resolution and its incorporation in the statement of principles which preceded every enactment.

As a result of the 1884 legislation, a three-tier structure came into being in all districts at the district level, in most taluks at the taluk level, and in a substantial number of villages at the village level in the Madras Presidency. In many areas, the bodies grew in strength, doing a substantial amount of work in

terms of the construction and maintenance of roads, the starting and maintenance of schools, hospitals, dispensaries, etc. Their total expenditure (although not very large by present-day quantitative standards) was substantial in comparison to the governmental expenditure in those days. Yet a deadlock began to develop in the functioning of these local bodies either between the local bodies and the Presidency government, or between their chairmen who were officials and the general membership. In most places, this led to people losing interest in the body, and in some, to the members trying to assert themselves. One way of such assertion, which became somewhat common in the district boards, was to reverse one or other decision of the collector-president, particularly in regard to the punishment meted out by him to any employee of the district board. This became irksome, if not quite intolerable, both to the collector and to the government. In 1905, the government provided for an appeal by the collector-president to the Governor-in-Council against the decisions of the district board. A real impasse in the structure was thus reached.

The Royal Decentralisation Commission of 1907, along with its primary task of examining the administrative structure of the governments in India from the sub-district to the imperial capital, also interested itself in the question of local boards and village panchayats. It obtained a massive testimony, all recorded verbatim and published in ten volumes comprising 45,891 questions and replies. Volume I,<sup>2</sup> pertaining to the Madras Presidency alone, consists of 10,079 questions and answers. Within the terms of its reference, the Commission made a comprehensive assessment of the prevailing situation at different levels and gave its own recommendations to deal with the problems faced.

The years 1909–1920 were the years of wide ranging discussion on the subject of local self-government institutions. The subject seems to have attracted practically everybody who had anything to do with public life. Even persons known for their moderate political views were to be found in the forefront, pleading the case for strengthening these bodies and extending them support. Research into this period may disclose that the published material pertaining to the panchayat idea, and to what such bodies should be and should do, is more voluminous during the decade of 1910–1920 than in any other ten-year period, including the years after independence. Two such elaborations, one by Gopal Krishna Gokhale and the other by C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, are worth reproducing here:

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2 S. Saraswathi: *The Madras Panchayat System*, vol.I: *A Historical Survey*, Impex India, Delhi 1973.

1. “The three evils of the present system of district administration are its secrecy, its purely bureaucratic character, and its departmental delays. Important questions affecting the interests of the people are considered and decided behind their backs on the mere reports of officials, only final orders being published for general information, as though the people existed simply to obey. The constant references, backwards and forwards, which an excessive multiplication of central departments has necessitated, involve long and vexatious delays even in the disposal of petty matters, and are a fruitful source of irritation and suffering to simple villagers. The Collector is the chief representative of the Executive Government in a district, and to prevent the evils of an uncontrolled exercise of power, he is subjected to a series of checks in his work. The checks are, however, all official; they are all exercised by the members of his own service, of which he himself, as a rule, is a fairly senior officer, and though they may serve to prevent gross abuses of power, they are not of much value in promoting efficient administration, and they certainly hamper him largely in the prompt discharge of his duties. What the situation requires is not such official checks exercised from a distance, but some control on the spot on behalf of those who are affected by the administration. For this purpose, I would have in every district a small council of non-officials, two-thirds of them elected by the non-official members of the district board, and one-third nominated by the Collector. I would make it obligatory for the Collector to consult the council in all important matters, and I would delegate to him large additional powers to be exercised in association with the council, so that ordinary questions affecting the administration of the district should be disposed of on the spot without unnecessary reference to higher officials.”<sup>3</sup>
  
2. “Unless the people are trusted to manage local affairs without official control from within, they will never learn adequately to discharge their functions. If this reform does not take place, as well as the much needed reform in the extension of their powers as to the raising of income, the framing of budgets, the creation of appointments, and in short all matters in which they at present work under strict control, still less it is likely that a spirit of initiative or of business-like promptitude will characterise the action of these bodies.”<sup>4</sup>

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3 Gopal Krishna Gokhale, quoted in: M. Ramchandra Rao: *The Development of Indian Polity*, Madras 1971, p.291.

4 C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer: *Presidential Address of the Malabar District Conference*, 1971.

These two views probably sum up several of the expectations and proposals by which these were sought to be realised.

The enactment which came in 1920 was thus an attempt to give some concrete shape to these ideas. To an extent the beginning was really hopeful. The two legislations as well as the regulations framed under them attempted to assist the realisation of these ideas. No doubt there were several powers reserved for the government under the two Acts, yet most of them were delegated to the district or taluk boards or to their presidents. Until 1930, there does not seem to have been any actual interference in the day-to-day functioning of these bodies, or of the modifications they made in the rules, regulations, etc. But concern about the manner of their functioning began to appear in government circles, particularly among those in charge of financial procedures, even as early as 1924. By 1930, such issues really became urgent. Some of the points made during discussions in government circles were that the forms prescribed by the government earlier did not "provide for sufficient information to check the accuracy of figures entered as (budget) estimates", that there were no written rules of procedure which described the important stages of preparation, control and sanction of budgets in the offices of the local boards, that the manner of presentation was not laid down and that the government "had no means of reasonably satisfying themselves about the reality of a working balance shown on paper". While pointing these out, it was admitted that however ideal a system might be in theory, its effectiveness depended on the manner and the spirit in which it was worked, but still it was stressed that the aim of a system was "equally to minimise all possibilities of human error". These points were illustrated by the defects noticed in a particular taluk board during that period. The place of the local bodies in the body politic was indicated and the objects in creating them were explicitly stated: "(i) to lighten the task of central authorities in respect to certain fields of activity which from their nature and the enormous size of this country cannot be efficiently exercised by a central organisation; and (ii) to train people in self-government".

These arguments led to the hypothesis that the spheres of activities of the local bodies would be limited by Acts of the legislature and would be subject to these; the administrative framework of local boards would be designed with full elasticity regarding their activities in the spheres prescribed, control remaining in the central authority and limited to specific items to prevent the decay of these institutions by financial insolvency.

On such a hypothesis, a 'fiscal system' to 'suit such an organisation' was worked out. The main suggestions made were to provide (i) statutory rules

under the rule-making powers of the government; and (ii) a detailed set of departmental instructions “to guide the presenting etc., of the budget”. These suggestions were considered by the relevant authorities. One of the draft rules prescribed that the “budgets of local boards and of the village development fund shall become executory only after the approval of the local government”. This was found to contravene Section 116 of the Act and was deleted. A few other rules were added, and from then on, the *rule* of statutory rules and detailed departmental instructions began in the working of the local bodies created under the 1920 Acts.

This and a few other such steps about this time set the trend and the pace. The rest was simply a logical consequence. What was found to contravene Section 116 of the Act in 1931–1932 no longer did so in 1935. In fact things went further. It was then stated that “the sanction of the budget shall not, by itself, be deemed to authorise the panchayat to incur all the expenditure provided for therein; and where the sanction of the local government or of any other authority is required for incurring any expenditure provision for which has been specifically accorded, it shall be the duty of the panchayat to obtain such sanction before the expenditure is incurred”.

Even this was found to be insufficient: In early 1939 the Inspector of Municipal Councils faced a serious problem which made him write to the government a letter that is worth quoting:

“In this connection I invite the attention of Government to the concluding portion of my letter of 20.3.1939 wherein I have promised to submit a further report about the callous way in which panchayats spend their funds under provisions of the Local Board Act. Rule 1-A (2) of Schedule V to the Act provides that, subject to such rules as the local government may make, the panchayat shall have power to make such provisions as it thinks fit for carrying out the requirements of the village in respect of certain specific matters, like plantation of avenues, control of village buildings, extension of village sites, village protection, improvement of agricultural stock, promotion of cottage industries, etc. Cases have come to notice where panchayats have been indulging in wasteful expenditure like maintenance of breeding bulls, encouragement of cottage industries, by maintaining bee-hive foundries, making provision for the extension of village sites, etc., without considering their financial position and quite oblivious to the fact that panchayats have got to improve their sanitation and afford facilities for drinking water, and maintain their roads properly, which are prime necessities of any village. Though law provides that Government may make rules in this behalf, still the framing

of a rule is not a pre-condition precedent to incurring of expenditure in respect of these authorised items as contemplated in rule 1-A (2) of Schedule V to the Act, and I think it is desirable that the inspector should be authorised to control such wasteful expenditure in the interests of the panchayat administration. I, therefore, suggest to Government the desirability of framing a rule to the effect that if panchayats would spend any money on the items specified in rule 1-A (2) of Schedule V, the previous sanction of the inspector should be obtained in the matter. I have already made a reference to the Government about the propriety of making a rule for controlling the establishment of village libraries and reading rooms and I am awaiting orders of the government in the matter. I suggest that Government may be pleased to consider the above suggestion and pass early orders in the matter.”

As a result, two government orders were issued: the first, on 31st August 1939, and the second some months later, on 2nd February 1940. The first related to a particular case of a panchayat keeping a bull, instructing the concerned panchayat to give up the keeping of the breeding bull and asking the district board to whom the bull belonged to take it back from the panchayat. The second order amended the schedule to the Act and stated that “no panchayat shall incur any expenditure on any of the matters specified in sub-rule (2) of rule 1-A of Schedule V of the Madras Local Board Act, 1920 without the previous approval in writing of the Inspector of Municipal Councils and Local Boards or of the Deputy Inspector of Municipal Councils and Local Boards concerned”. About the same time, a rule for controlling the establishment of village libraries and reading rooms was also issued by the government. Thus under the rule-making authority each activity of the panchayat came to be controlled by the government.

Similar alterations were made in other matters. The technical sanctioning powers of the bodies were first made over to their technical staff but later the staff was itself taken out of the service of the local boards. Whatever little staff still stayed in the service of these bodies gradually began to be bound not by the conduct rules as framed by these bodies but by rules statutorily proclaimed. Even the travelling and daily allowance rules did not escape attention. By about 1944, the procedural and operational structure which, with some recent refinements, exists today under the Madras Panchayats Act, 1958, had come into being.

The period 1946 to 1958 and thereafter, in practically every detail, is comparable to the period 1907–1920. The same type of concern to promote local bodies was expressed; similar discussions took place; similar commissions

or committees were appointed. But while the local boards of 1920 had started with a comparatively cleaner slate, the panchayat bodies of 1958 were loaded with complexities of procedure. The aim in 1958 was to achieve each and everything with the same old operational and procedural devices. The Act of 1958 also created a three-tier structure, this time with more status and resources at the middle tier. It also provided for larger quantitative resources than had obtained immediately before. The most outstanding achievement of the 1958 period was the establishment of village panchayats to cover every village and hamlet. Until 1958, only about half the area of the state had village panchayats. In the 1930s, the area coverage was about one-third of the composite presidency.

Yet even the financial resources after 1958 were proportionately no more than those which obtained in the two decades 1920 to 1940. In fact, in comparison to total state expenditure, the present resources are somewhat below those of the previous period. Until about 1940, the total expenditure of local bodies in the Madras Presidency had ranged from 4 to 6 crores of rupees, while the expenditure of the Presidency government moved between 16 and 20 crores of rupees. Since 1961, when the present structure had fully come into being, the expenditure is around Rs.28 to Rs.30 crores a year, while the state expenditure has grown to nearly Rs.195 crores in 1964–65. This certainly does not imply that these bodies are languishing for lack of money. This is only to illustrate the trend.

The study from records presented in Volume I highlights the totality of the present structure in its varied details. It also spells out by a perusal of the past records the antecedents of the prevailing structure. Why the same pattern has to repeat itself is something which cannot easily be answered from the records. The present volume is an attempt to evaluate the system and functioning of Panchayat Raj in the Madras state, mainly from the information and impressions gathered during extensive tours of several districts, undertaken during the study, and from a study in depth of certain selected panchayats and panchayat unions. The total impact of the system in terms of the investments made, the programmes taken up, the human resources involved and the institutional machinery at work has been assessed in a general way. Some crucial questions like corruption, the extent of real 'self-government', the role of panchayats in the village communities have been discussed with a view to identifying the problems and suggesting a way out to bridge the existing gap between the theory and practice of Panchayat Raj in the Madras state.

### The Problem<sup>5</sup>

Much is known and said about the ancient nature of the panchayat system in rural India. But it is much less realised that such village bodies, though ancient in origin, existed as functioning entities in most parts of India—both north and south—until recent times. Notwithstanding all the political and economic changes which had disturbed Indian society in the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries, these bodies were in every sense, in matters of all internal management relating to their respective areas and populace, governments of their areas around the year 1800.<sup>6</sup> Their conduct was based on customary usage and so in many respects differed from one area to another. Their sovereignty was bound internally by *dharma* and externally by the political power which held sway over the larger territory. To the extent that the political power conformed to custom and obeyed *dharma*, these bodies and the people in their areas felt more free, economically prosperous and lived in relative harmony. At times when such political power became more demanding or grabbing or oppressive due to external pressures or because of its alien origin and became less certain of its rule, these bodies became correspondingly depressed and consequently rather rigid and people in their charge less free. Even then the bodies stayed, governed their areas, and looked after all functions—including the overall management of land and its occasional re-division where such practice prevailed<sup>7</sup>— which required to be looked after publicly.

The custom and the *dharma*, as understood and applied around 1800, was vastly different to what prevailed in the latter part of the 19th and the early 20th centuries. For instance, the rights of the actual cultivator were far superior both over the produce and the land to what these were in later decades until the present. Similarly, the economic repression and exploitation of what are termed the lower castes seems to have been rare. A constant economic or group exploitation of certain castes appears to be of somewhat later date.

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5 This forms the concluding section (Chapter V) of the volume: *The Madras Panchayat System*, vol.II: *A General Assessment*, Impex India, Delhi 1972.

6 *Memorandum of the Improvements in the Administration of India during the last thirty years*—prepared at the instance of the Court of Proprietors of the East India Company, January 1758. See also various proceedings and minutes of the governments of Bengal, Madras and Bombay presidencies, particularly the minute of the Governor General (20 January 1832) on the question of the village system, the several variations in different parts of the country, the question of the rate of assessment, etc.

7 The practice even continued in some areas of the Madras state until the end of the nineteenth century.

The material on the state of Indian society in the years 1750–1830 or so is scattered in voluminous records relating to that period. This requires a fresh and careful, unbiased examination. Far too many things have been taken for granted on the authority of historians and writers, most of them dating from about 1860.<sup>8</sup>

It would be claimed by most scholars that even if one could find material in the British collectorate and other records of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century apparently disproving or seriously challenging notions, beliefs and views which have been held for a century past, how is one to accept what such records indicate. The scholars' point here is that the writings and observations of mere administrators who had no training of any sort in the modern disciplines of social science cannot be acceptable in such matters. The scholars, however, seem to have forgotten the origin of the writing of current Indian history. The history, the beliefs and the notions which prevail amongst scholars and the intelligentsia themselves are based on a particular selectivity of these very records. The only other contributory records which have led to the presently held deductions about the nature and state of Indian society in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are the scriptural texts, of which the Brahmins were the guardians. But practically all these Brahmanical texts are works of theory and ideology or commentaries on them. Like all theories and ideologies these presented what was considered as 'desirable' by their authors and limited followers. Even if these had really become reality in any large areas—and this is very doubtful, keeping in view the nature of change and alteration which influences all theories and ideologies as time passes—it would be self-deception to believe that such reality had existed unaltered for several centuries and millennia. The reality of the eighteenth century was based on its own ideas and requirements. Even where the Brahmins ruled, as the Peshwas effectively did in Maharashtra for many decades, the social reality did not flow from the Brahmins, but from usage.<sup>9</sup>

8 For an account of how Indian history began to be written, the reader is referred to "James Mill, Mounstuart Elphinstone and the History of India", in: C.H. Philips (ed.), *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, Oxford University Press 1961. Also Q. Craufurd, *Sketches of the Hindoos*, 1790, may be read for a description of South Indian society around this time.

9 The opinion that "the power of the Brahmins is doubled since they lost the country" told to Elphinstone (Minutes, 26 March 1825) by a Maratha peasant, though in no sense conclusive, is perhaps nearer the truth than the present-day prevalent notions. Around the same time (1826), the people of Sattara and Khandesh believed that "new [social] rules can be established" in consultation with elders and Brahmins, and the Sattara people went as far as to say that "custom has sanctioned many things in opposition to the Sastras". It is true Poona differed from this view. But Poona was a purer citadel of Brahmanical scholarship and custom.—Another point regarding the present notions may be mentioned here. The custom of Sati much exercised the mind of many Indians and the British in the early [contd.]

nineteenth century. Since then a whole mythology has been created and is believed regarding its wide scale prevalence in the early years of the 19th century. But in a period of some 40 years, 1772–1813, only some three cases of ‘Sati’ can be traced in the records of the Madras Presidency. No doubt in the Bombay Presidency in the four years 1824–1827 there were 158 cases but 114 of these occurred in Concan South, 17 in Dharwar, 11 in Ahmedabad and 10 in Khandesh. Other districts of the Bombay Presidency reported one or two cases or nothing at all. It is possible that the recorded cases were not the total reality. But these must have borne some relationship to what existed. In Bengal of course the practice was fairly widespread, but its intensity was mainly limited to Calcutta division with some 250 to 500 cases every year, with Benares and Dacca following with 50–140 annually during 1815–1825.

Yet another much believed notion amongst the scholars and ruling circles is about the age-old submissive nature of the ordinary Indian and his child-like attitude to his rulers. Discussing the tendency amongst the Madras native officials for flattering the British despite the latter’s harshness to those in their power, as compared with the Maratha Brahmins who were “more civil to their inferiors, polite to their equals and less cringing to their superiors” than the inhabitants of the British-governed old provinces (Bengal and Madras), one of the senior officials who had had experience of both Madras and Bombay areas had this to say: “In our old territory, the nature of our institutions has in great degree confounded all ranks and distinctions of persons, reducing the whole to nearly one common level, with the exception of the few whom we employ in office”. Another official suggested that the reason for such behaviour might be inherent in the situation of British power. He said “the position of the *Mamlatdars* [the Indian revenue officials of the British] was now secure from the influence of the ‘gentry’ of the country; therefore the *Mamlatdars* no longer troubled to conciliate them”. Elphinstone, who was Governor of Bombay at this time (1820–22), also noted this difference and in commenting on the statement of a senior Bengal officer “that there was scarcely a Bengali in his district who would sit down in the presence of an English gentleman”, remarked: “Here every man above the rank of a Hurcarrah sits down before us, and did before the Peshwa; even a common ryot, if he had to stay any time, would sit down on the ground”. (The quotations and facts in this paragraph and the quotation from Elphinstone’s Minutes in the paragraph above are taken from Kenneth Ballhatchet: *Social Policy and Change in Western India, 1817–1830*, OUP 1957).

How the submissive attitude developed may perhaps be illustrated from an incident described by C.E. Kenway: *Sketches of India*, 1858. While recommending that “we must awe by power whilst we attack by kindness”, the author reproduces an account of an incident in 1764. According to him, “shortly after the battle of Patna, Major Hector Munro came up with reinforcements of British troops, and assumed the command of the whole army. To put down a mutiny of the sepoy, whom he found clamouring for higher pay, Munro determined to blow 24 of the ring leaders from the mouth of his cannon. The victims were selected from a whole battalion, who, after threatening the lives of their English Officers, had been caught marching off by night to join the enemy. They had been tried by a Field Court Martial of their own black officers, who had found them guilty of mutiny and desertion. When four had suffered, and the fifth was tied to the gun’s mouth, the sepoy tumultuously declared that the execution should stop there. Munro ordered the artillery officers to load with grape, and turn their guns on the native regiments: he drew up his Europeans in the intervals between the guns, and called on the sepoy to ground their arms. The men obeyed, and the executions went on. This extreme measure was attended with complete success. There was no more mutiny from that day forward.”

The need for the Indian scholar is to do a little probing into the facts and beliefs which have been taken for granted for so long, and in the extension and perpetuation of which he has had a large share.

The village in 1800, both in south and north India, though varied in its land management—from the *samudayam* to specific individual proprietorship, and other institutional and technological practices—had at least this much in common: that it maintained its own land records and had the village karnam (the patwari in the north) and several other professional persons known as ‘village servants’ to render it professional service. Their number seems to have varied from area to area and some villages had more than one person in a particular professional category and some others shared one or two of the servants with another nearby village. All these persons were maintained and paid by the village according to somewhat differing arrangements, the more usual practice being their individual share—in terms of revenue or proportion of produce being treated as the first charge on revenue and all agricultural produce.

Starting from relatively disturbed political conditions and consequent tyranny around 1750, the years 1750 to 1840 were years of disruption and decline, and in most areas the village panchayat system disappeared for all practical purposes. The two main causes were the taking over of the total revenue along with the village karnam, the village land records and the village police by the overall political power of the time, i.e. the British rulers of India in the areas under their direct control, and by their dependent native rulers in their own areas in due time; and the second, the determining and fixing of the land tax (now termed land revenue) at around 50 per cent of the gross agricultural produce in most parts of India and in all areas coming under the control of the Madras Presidency. Within a few years after such determining and fixing of the tax, the land revenue is commuted into a money tax on the basis of officially determined average prices, etc. Such commutation took place throughout the country—in certain areas a little earlier, in others somewhat later.

It may not be correct to suggest that the taking over of around 50 per cent of the gross agricultural produce as land revenue by the political power was an altogether new innovation introduced in India by the British rulers. The practice and its basic theoretical formulation is claimed by British researchers of the late eighteenth century to be earlier than the British rule and is said to have had its origin during the reign of Allahuddin Khilji (ca.1300).<sup>10</sup> Whatever may have been the assessment imposed on land by Allahuddin Khilji or other later rulers of Delhi in the Tamil areas of the Madras Presidency and even in most other districts, such an exaction was unheard of until the mid-eighteenth

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10 *The Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the (British) House of Commons on the Affairs of British East India Company, 1812*, particularly the report of James Grant: *Political Survey of the Northern Circars*. Also see, *Land Tax of India—According to Mahomedan Law—translated from Futawa Alumgeeree* by N.B.E. Baillie, London, 1853; John Briggs (Lt. Col.): *The Present Land Tax in India*, 1830.

century. The southern districts of Tamilnadu, like Ramnad and Tirunelveli, did not have much taste of it even until 1800.

One of the major contributions of the British to India was to give this exaction legality, to work out its details for practically every village, hamlet and most fields and to enforce it rigorously, in the language of British rule, 'without fear or favour'. This they did after great and profound deliberations which ended in favour of 'what the natives were accustomed to' and what were assumed to be the rightful share of the sovereign political power 'as the supreme landlord' of each patch of land and field in India. Controversies certainly raged even after the decision and continued along with its implementation in the field. Some modifications in the rates of assessment began to be made around 1860 after it was established that the land revenue should, on average, be equal to half the net produce and not to exceed 33 per cent of the gross produce for dry lands and 40 per cent for wet lands.<sup>11</sup>

The extraction of land revenue of 50 per cent had its inevitable consequences. Accompanied by the need to subordinate the people to the will of an alien political power, it depressed society in every conceivable manner. Economic depression followed as a consequence. The 50 per cent land tax became at times 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the gross produce.<sup>12</sup> Wholesale desertion of land took place; the condition of the labourer seemed somewhat more bearable as he was less bound and could more freely migrate from place to place. Agriculture fell into ruins. Economic depression resulted and was again and again followed by famines and an unheard-of rise in prices. This persisted in the Madras Presidency for more than a century.

The ancient village system disappeared under such destructive impact. Still, remnants of the *samudayam* (meaning community) villages continued here and there until the beginning of the present century. But these were *samudayam* in form only and also disappeared by 1940 in the remaining villages in the district of Thanjavur. The *samudayam* concept and manner of functioning for limited purposes, however, are still traceable in the form of *Mahimai* groups and associations in some areas like Ramnad and Madurai and in the form of more varied caste assemblies and village groups around local temples.

11 *Standing Orders of the Madras Board of Revenue 1820–1865*, No.127(3) of 18 September 1858.

12 Various reports of the Madras Board of Revenue for the years 1852–1855. Also (a) *Papers relating to reduction of assessment in North Arcot, 1855*, (b) J.W.B. Dykes: *Salem—An Indian Collectorate*, 1853, (c) J.B. Norton: *The Condition and Requirements of the Presidency of Madras*—as a letter to Joint Secretary, Board of Control, London, Madras 1854, and many other documents of the period.

The present governmental structure in India originated some 180 years ago in the presidencies of Madras, Bengal and Bombay. As years passed and experience accumulated, the structure came to be defined in the minutest detail by written instructions and orders of the government, which were from time to time classified into the various manuals, standing orders and the like. Legislative enactments (earlier known as regulations) also grew but their bulk and weight was still manageable until the end of the nineteenth century. Most of the basic principles and the resulting structure and procedure of governance in India were well settled by about 1840 or 1850. The primary provisions of documents, like the standing orders of the Board of Revenue in Madras, really date back to this time. Since then, it has largely been a job of refinement, rationalisation, additions and subtractions to what was laid down over a century and more ago. The basic regulations regarding the job of the district collector, or the village munsif or karnam were enacted in Madras in the years 1800–1820. With minor variations—and fewer after 1900—these still hold the field. Similarly, the secretarial system which India has today is a product of the earlier part of the nineteenth century with some variations and rationalisation here and there in the years before 1900. After that the main change is only in the personnel, Indians replacing the British over a period of fifty years. Being by nature rather cautious, at times a hair-splitter, the educated Indian, by the time he came to occupy positions of authority in the governmental structure, was much more alienated from his society, and his contribution to the system has been largely in the plugging of ‘loopholes’, making the structure even more restrictive.

The structure, however, to begin with had a specific purpose. It was to enable an alien nation to rule over this country in relative peace and quiet, and also to present a facade of fair play and justice between man and man to the ruled. Not being really able or willing to understand the relationships and structure of Indian society,<sup>13</sup> the British, once India was wholly subjugated, stratified and legalised the situation which had come into being after their occupation or conquest. It is this badly mauled and disrupted society that they tried to preserve as some exotic being with their law and administration for over a hundred years.

But even this disrupted society was no exotic creature, no mummified corpse. It was still living, at least its living men and women still tried to operate

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13 Reference may here be made to (a) *Memorandum of the Improvements in the Administration of India during the last thirty years*, *op. cit.*, 1758; and (b) to various despatches from the Court of Directors of the East India Company to the Governor General during the period 1815–1835, particularly the despatch of January 2, 1829.

in the manner of human beings. This, however, became difficult for a great many; the structure provided them no leeway to feel human, to express themselves. Such inability and frustration led to the usual behavioural patterns of people so situated which are fairly familiar in modern times. Society ate its own children, certainly those who could not protest. The wholesale uprooting of people from their homes and their lands, either due to direct governmental assessment or because of rack renting, has already been referred to. The land and the houses, at least the house sites, did not disappear from the country; only these went to other people, those who survived the general cataclysm. This is being stated not to blame anybody, neither the British nor the Indian people. It constitutes only an attempt to understand present-day Indian dilemmas against the historical background of a two-hundred-year-old legacy.

By the beginning of the present century, the situation began to change. The hold of the British slackened, the possession of India became less worthwhile, though still prestigious and the temper of the country warmed. Other ways of pacification were tried, attempts made to import newer ideas of the West, even concessions made to political and other demands. The present-day local statutory bodies, the various developmental departments, the cooperatives, the registered voluntary associations are all really a product of this later time. Initially though free to coin their idiom and procedure, nonetheless, all these institutions had an unbreakable link with the governmental structure. The governmental structure, as separate from the legislatures, however, underwent little change. Whatever change there was, as in the 1930s and 1940s, was towards further restrictiveness in every sphere, not only in its relationship with the local bodies.

The Indian political movement, however, of which Independence in 1947 is an offspring, did not worry about such restrictiveness. To it, the whole British-imposed system was an evil, something like a design by the Devil. In its view, when India attained independence, the whole had to go lock, stock and barrel! This is what the country thought and believed when it believed in the possibility of achieving independence at all. Many people continued to believe this even after 1947.

The problem of the panchayat structure is fundamentally intertwined with the problems of the governmental structure. So are the problems of development. It should have been possible if the country had handled one problem at a time to make some sense of the situation. A mixing together of what really can never mix, given the existing constituents, has led to a limitless mess. Each of these now is like a stone round the other's neck, making most functioning, if not well nigh impossible, at least terribly slow and wasteful of human talent and capacity.

Left to itself, it may have been possible for the governmental structure, when whipped sufficiently by public opinion and consequently its elected masters, to deliver in time some bits of development. To achieve this, had there been sufficient pressure, it would have strained itself to the utmost. Such straining would have led to its own enlightenment with a consequent reform or replacement of the structure. If it had failed, it would have disappeared anyway. The problem would have been solved one way or the other.

The other way out was to change the structure by a conscious decision, if not in 1947 when one could claim the country was much too occupied, at least in 1950. It is not as if the people in the structure stood in the way. Perhaps the nation's will had failed.

Then the country started on the road to development. In the field of rural development, it started with the Community Development and National Extension Service scheme. The programme after a little while seems to have lost any moorings it ever had. The political apparatus got panicky. Committees were appointed and studies were initiated. The recommendation was made for statutorily associating the people with the Community Development and National Extension Service. In itself that might not have been too bad a decision. But there it ended. It would not be fair to imply that the august committee which advocated this arrangement and those who pursued its report and recommended it to the nation were oblivious of other road blocks. They could not really have been so, being men of eminence and experience. Yet they left all that to the course of events. In comparison, the Commission on Decentralisation in 1909 and the then Government of India had shown more care and foresight in specifying the enabling nature of the law which they recommended for the local bodies.

But it is not as if foresight was so absolutely lacking. In Madras itself, two very responsible sections of opinion had in their differing manner expressed doubt about the arrangements which were being made. One of the groups was made up of the officials of the Madras government who, expressing their views on the committee on Plan Project's recommendations, thought that in the beginning 'productive development' (meaning Community Development and National Extension Service) should stay with the government and only advisory association of panchayat unions was desirable in the matter, while 'social service development' (education, health, welfare, communication, etc.) should go to the panchayat unions wholly. The other group, that of the legislative critics of the government, expressed similar views though from differing angles in view of preserving the initiative and freedom of these bodies.

The major failure of the structure in India today is at the level of responsibility and accountability. If this is realised, everything else may correct itself. Responsibility does not really mean obedience to orders and instructions and conforming to the laid down paths. Responsibility implies fulfilling the purposes in view of the task assigned.

The failures today, particularly in the panchayat structure, are in the matter of arrangements and not due to those who work in them. Had the arrangements been appropriate, even the most rusted and indolent set of people could accomplish a fairly good job. Most of them today are doing what they are asked to do and allowed to do. And the whole amounts to very little. Whatever is happening today is largely a function of the quantitative input, which as such is terribly wasteful. Of course, the structure preserves the *status quo* and maintains law and order.

However, if maintenance of the *status quo* and the defence of the country alone are the job of the structure, it may have carried on with it, with *ad hoc* deviations and amendments, perhaps indefinitely. But the nation aspired to other things or was persuaded to. But to reach the aspirations one requires the right instrumentalities. This India did not create. Having committed a grievous error, its rulers also lost patience a little too quickly and did not give the old instrumentalities or the new cadres, which were in certain situations created, enough time to adjust themselves, to modify their methods and procedures to fit the tasks. Instead, it mixed up the whole thing, the old instrumentalities, the new cadres, the people's representatives, and put them in the vice of the 150-year-old superstructure. Wherever the persons involved are more agitated and flushed, they come to blows or curse one another; where they are resigned to everything (and the doses of cynicism are rather large, as in many places in the north) nothing ever moves; and where they are more practical and plodding, they bend the instrumentalities to the extent they can, without smashing the thing altogether, or circumvent it mutually so that at least something is done, things at least are kept on the move. This latter is more or less the position in the Madras state. A shared common idiom amongst most people at the local levels and the lack of a major culture gap between the agents of the governmental structure and the people alone makes this possible. But this is really no workable arrangement.

As said earlier, there is no real harm in directing and doing everything from a central place. Only it assumes the presence of the right instrumentalities, the capacity of the centre to use them in the manner desired and to attend to each situation individually. If the quantities involved make direction and attention from one central place cumbersome or impossible, one can split the centre or

create sub-centres—as many as one wishes—and man them with those in whose capacity and judgement one can lay trust. Nobody—at least not the people of India and certainly not the people of Madras—hinders the making of such arrangements. It is due to their own will or failing that the rulers in Delhi, or the rulers in Madras and other states, do not think of such arrangements.

If for some compelling reasons—political, spiritual, sentimental or any other—statutory local bodies are an inevitable part of the landscape of India, then they have to function as such. They will do all that they choose and that which is not specifically prohibited by the basic laws. They will be bound by their good sense and the first few pages of the Indian Constitution. All else, though useful as a model and as suggestions born out of wisdom and experience, can have no binding value. That is, if the bodies, true to the basic principle of their existence, are self-governing bodies within their sphere, their responsibility is to the people in their area to whom only they are accountable for everything they do within their permitted domain. If they encroach beyond, then only the central authority has a right to intervene.

Self-government at any level can function in no other way. All other ways are either only to reduce the institution into an agency of the outsider or to make it irresponsible. Self-government assumes accountability to the people to whom it refers. Otherwise it has no meaning.

The internal problems of the panchayat bodies today are wholly due to indecision in this sphere. What one hears so much today about malpractices here and there, arbitrariness, or non-functioning of panchayat bodies arises from a misunderstanding of the nature of these bodies and their role. Furthermore, many of their problems today are because of the thrusting of an alien idiom on them. Either it paralyses or it leads them to make a mockery of themselves. If they are to function, they can only function with the idiom of their own society. This alone will make them accountable to people whom they represent. The people in their areas today cannot hold them accountable, not only because they are not so accountable in the Acts and the rules and the executive instructions, but also because they have no comprehension of the manner of their functioning. To them, everything these bodies and their masters do is a bit of a riddle, if not wholly wrong. To expect them to take these bodies to task in the present situation is unthinkable. The people can do that only when they know they are the final arbiters in the particular situation.

But if such self-government were to operate, the ‘leaders’ of opinion, the trainers and the educators would not like it. It may not seem right to them. This is due to the alienation in Indian society. So far those with power and influence

have handled such situations by not allowing people to engage in any open social or community activity. Also, at times, they have tried to train them. Consequences both ways have been disastrous. Instead of making them free, such training has made them more subordinate and inhibited, or altogether crafty. Most of the training part of the panchayat system in Madras and elsewhere in fact has done more harm than any other comparable aspect of the panchayat programme. It has helped to crush whatever little interest and initiative any of the persons had before they got engulfed in the everlasting confusion, in do's and don'ts and exhortations for carefulness and caution which has constantly poured from the trainers. The result today is that in the Madras panchayat system even the panchayat union council chairmen are not sure if they can really sit down in their councils and consider and review what has been achieved and what has not in terms of the basic objectives of the Preamble of the 1958 Act itself and to locate and state the reasons thereof. They feel and they are told that this really is not their domain. Perhaps it is unlawful too.<sup>14</sup> Such a state of affairs really needs to be examined by those who are competent and have some say in taking decisions regarding the affairs of the country.

To conclude, over a hundred and fifty years ago the British rulers in India tried to create a governmental superstructure on the foundations of a society to whose disruption they had contributed in no small manner and one which has since been in much agony. They built the structure brick by brick and added all the imperial trappings. The agony in the course of time became almost a part of the life of the Indian people and occasionally burst its bounds here and there. Healers of all types applied their remedies on the wounds. It probably gave relief to a few. Then, there arose hope in the person of Mahatma Gandhi, a promise that the ordeal was soon going to be over. Half-believingly, many found succour in this promise.

Such newly found hope had little to do with this or that philosophy of government; it did not even concern itself much with the sentimentality which has been poured day in and day out over words like panchayats. When such promise was symbolised or expressed by someone whom they loved, admired and believed in, it only signified a society where people were free and relieved of the unbounded suffocation and restrictiveness which the alien idiom had perpetrated. They did not much mind whether they were to be governed and administered from one capital or 500,000. What they certainly did care and understand was that it would be governed by what was considered to be right

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14 Such a view and impression is not limited to a few chairmen. It is widely shared by even such persons who are amongst the founding-fathers of the present Madras panchayat system. The situation really is in no way different in other states.

and good by the standards and values of their society and that the administrators and the governors would be amenable and responsive to public opinion and accountable for the functions entrusted to them.

If the country has chosen to adopt the panchayat system for matters of local governance, then the panchayats must be given freedom to operate in the manner of their individual choice and they must be helped to feel and become adult. It is likely that when this is allowed, they may at times and places act arbitrarily. Ordinarily this seldom happens; a locally-based system which has to function and deliver certain results to a local community cannot afford to be accused of arbitrariness by those to whom it is accountable. Arbitrariness would lead to stagnation. Yet, such a situation can arise. The way out is a socio-political educative programme in which there can be a dialogue between the educators and the people. The present stress on concepts like duty, due procedure and proper channels has to change in the direction of assertion, action and responsibility. The word 'duty' really implies assertion, action and responsibility, but somehow it has been so twisted in recent usage that it has begun to be synonymous with 'obedience'. It is such distortion which has corroded practically all the social checks. These have to be reconstructed. But unnecessary protection and restrictiveness all-round is no way to build social checks. The habits of a sheltered life of the middle-classes and urban society have little in common with the principles and assumptions of local government. Its affinity is with the peasant sturdiness. And that can only happen when it is allowed to grow according to its nature and not as a cultured hot-house plant.

The combining of local self-government with national and state-sponsored schemes, as it has turned out, was an unwise governmental decision. One or the other must be modified in the process of functioning. If no major modification is desirable in the developmental scheme, it must be entrusted to an actual subordinate and qualified unit. To thrust it on the self-governing unit as a scheme is to destroy both. That certainly cannot be the aim in view. The self-governing unit, in addition to what is termed as 'social development' in Madras, may do productive development also. But that is its own ultimate decision. Regarding the structure of law which has to be their frame of reference, the first must be the principles of the Indian Constitution. These bind them in the same manner as they bind the government at the centre and the states. The second can be some specific enactment which provides them legality, defines their sphere and specifies the sources from which they will derive their major income. The present Madras Panchayats Act of 1958 does specify the financial arrangements fairly well. In terms of the enactment, a simplified version of the present Act, removing the restrictive provisions which have crept into it during the last thirty-five to forty years of decline, can serve to start with. Perhaps the Act of 1920 and the

rules framed under it at that time with the deletion of any anachronism and phrases, which no longer have any relevance, may do equally well. What prevails at the present is not a workable arrangement. It cannot stand still and has to move either towards greater freedom and initiative to the bodies or towards its further whittling down. The only way to keep it still is a tricky game between the government and the bodies where no side wins. Such a game may be absorbing, but then one must confess that that is now the only purpose of what has begun to be called the 'panchayat raj' structure.

It must be added that if a decision was to be taken to permit self-government, in however limited a sphere, to the panchayat bodies, such a decision could only be taken after understanding its full implications in terms of policy and operation and the impact of consequent functioning on the larger governmental structure. A clear-shared realisation of this at the levels of the government authority was conspicuously absent even in the days of the Decentralisation Commission and in the debate and the enthusiasm which it fostered. Perhaps isolated individuals in the governmental hierarchy, like Montagu, did visualise the primary and urgent contradictions which would arise from such a step. Yet nothing was specifically laid down which could have been adopted to resolve the contradictions as they arose. The result was that the very functioning of the panchayat institutions under the Madras legislation of 1920 in a period of ten years laid bare the impasse which had arrived. That particular impasse was resolved against the panchayat bodies by a series of mostly well premeditated steps and through a process of stunning these bodies; the stage finally reached has been assumed to be one in which the system had existed all the time. Yet even if the impasse had been resolved in their favour, because of their own individual and collective strength and vigour, the consequences, though perhaps happier, would have been no less complex.

In any country, most of the primary governmental forms must flow from a central theme and principle. In whichever fields there is permissibility of varied forms, those fields have to be demarcated from the governmental structure in a manner that the organisational and administrative arrangements in them do not unduly impinge on the mode of functioning of the central governmental machinery. In most countries where the governmental forms have been arrived at through a continuously evolving process and where they are based on native genius and principles, this does not cause any great worry. Even there, there may be various shifts in the functional or power relationships between the central government and the local authorities. But in essence such an occurrence is something very routine, and would hardly cause a ripple in the ordinary life of

the people, and consequently there is little talk of decentralisation in such countries outside the portals of the government and the local bodies. In India it is not so.

In India the present governmental forms, notwithstanding bits of native trappings which are found attached to them, have flowed from altogether alien themes and principles, and imperial or colonial needs. This is not to pass any judgement on what exists. But one thing needs to be realized: If self-government is allowed in any institution and if those who have to manage it, as the people's representatives or as staff are not very effectively brought up in the idiom of the central structure, they will, from the day they begin to operate, do most things very differently. This in time may create, even if there were a general agreement between the self-governing institutions and the central authority on priorities and major purposes, a great chasm in their functioning processes.<sup>15</sup> If, instead, those who run these institutions have been brought up in the idiom of the central structure, though there may be disputes in the matter of power and resources, they will more or less operate in the manner of the central structure. But the fact of their doing so, even when it gives more substantial quantitative results, would imply that self-government of the institution is limited to them, and has little to do with the people whom they are expected to represent. Hence their real accountability would lie elsewhere and not with the people until such time when the people themselves have been taught to understand and appreciate the idiom and manner of these bodies, of those who run them (and have as a corollary totally forgotten their own), and thus have achieved an unfettered emotional and intellectual link with the running of the country itself.

Whether it is the people who have to change or it is the superstructure which has to get in tune with the people is the dilemma of self-government in present-day India. In this there are no shortcuts and drawing room arrangements. Practically all these have been tried. Whatever decision is made to break the impasse has to be very clearly conceived and sharply defined.

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15 It may perhaps be possible to demarcate areas in a way that no harm can come to either and the society which they serve.

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The Beautiful Tree:  
Indigenous Indian Education  
in the Eighteenth Century (1983)



## The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century (1983)

This major work uses in its title a quote from Gandhiji's Chatham House speech in 1931 which underscored the traditions of Indian education. By reproducing extensive documentation from the 18th and 19th centuries (in particular, relating to the Presidencies of Madras and Bengal, as well as the Malabar and the Punjab regions) about widespread educational institutions prevalent in different regions of the subcontinent, Shri Dharampal provides incisive empirical evidence to substantiate Gandhiji's claim about India being more educated before the onset of British rule. This published documentation initiated a vibrant discussion; the book was reviewed among others by P. Radhakrishna (*Indian Express*, 26.02.1984), Claude Alvares (*The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 18.04.1984, 42-46; response by G.S.R. Krishnan, *ibid*, 22.07.1984), Dharma Kumar (*Seminar*, May 1984; response by J.K. Bajaj & M.D. Srinivas, *Seminar*, June 1984), G.S.R. Krishnan & Madras Group (*PPST Bulletin* 4/1, June 1984, 22-47; 48-63), G. Sivaramakrishnan (*EPW*, 25.08.1984, 1473-1475), Amrik Singh (*Indian book Chronicle* 10/11, 01.06.1985, 201-204), Ganesh Mantri (*Dharmayug*, 14.07.1985), Alok Parasher Sen & S.G. Kulkarni (*Studies in History* 2/2, 1986, 288-291), Sebastian Joseph (*Deccan Herald*, 29.03.1987). Here, Shri Dharampal's detailed and insightful introduction is being reproduced. The text, besides lucidly contextualising the official documentation, also provides an incisive outline of the contemporaneous British educational set-up, thereby allowing the reader to appreciate the relatively high-level of pedagogic developments still prevailing in many regions of the subcontinent in the late 18th and 19th centuries. References to the documents (primarily reports by Governor Thomas Munro [Madras], William Adam [Bengal], Alexander Walker [Malabar] and G.W. Leitner [Punjab]) have been omitted; hence the reader is encouraged to consult the original book to be fully informed about the historical evidence. The volume was reprinted by Keerthi Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., Coimbatore 1995, and also in: Dharampal, *Collected Writings*, Other India Press: Mapusa 2000 (reissued 2003 & 2007), vol. III. Translations into Gujarati and Hindi were published in *Dharampal Samagra Lekhan* (11 vols.), edited by Indumati Katdare, Punarutthan Trust, Ahmedabad 2005 and 2007, respectively.



## The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century (1983)

**M**uch of Indian historical knowledge has been derived, at least until recent decades, from the writings of foreigners. This applies to our knowledge about Indian education as well as to that relating to most other spheres. Unless the Indian source material is of an epigraphical or archaeological nature, the oral traditions, beliefs, or even contemporary Indian writings, if taken into account at all, do not, in themselves, seem to be relied upon by those who write history. The universities of Taxila and Nalanda, and a few others until recently have been more known and written about, primarily because they had been described centuries ago by some Greek, or Chinese traveller, who happened to keep a journal which had survived, or communicated such information to his compatriots who passed it down to modern times.

As it happens, there seem to be relatively few foreign accounts of India between about the 10th and 16th centuries A.D. Further, those which are known are more concerned with the exploits of those men to whom the writers, or chroniclers were attached. Moreover, as such chroniclers happened to be mostly from West Asia (which had a different style of narration), and not from Europe, or China, and further, were closely connected with the extension of Islam into parts of India, they have, consequently, received much less notice and celebrity unless, of course, what they said suited the 19th century writers of Indian history.

It is also probable that so much had already been written by the 8th or 10th century A.D. about the wealth, learning, and philosophies of India (and, furthermore, the organisation of its society, being basically not too different from contemporary society in its neighbouring areas) that the foreign travellers and chroniclers of this period had no special reason to write about such matters. It may also possibly be true, as is generally held by many scholars, that from the 8th or 10th century onwards India was on a visible, or imperceptible declining course, and that what the foreign visitor saw did not really catch his attention.

However, from about 1500 and more so from about the close of the 16th century, travellers and adventurers of a new kind began to wander around parts of India. Since for centuries the areas they came from had had no direct links with India, and as they had come from wholly different climates and societies, to them most aspects of India—its manners, religions, philosophies, ancient and contemporary architecture, wealth, learning, and even its educational methods

were something quite different from their own European backgrounds, assumptions and experience. It is not that the areas they came from, that is southern and western Europe, did not have wealth, philosophies, religions, or great historical architecture. As regards wealth itself, by then there were thousands of families possessing long-accumulated wealth not only amongst the nobility but also in the mercantile and banking classes in different parts of Europe. Moreover, from 1500 onwards vast amounts of gold and silver had begun to pour into Europe from the Americas.<sup>1</sup> Europe also had a 1500 years old religion, and the concepts, philosophies and world-view it gave birth to. However, to the European elite, the world of India had long appeared as something from quite another planet. Furthermore, by about 1500, a tradition of writing, of narration, of description, and even more importantly of printing had begun to spread through Europe. It is not surprising, therefore, that many such travellers, and adventurers, or plenipotentiaries of the various kingdoms of Europe belonging to the European religious or secular elite (as distinct from the sailors or soldiers who, though they made such travel possible, were mere hewers of wood and drawers of water) began to write about their observations and about what interested them to the extent and in the manner they comprehended what they saw, or also in line with what suited their varying audiences. For instance, there are fairly long contemporarily published accounts on the kingdom of the Samudrin Raja of Calicut,<sup>2</sup> on the 'Banias of Surat',<sup>3</sup> on the Parsis,<sup>4</sup> on the courts of Akbar,<sup>5</sup> and Jahangir,<sup>6</sup> and of the poor daily food of the Indian, of "*Khichri* eaten hot with butter."<sup>7</sup> Even the method of teaching in Indian schools received attention<sup>8</sup>, and all these accounts date back to the 16th, and the early decades of the 17th century.

1 A. Del Mar: *History of Precious Metals from Earliest Times to the Present*, 1880; especially pp.174-75, 184-85.

2 Accounts of Calicut began to be published in Portuguese, and soon after in other European languages from about 1500. One of the more detailed of these accounts was by H. Lopes da Castaneda, and it was translated and published into English under the title *The First Booke of the Historie of Discoverie and Conquest of East India, Enterprised by the Portingales*, in 1582.

3 Henry Lord: *Display of two Foreign Sects in the East Indies*, London, 1630.

4 Ibid.

5 For instance see Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations &c.*, 3 volumes, 1598-1600, especially volume 2 for Ralph Fitch's account of his voyage to and travels in India, 1583-91.

6 F. Pelsaert: *Jahangir's India*, translated and edited by W.H. Moreland, 1925.

7 Ibid, pp.60-61: Pelsaert seems to be much put out by the fact that "Oxen and cows are not slaughtered. [...] besides, their slaughter is strictly forbidden by the king on pain of death"; he then adds "this would be a desirable country if men might indulge their hunger or appetite as they do in our cold lands."

8 Pietro Della Valle, 2.11.1623, in: *The Travels of sig. Pietro della Valle, a Noble Roman into East India*, London 1665, pp.110-11.

Prior to 1770, by which time they had become actual rulers of large areas, the British, on whose writings and reportings this book is primarily based, had rather different interests. Their interests then, as in the subsequent period too, were largely mercantile, technological, or were concerned with comprehending, and evaluating Indian statecraft and thereby extending their influence and dominion in India. Indian religions, philosophies, scholarship and the extent of education—notwithstanding what a few of them may have written on the Parsis, or the *Banias* of Surat—had scarcely interested them until then.

Such a lack of interest was perhaps partly due to their different expectations from India: but it seems that the main reason for this lies in the fact that the British society of this period, that is from the mid-sixteenth to about the later part of the eighteenth century had few such interests, and in such matters (religion, philosophy, learning, education) was somewhat introverted by nature. It is not that Britain had no tradition of education, or scholarship, or philosophy during the 16th, 17th, or early 18th century. It had much of all these and during this period produced figures like Francis Bacon, Shakespeare, Milton, Newton, etc. It had the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Edinburgh which had their beginnings in the 13th and 14th centuries. By the later part of the 18th century, Britain also had around 500 Grammar Schools. Nevertheless, all this considerable learning and scholarship was limited to a very select elite, especially after the mid-sixteenth century when the Protestant revolution led to the closing of most of the monasteries and the sequestration of their incomes and properties by the state.

According to A.E. Dobbs, before the Protestant revolution the University of Oxford might be described as the “chief Charity School of the poor and the chief Grammar School in England, as well as the great place of education for students of theology, of law and medicine”<sup>9</sup> and “where instruction was not gratuitous throughout the school, some arrangement was made, by means of a graduated scale of admission fees and quarterages and a system of maintenance to bring the benefits of the institution within the reach of the poorest.”<sup>10</sup> Further, a very early statute of England while specifying that “No one shall put their child apprentice within any city or borough, unless they have land or rent of 20 shillings per annum: but they shall be put to such labour as their fathers or

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9 A. E. Dobbs: *Education and Social Movements 1700-1850*, London, 1919, p.80, quoting *Oxford Commission*, 1852, Report, p. 19.

10 *Ibid*, p. 83

mothers use, or as their estates require”; nonetheless stated that “any person may send their children to school to learn literature”.<sup>11</sup>

However, from about the mid-16th century a contrary trend set in. It even led to the enactment of a law “that the English Bible should not be read in churches. The right of private reading was granted to nobles, gentry, and merchants that were householders, but was expressly denied to artificers’ prentices, to journeymen and serving men ‘of the degree of yeomen or under’, to husbandmen and labourers” so as to “allay certain symptoms of disorder occasioned by a free use of the Scriptures.”<sup>12</sup> According to this new trend it was “meet for the ploughman’s son to go to the plough, and the artificer’s son to apply the trade of his parent’s vocation: and the gentlemen’s children are meet to have the knowledge of government and rule in the commonwealth. For we have as much need of ploughmen as any other State: and all sorts of men may not go to school.”<sup>13</sup>

After about a century and a half, that is from about the end of the 17th century, there is a slow reversal of the above trend leading to the setting up of some Charity Schools for the common people mainly with a view to provide “some leverage in the way of general education to raise the labouring class to the level of religious instruction”; and more so in Wales “with the object of preparing the poor by reading and Bible study for the Sunday worship and catechetical instruction”.<sup>14</sup>

After a short start, however, the Charity school movement became rather dormant; but about 1780 it was succeeded by the Sunday school movement.<sup>15</sup> However, “popular education” even at this period “was still approached as a

11 Ibid, p.104, f.n.1, quoting 7, Henry IV, c.17.

12 Ibid, p.105, quoting 34 & 35, Henry VIII, c.1. This statute dating 1542-43, consisting of just one Article after a preamble read, [...] ”The Bible shall not be read in *English* in any church. No women or artificers, prentices, journeymen, servingmen of the degree of yeomen or under, husbandmen, nor labourers, shall read the New Testament in *English*. Nothing shall be taught or maintained contrary to the King’s instructions. And if any spiritual person preach, teach, or maintain any thing contrary to the King’s instructions or determinations, made or to be made, and shall be thereof convict, he shall for his first offence recant, for his second abjure and bear a fagot, and for his third shall be adjudged an heretick, and be burned and lose all his goods and chattels”. The statute was entitled “An Act for the Advancement of True Knowledge”. This restriction however may have completely been lifted by the time the ‘authorised version’ of the Bible (King James’s translation) was published in England in 1611.

13 Ibid, p.104, f.n.3, quoting Strype, Cranmer, i.127.

14 Ibid, p.33, f.n.1.

15 Ibid, p.139.

missionary enterprise” and the maxim was “that every child should learn to read the Bible.”<sup>16</sup> “The hope of securing a decent observance of Sunday”<sup>17</sup> led to concentrated effort on the promotion of Sunday schools, and after some years this focussed attention on the necessity of day schools. From then on school education grew apace; nevertheless it is to be noted that as late as 1834 “the curriculum in the better class of national schools was limited in the main to religious instruction, reading, writing and arithmetic: in some country schools writing was excluded for fear of evil consequences.”<sup>18</sup>

The major impetus to the Day School movement came from what was termed the “Peel’s Act of 1802” which required the employer of young children “to provide, during the first four years of the seven years of apprenticeship, competent instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic, and to secure the presence of his apprentice at religious teaching for one hour every Sunday and attendance at a place of worship on that day.”<sup>19</sup> But the Act was unpopular, and its “practical effect...was not great”<sup>20</sup> At about the same time, however, the monitorial method of teaching used by Joseph Lancaster (and also by Andrew Bell, and said to be borrowed from India)<sup>21</sup> came into practice and greatly helped advance the cause of popular education. The number of those attending school was estimated at around 40,000 in 1792, at 6,74,883 in 1818, and 21,44,377 in 1851. The total number of schools, public as well as private in 1801, was stated to be 3,363 and by stages reached a total of 46,114 in 1851.<sup>21</sup>

However, in the beginning, “the teachers were seldom competent, and Lancaster insinuates that the men were not only ignorant but drunken.”<sup>22</sup> As regards the number of years of schooling Dobbs writes that “allowing for irregularity of attendance, the average length of school life rises on a favourable estimate from about one year in 1835 to about two years in 1851.”<sup>23</sup>

Regarding the English Public schools, their fortunes are said to have fallen strikingly during the eighteenth century. In January 1797, the famous school at Shrewsbury, for instance, did not “have above three or four boys,” but

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16 Ibid, p.139.

17 Ibid, p.140.

18 Ibid, p.158.

19 J.W. Adamson: *A Short History of Education*, Cambridge, 1919, p.243.

20 Ibid, p.243.

21 House of Commons Papers, 1852-53, volume 79, p.718, for the number of schools and pupils in them in 1818 and 1851.

22 Adamson: *op.cit.*, p.232.

23 Dobbs, *op.cit.*, pp.157-8, also f.n.1, p.158.

after some major reorganisation it had about 20 pupils a year later.<sup>24</sup> The teaching in public schools like Eton consisted of writing and arithmetic (a number of English and Latin books were studied), while those in the fifth form also learnt ancient Geography, or Algebra. Those who stayed at Eton “long enough” also “went through part of Euclid.”<sup>25</sup> However it was “not till 1851 that Mathematics became a part of the regular school work and even at that date those who taught the subject were not regarded as persons of full standing on the staff of masters.”<sup>26</sup>

While school education, especially elementary education at the people’s level was rather an uncommon commodity till around 1800, nonetheless, the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Edinburgh were perhaps as important for Britain as Taxila and Nalanda were in ancient India as well as places like Navadweep were as late as the latter part of the 18th century.<sup>27</sup> Since many of those who began to come to India from Britain as travellers, scholars, or judges, especially after 1773, had had their education in one of these three universities<sup>28</sup>, it may be relevant, before discussing the Indian position, to give a brief account of the courses studied and the number of students, in one of them around 1800. The university chosen here is that of Oxford, and it is assumed that this information is also fairly representative of studies at Cambridge and Edinburgh at this period.

The growth of the University of Oxford after England’s rupture with Rome may be indicated from the following chronological list of professorships created there from 1546 onwards:<sup>29</sup>

- 1546 5 Professorships founded by Henry VIII:  
 1. Divinity, 2. Civil Law, 3. Medicine, 4. Hebrew, 5. Greek.
- 1619 Geometry, and Astronomy
- 1621 Natural Philosophy

24 Adamson: *op. cit.*, p.266.

25 Ibid, p.226.

26 Ibid, p.226.

27 Writing to the second Earl Spencer on 21 August 1787, William Jones described a serpentine river “which meets the Ganges opposite the celebrated University of *Brahmans* at *Navadwipa*, or *Nuddea*, as Rennel writes it. This is the third University of which I have been a member.” *The Letters of Sir William Jones*, ed. by G. Cannon. 2 volumes, 1970, p.754.

28 The fourth British University, that of London was established in 1828.

29 The above information is abstracted from *The Historical Register of the University of Oxford 1220-1888*, Oxford, 1888, mostly from pp.45-65.

- 1621 Moral Philosophy (but break between 1707-1829)
- 1622 Ancient History (i.e., Hebrew, and Europe)
- 1624 Grammar, Rhetoric, Metaphysics (fell into disuse, replaced by Logic in 1839)
- 1624 Anatomy
- 1626 Music
- 1636 Arabic
- 1669 Botany
- 1708 Poetry
- 1724 Modern History and Modern Languages
- 1749 Experimental Philosophy
- 1758 Common Law
- 1780 Clinical Instruction
- 1795 Anglo-Saxon (i.e., language, literature, etc.)
- 1803 Chemistry

Regarding data relating to the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were nineteen colleges and five halls in Oxford at this period. There were then about 500 fellows in the colleges, a few of whom in each college were engaged in teaching. In addition, there were nineteen professors in 1800, a total which had increased to 25 by 1854.

The main subjects which were studied at the beginning of the nineteenth century were theology and classics. Examinations were set in classics known as *Literae Humaniores*, which included Greek and Latin language and literature, moral philosophy, rhetoric and logic, and the elements of the mathematical sciences and physics. Lectures were also available on other topics, e.g. law, medicine and geology.

There was an increase in the number of students entering the University from about 1805 onwards. The number of students on the rolls during one year rose from about 760 in the early nineteenth century to about 1300 in 1820-24. The main sources of financial support of the colleges in Oxford were their endowments, mainly in land, and income from students. The proportion of income from each source varied from college to college. Taking a wider view of all the expenses of a university course including clothing and travelling, a parent who clothed his son and supported him at

university and during the vacation could expect to pay from £600-800 for his four year course around 1850.<sup>30</sup>

While the British, as well as the Dutch, the Portuguese, and the French, directly or in the name of the various East India Companies they had set up in the late 16th and early 17th centuries were busy extending their bases, factories, fortifications and the like, and wherever possible occupying whole territories in the Indian Ocean area from 1500 A.D. onwards, the European scholars on their part were trying to comprehend various aspects of the civilizations existing in this area. Prominent amongst these, especially in the fields of the sciences and customs, manners, philosophies and religions were members of the several Christian monastic orders, the most well known being the Jesuits. There were some others with interests of a more political, historical or economic nature; and many took to narrating their own adventures, and occasionally misfortunes in the 'fabulous' and 'exotic' East. Due to the widespread interest of the European elite, much of this writing was published in one or more European languages soon after. Accounts and discussions which happened to be of a limited, but great scholarly or religious interest were copied by hand many times over.<sup>31</sup>

## II

It was this great accumulation of material that from about the mid-18th century led to serious scholarly attention and debate on India, and areas of South East Asia as regards their politics, laws, philosophies and sciences and especially Indian astronomy. To an extent, it was this contemporary European interest, especially amongst men like Voltaire, Abbé Raynal and Jean Sylvain Bailly that aroused a similar interest in Britain, more so amongst those connected with the University of Edinburgh, like Adam Ferguson, William Robertson, John Playfair<sup>32</sup> and A. Maconochie. In 1775 Adam Ferguson recommended to his

30 The foregoing four paragraphs are based on information supplied by the University of Oxford in November 1980 on request from the author.

31 For instance, as stated in her doctoral thesis submitted in April 1980 at the Sorbonne, Paris (Gita Dharampal: *Étude sur le rôle des missionnaires européens dans la formation première des idées sur l'Inde*), based on an early eighteenth century manuscript which still has several copies extant; the manuscript is titled *Traité de la Religion des Malabars*, and its first copy was completed in 1709 by Tessier de Quéralay, procurator of the Paris Foreign Mission in Pondicherry, 1699-1720, nominated Apostolic Vicar of Siam in 1727; copies of this mss. are to be found in the following archives: Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale 3 copies, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 1 copy, Bibliothèque Ste. Geneviève 1 copy, Archives Nationales 1 copy), Chartres (Bibliothèque Municipale 1 copy, formerly belonging to the Governor Benoit Dumas), London (India Office Library, 2 copies in Col. Mackenzie's and John Leyden's collections, respectively), Rome 1 copy (Biblioteca Casanatesa, containing the Vatican Collection); the thesis was published as *La Religion des Malabars*, Immensee, 1982.

32 See the author's *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century: Some Contemporary European Accounts*, Impex India, Delhi, 1971, for Prof John Playfair's long article on Indian astronomy, pp.9-69.

former student, John Macpherson (temporarily to be Governor General of Bengal during 1784-85) “to collect the fullest details you can of every circumstance relating to the state and operation of policy in India [...] That you may the better apprehend what I mean by the detail [...] select some town and its district. Procure if possible an account of its extent and number of people. The different classes of that people, the occupations, the resources, the way of life of each. How they are related and their mutual dependencies. What contributions Government, or subordinate masters draw from the labourer of any denomination and how it is drawn. But I beg pardon for saying so much of an object which you must know so much better than I do. The man who can bring light from India [i.e., of its material resources, etc.] into this country and who has address to make his light be followed may in a few years hence make himself of great consequence and here I shall conclude my letter [...]”<sup>33</sup>

A. Maconochie, on the other hand, first in 1783<sup>34</sup> and then again in 1788, advocated the taking of such measures by “our monarch, the sovereign of the banks of the Ganges [...] as may be necessary for discovering, collecting and translating whatever is extent of the ancient works of the Hindoos” and thought that if the British “procured these works to Europe, astronomy and antiquities, and the sciences connected with them would be advanced in a still great proportion.” He further observed that “the antiquities of the religion and Government of the Hindoos are not less interesting than those of their sciences” and felt that “the history, the poems, the traditions, the very fables of the Hindoos might therefore throw light upon the history of the ancient world and in particular upon the institutions of that celebrated people from whom Moses received his learning and Greece her religion and her arts”. Prof. Maconochie also stated that the centre of most of this learning, according to various accounts was Benares, where “all the sciences are still taught” and where “very ancient works in astronomy are still extant.”<sup>35</sup>

Around the same time, though for more practical and immediate purposes of governance and more in line with Adam Ferguson, a similar vein of thought and some corresponding action had started amongst those who had been entrusted with the exercise of actual power and the carrying out of the policies and

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33 Edinburgh University: Dc.177: letters from Adam Ferguson to John Macpherson, letter dated 9.4.1775.

34 Edinburgh: Scottish Record Office: *Melville Papers*: GD 51/3/617/1-2, Prof A. Maconochie to Henry Dundas.

35 Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland: Ms.546, Alex Abercomby forwarding a further memorandum from Prof Maconochie to Henry Dundas, March 1788. The memorandum was communicated to Lord Cornwallis by Henry Dundas on 7.4.1788.

instructions from London, within India. It was such practical needs which led to the writing of works on Hindu and Muslim law, investigations into the rights of property, into the revenues of various areas, and to assist all this, to a cultivation of Sanscrit and Persian amongst some of the British themselves. The latter was felt necessary so as to enable the British to discover better (i.e., for themselves; to the Indians what was being discovered, whether then considered relevant or not, was already familiar), discard, choose, or select what suited their purpose most. In the process some of them also developed a personal interest in Sanscrit and other Indian literature for its own sake, or for the sort of reasons which Prof. Maconochie had in view. Charles Wilkins, William Jones, F.W. Ellis in Madras, and Lt. Wilford (the latter got engaged in some very exotic research at Varanasi) were amongst the more well known men of this category.

Apparently, three approaches seemingly different but in reality complementary to one another began to operate in the British held areas of India from about the 1770s regarding Indian knowledge, scholarship and centres of learning. The first resulted from growing British power and administrative requirements which (in addition to such undertakings that men like Adam Ferguson had recommended) also needed to provide a garb of legitimacy and a background of previous indigenous precedents (however far-fetched) to the new concepts, laws and procedures which were being created by the British state. It is primarily this requirement which gave birth to British Indology. The second approach was a product of the mind of the Edinburgh Enlightenment (dating back to around 1750) which men like Maconochie represented. They perhaps had a fear, born out of historical experience and philosophical observation and reflection (since what had happened in the Americas, how whole civilizations had got uprooted, in the previous two centuries was common knowledge amongst them) that conquest and defeat of a civilization generally led to its disintegration, and the disappearance of precious knowledge which it had. They, therefore, advocated the preparation of a written record of what existed, and what could be got from the learned in places like Varanasi. The third approach was a projection of what was then being attempted in Great Britain itself: i.e. an attempt to bring people to an institutionalised, formal, law-abiding Christianity and, for that some literacy and teaching became essential. To achieve such a purpose in India, and to assist evangelical exhortation and propaganda to extend Christian 'light' and 'knowledge' to the people, the preparation of grammars of various Indian languages became urgent. The task according to William Wilberforce was, "the circulation of the holy scriptures in the native languages" with a view to the general diffusion of Christianity, so that the Indians "would, in short become Christians, if I may so express myself, without knowing it."<sup>36</sup>

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36 HANSARD: June 22, 1813; columns 832, 833.

All these efforts joined together also led to the founding of a few British sponsored Sanscrit and Persian colleges, to the publication of some Indian texts or selections from them which suited the purpose of governance. From now on, Christian missionaries also began to open schools and occasionally they, and some others at times, wrote about the state and extent of indigenous education in the parts of India in which they functioned. However, essentially the British interest was centred not on the people as such, or their knowledge, or education, or the lack of it, but rather in such ancient texts which served their purpose and in making the people conform to what was chosen for them from such texts and their new interpretations. The other interest (but initially till 1813 this was only amongst a section of the British) was in the Christianisation of those who were considered ready for such conversions or, in the British phraseology of the period, for receiving “the blessings of Christian light and moral improvements”. This latter was also expected to serve a more political purpose in as much as it was felt that it could establish some affinity of outlook and belief between the rulers and the ruled. A primary consideration in all British decisions, however, from the very beginning, continued to be the aim of maximising the revenue receipts of Government and of discovering any possible new source which had remained exempt from paying any revenue to Government.

### III

The instructions regarding the collection of information about the extent and nature of indigenous Indian education and its contemporary state were largely the consequence of the long debate in the House of Commons in 1813 on the clause relating to the promotion of “religious and moral improvement” in India.<sup>37</sup> Before any new policy could be devised, the existing position needed to be better known. But as generally happens in the gathering of any such information, and more so when such collection of data was a fairly new thing, the quality and coverage of these surveys varied from presidency to presidency and even from district to district.

The information which is thus available today, whether published, or still in manuscript form in governmental records as is true of the details of the Madras Presidency indigenous education survey, largely belongs to the 1820s and 1830s period. An unofficial survey made by G.W. Leitner in 1882 for the Panjab compared the situation there for the years before 1850, with that in 1882.

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<sup>37</sup> *HANSARD*: June 22 and July 1, 1813: Debate on Clause No.13 of the India Charter Bill, titled in *HANSARD* as “Propagation of Christianity in India”.

Before proceeding with the analysis of this information its main points may be highlighted here in a few paragraphs.

The most well-known and controversial point which emerged from these surveys was an observation made by William Adam in his first report that there seemed to exist about 1,00,000 village schools in Bengal and Bihar around the 1830s.<sup>38</sup> This statement while it had no known backing of official records appears to have been founded upon impressions of various high British officials and others who had known the different areas rather intimately and over long periods. Similar statements had been made, much before W. Adam, for areas of the Madras Presidency by men like Thomas Munro, that every village had a school<sup>39</sup> and for areas of the newly extended Presidency of Bombay around 1820 by senior officials like G.L. Prendergast, “that there is hardly a village, great or small, throughout our territories, in which there is not at least one school, and in larger villages more.”<sup>40</sup> Observations made by Dr. G.W. Leitner in 1882 show that spread of education in the Panjab around 1850 was of a similar extent.

Since these observations were made, they have been treated by some with the sanctity reserved for divine utterances, and by others, as blasphemous. Naturally, the first view was linked with the growth of a vocal Indian nationalism, though its exponents, besides prominent Indians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, have also included many illustrious Englishmen, like Keir Hardie, and academics like Max Mueller. The second, the blasphemous view of them, was obviously held by those who in the later period were, in one capacity or another, concerned with the administration of India or those who felt impelled, sometimes because of their commitment to certain theoretical formulations on the development of societies, to treat all such impressions as unreal. It had become necessary, especially after 1860, that the men who, after a long period in the British Indian administration or its ancillary branches, had the ability to write should engage in the defence of British rule, and especially its beginnings, and consequently refute any statements which implied that the British had damaged India in any significant way.

Yet, while so much ink has been spilt on such a controversy, little attempt is known to have been made to place these statements or observations in their

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38 *Report on the State of Education in Bengal*, 1835. p.6.

39 *House of Commons Papers*, 1812-13, volume 7, evidence of Thomas Munro, p.127.

40 *House of Commons Papers*, 1831-32, volume 9, p.468. This statement of Prendergast may however be treated with reservation as he made it in the context of his stand that any expenditure in the opening of any schools by the British was undesirable. Yet, its validity as a general impression of a senior British official, particularly as such an impression is corroborated by similar observations relating to other parts of India, should be beyond much doubt.

contextual perspective. Leaving Leitner's work, most of these statements belong to the early decades of the nineteenth century. The difficulty, however, for the later British administrator, to appreciate the substance of the controversy is quite understandable. For, as may be noted from the brief account given in the preceding pages, till about 1800 England had few schools for the children of ordinary people. Even many of the older Grammar Schools were at that time in poor shape. Moreover, the men who in this period wrote about India (whether concerning its education or its industry and crafts or the somewhat higher real wages of Indian agricultural labourers compared to such wages in England)<sup>41</sup> belonged to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century society of Great Britain. Therefore, quite naturally, when they wrote about a school in every village of India, while it may or may not have been literally true, in contrast to the British situation, it must have appeared to them so. And though they did not much mention this contrast in so many words, it may reasonably be assumed that, as perceptive observers it was such a contrast which led to these judgements.

The other points which emerge from these surveys, and which are based not on mere impressions but on hard data, is the nature of this Indian education, its content, the duration for which it ordinarily lasted, the numbers actually receiving institutional education in particular areas and most importantly detailed information on the background of those benefiting from these institutions.

However, it was but natural that the idea of a school existing in every village, dramatic and picturesque in itself as such statements were, attracted great notice and eclipsed the rest of the equally important details. Still, it is nevertheless unfortunate that the more detailed and hard facts have received hardly any notice or analysis. For, it is these latter facts which provide an insight into the nature of Indian society at that period of time. Deeper analysis of this data and adequate reflection on the results followed by required further research may help solve even the riddle of what has been termed the "legend of the 1,00,000 schools."<sup>42</sup>

According to this hard data, in terms of the content and proportion of those attending institutional school education, the situation in India in 1800 (and, it should be remembered that it is a greatly damaged and disorganised India that one is referring to) does not in any sense look inferior to what obtained in England then; and in many respects Indian schooling seems to have been much

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41 See, for instance, the discussion on relative Indian and British agricultural wages in the *Edinburgh Review*, volume 4, July 1804.

42 Philip Hartog, *Ibid*, p.74.

more extensive. The content of studies does not appear very dissimilar to what was then studied in England. The duration of study was more prolonged. The method of school teaching was the method which is said to have greatly helped the introduction of popular education in England but which had prevailed in India for centuries. School attendance especially in the districts of the Madras Presidency, even in the decayed state of the 1820s, was proportionately far higher than the numbers in all variety of schools in England in 1800. The conditions under which teaching took place in the Indian schools were less dingy and more natural;<sup>43</sup> and it was observed that the teachers in the Indian schools were generally more dedicated and sober than their English counterparts. The only aspect, and certainly a very important one, where Indian institutional education seems to have lagged behind was with regard to the education of girls, which quite possibly may have been proportionately more extensive in England in 1800, and was definitely the case, a few decades later. However, the accounts of education in India do often state, though it is difficult to judge their substantive accuracy from the data which is so far known, that the absence of girls in schools was explained by the fact that most of their education took place in the home.

It is, however, the Madras Presidency and Bengal-Bihar data, concerning the background of the taught (and in the case of the five districts of Bengal-Bihar, also of the teachers) which presents a kind of a revelation: for the data reveals a picture which is in sharp contrast to the various scholarly pronouncements of the past 100 years or more, in which it had been assumed that education of any sort in India, till very recent decades, was mostly limited to the twice-born<sup>44</sup> amongst the Hindus, and amongst the Muslims to those from the ruling elite. The actual situation which is revealed was different, if not quite contrary. As will be noted in greater detail further on, for at least amongst the Hindoos, in the districts of the Madras Presidency (and dramatically so in the Tamil-speaking areas) as well as the two districts of Bihar, it was instead those termed Soodras, and the castes considered below them<sup>45</sup> who predominated in the thousands of the then still existing schools in practically each of these areas.

The last point which this work briefly touches on concerns the conditions and arrangements which alone could have made such a vast system of education feasible. To an extent, though supported by considerable hard data, the

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43 This, however, may have resulted more from a relatively easier Indian climate than from any physical and institutional arrangements.

44 That is those belonging to the Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaisya *varnas*, but excluding the Soodras and castes outside the four *varna* division.

45 It may fairly be assumed that the term 'other castes' used in the Madras Presidency survey in the main included those who today are categorised amongst the scheduled castes, and many of whom were better known as 'Panchamas' some 70-80 years ago.

conclusions to which this leads are still tentative, and in statistical terms somewhat speculative. It seems however, that it was the sophisticated operative fiscal arrangements of the pre-British Indian polity, through which substantial proportions of revenue had long been assigned for the performance of a multiplicity of public purposes, and which seems to have stayed more or less intact through all the previous political turmoils, which made such education possible; and it was the collapse of this arrangement through a total centralisation of revenue, as well as political structure that led to educational as also to decay in the economy, social life etc. If this inference is at all valid a re-examination of the various currently held intellectual and political assumptions with regard to the nature of pre-British Indian society, and its political and state structure becomes imperative.

However, before discussing this last point any further it is necessary first to comprehend the various aspects of the educational data, and the controversy it gave rise to in the 1930s. As the detailed data of the Madras Presidency is the least known, and the most comprehensive, we shall examine them first.

#### IV

All the available papers connected with this survey, i.e., the instructions of Government, the circular from the Board of Revenue to the district collectors conveying the instructions and the prescribed form according to which information had to be compiled, the replies of the collectors from all the 21 districts of the Presidency, the proceedings of the Board of Revenue on the information received while submitting it to Government, and the Madras Government's proceedings on it are all reproduced at Annexure A(i)-A(xxx) [in the original publication (1983) which contains the historical documentation]. It would have been useful for a more thorough analysis, and for better understanding of the situation if the details from which the collectors compiled their reports could be found. A reference to the records of a few districts, preserved in the Tamilnadu State Archives does not, however, indicate any additional material having survived in them. If any Talook records still exist for this period it is quite possible they may contain more detailed data about particular villages, towns, colleges and schools.

In addition to the instructions conveyed in the Minute of the Governor in Council, and the text of the letter from Government to the Board of Revenue, both of which were sent to the collectors, the prescribed form required from them details about the number of schools and colleges in the districts, and the number of male and female scholars in them. The number of scholars, male as well as female, were further to be provided under the categories of (i) Brahmin scholars, (ii) Vysee scholars, (iii) Soodra scholars, (iv) scholars of all other castes and (v) Musalman scholars. The numbers under (i) to (iv) were to be

totalled separately, And to these were to be added those under (v) thus arriving at the total number of Hindoo and Musalman scholars, in the district, or some part of it. The category 'all other castes' as mentioned earlier evidently seems to have implied all such castes who may have then been considered somewhat below what may be termed the sat-soodra category, and included most such groupings which today are listed among the scheduled castes.

As may be noted from the documents that while a reply was received from the collector of Canara, he did not send any data about the number of schools, and colleges, or any estimation of the number of those who may have been receiving instruction in the district, through what he termed private education. Apart from the statement that "there are no colleges in Canara", etc., he was of the view that teaching in Canara could not be termed 'public education' as it was organised on a somewhat discontinuous basis by a number of parents in an area by getting together and engaging the services of a teacher(s) for the purpose of teaching their children. The major difficulty for the collector, however, seemed to be that "the preparation of the necessary information would take up a considerable time," and that even if it were collected no "just criterion of the actual extent of schools as exist in this zillah could be formed upon it." He, therefore, hoped that his letter itself would be considered as a satisfactory reply. It may be added here that Canara, from about 1800 onwards, and till at least the 1850s even more than the northern areas of coastal Andhra, was the scene of continual opposition and peasant resistance to British rule. Besides, it also generally happened that whenever any such data was ordered to be collected (and this happened quite often) on one topic or another, the quality and extent of the information supplied by the collectors varied a great deal. To some extent such differences in these returns arose from the varying relevance of an enquiry from district to district. A more important reason perhaps was the fact that because of the frequent change of collectors and their European assistants many of them (at the time such information was required) were not very familiar with the district under their charge, and quite a number were for various reasons too involved in other more pressing activities, or mentally much less equipped to meet such continual demands for information.

The information from the districts, therefore, varies a great deal in detail as well as quality. While the data from about half the districts was organised talook-wise, and in some even pargana-wise, from the other half it was received for the district as a whole. Three districts Vizagapatam, Masulipatam and Tanjore added one further category to the prescribed form provided by Government, viz. the category of Chettris or Rajah scholars between the columns for Brahman and Vysee scholars. Further, while some of the collectors especially of Bellary, Cuddapah, Guntoor and Rajahmundry sent fairly detailed textual replies, some others like Tinnevelly, Vizagapatam and Tanjore left it to the data to tell the

story. A few of the collectors also mentioned the books used in the schools and institutions of higher learning in their districts, and the collector of Rajahmundry, being the most detailed, provided a list of 43 books used in Telugu schools and of some of those used in the schools of higher learning as well as in the schools teaching Persian and Arabic.

### **Total Schools, Colleges and Scholars**

According to the reports of the collectors, the following [Table I] was the total number of schools and institutions of higher learning along with the number of students in them in their districts. Incidentally, the collectors of Ganjam and Vizagapatam indicated that the data they were sending were somewhat incomplete. This might also have been true of some of the other districts which were wholly or partly under Zamindari tenure.

Two of the collectors also sent detailed information pertaining to those who were being educated at home, or in some other private manner. The collector of Malabar sent details of 1,594 scholars who were receiving education in Theology, Law, Astronomy, Metaphysics, Ethics and Medical Science in his district from private tutors. The collector of Madras, on the other hand, reported in his letter of February 1826 that 26,963 school-level scholars were then receiving tuition at their homes in the area under his jurisdiction. More will be said about this private education subsequently.

The reports of the collectors were ultimately reviewed by the Government of the Presidency of Madras on 10 March 1826 and the Governor Sir Thomas Munro was of the view that while the institutional education of females seemed negligible that of the boys between the ages of 5 to 10 years appeared to be “a little more than one-fourth” of the boys of that age in the Presidency as a whole. Taking into consideration those who were estimated as being taught at home he was inclined “to estimate the portion of the male population who receive school education to be nearer to one-third than one-fourth of the whole.”

### **Caste-wise division of Male School Students**

The more interesting and historically more relevant information, however, is provided by the caste-wise division of students, not only as regards boys, but also with respect to the rather small number of girls who, according to the survey, were receiving education in schools. Furthermore, the information becomes all the more curious and pertinent when the data is grouped into the five main language areas—Oriya, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Tamil—which constituted the Presidency of Madras at this period, and throughout the

TABLE I  
Details of Schools and Colleges

	Schools		Colleges		Total (1823 Estimates)	Population* Remarks
	Number	Students	Number	Students		
<b>Oriya Speaking</b>						
Ganjam	255	2,977		*	332,015 (375,281)	Partial returns *Privately in Agraharams
<b>Telugu Speaking</b>						
Vizagapattam	914	9,715			772,570 (941,004)	Returns somewhat incomplete.
Rajahmundry	291	2,658	279	1,454	738,308	
Masulipatam	484	5,083	49	199	529,849	
Guntoor	574	7,724	171*	939*	454,754	*Privately taught
Nellore	697	7,621	107	*	839,647	*included in schools total
Cuddapah	494	6,000		*	1,094,460	*Privately taught
		<u>38,801</u>				
<b>Kannada Speaking</b>						
Bellary	510	6,641	23	*	927,857	*included in schools total
Seringapatham	41	627			31,612	
		<u>7,268</u>				
<b>Malayalam Speaking</b>						
Malabar	759	14,153	1	75*	907,575	*Those privately taught given separately
<b>Tamil Speaking</b>						
North Arcot	630	7,326	69	418	892,292 (577,020)	
South Arcot	875	10,523			455,020 (420,530)	
Chingleput	508	6,845	51	398	363,129	
Tanjore	884	17,582	109	769	901,353 (382,667)	
Trichnopoly	790	10,331	9	131	481,292	
Madura	844	13,781		*	788,196	*Privately in Agraharams
Tinnevelly	607	9,377			564,957	
Coimbatore	763	8,206	173	724	638,199	
Salem	333	4,326	53	324	1,075,985	
Madras	322	5,699		*	462,051	*Privately, Gratis
		<u>93,996</u>				
Total	11,575	157,195	1094	5,431	12,850,941	

± Varying population figures in parenthesis are those sent by the Collectors with the educational data.

nineteenth century. The following [Table II] gives the caste-wise number of school-going male students in each district of the five language areas.

TABLE II  
Caste-wise percentage of Male School Students

District	Hindoos					Muslims	Total Male students 100%
	Brahmins	Chettris, Rajahs	Vysee	Soodra	Other castes		
<b>Oriya Speaking</b>							
Ganjam	808	—	243	1,001	886	27	2,965
<b>Telugu Speaking</b>							
Vizagapattam	4,345	103	983	1,999	1,885	97	9,412
Rajahmundry	904	—	653	466	546	52	2,621
Masulipatam	1,673	18	1,108	1,506	470	275	5,050
Guntoor	3,089	—	1,578	1,923	775	257	7,622
Nellore	2,466	—	1,641	2,407	432	617	7,563
Cuddapah	1,416	—	1,713	1,775	647	341	5,892
<b>Kannada Speaking</b>							
Bellary	1,185	—	981	2,998	1,174	243	6,581
Seringapatam	48	—	23	298	158	86	613
<b>Malayalam Speaking</b>							
Malabar	2,230	—	84	3,697	2,756	3,196	11,963
<b>Tamil Speaking</b>							
North Arcot	698	—	630	4,856	538	552	7,274
South Arcot	997	—	370	7,938	862	252	10,419
Chingleput	858	—	424	4,809	452	186	6,729
Tanjore	2,817	369	222	10,661	2,426	933	17,428
Trichnopoly	1,198	—	229	7,745	329	690	10,191
Madura	1,186	—	1,119	7,247	2,977	1,147	13,676
Tinnevelly	2,016	—	—	2,889	3,557	796	9,258
Coimbatore	918	—	289	6,379	226	312	8,124
Salem	459	—	324	1,671	1,382	432	4,268
<b>Madras</b>							
(i) Ordinary schools	358	—	789	3,506	313	143	5,109
(ii) Charity schools	52	—	46	172	134	10	414
<b>Total</b>	<b>29,721</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>13,449</b>	<b>75,943</b>	<b>22,925</b>	<b>10,644</b>	<b>1,53,172</b>

It has generally been assumed that education of any kind in India, whether in the ancient period, or even at the beginning of British rule was mainly concerned with the higher and middle strata of society, and in case of the Hindoos (who in the Madras Presidency accounted for over 95% of the whole population) it was more or less limited to the twiceborn. However, as will be seen from the following tabulation (Table II), the data of 1822-25 indicate a more or less opposite picture. Such an opposite view is the most pronounced in the Tamil-

speaking areas where the twice-born ranged between 13% in South Arcot to some 23% in Madras, the Muslims constitute less than 3% in South Arcot and Chingleput to 10% in Salem, while the Soodras and the other castes ranged from about 70% in Salem and Tinnevelly to over 84% in South Arcot.

To make the above tabulation more easily comprehensible, the castewise data may be converted into percentages of the whole for each district. The following [Table III] is the result of such conversion.

TABLE III  
Caste-wise division of Male School Students

<i>District</i>	<b>Hindoos</b>			<b>Muslims</b>		
	<i>Brahmins</i>	<i>Chettris, Rajahs</i>	<i>Vysee</i>	<i>Soodra</i>	<i>Other castes</i>	
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b><i>Oriya Speaking</i></b>						
Ganjam	27.25	0	8.24	33.76	29.88	0.91
<b><i>Telugu Speaking</i></b>						
Vizagapattam	46.16	1.09	10.44	21.24	20.03	1.03
Rajahmundry	34.49	0	24.91	17.78	20.83	1.98
Masulipatam	33.13	0.36	21.94	29.82	9.30	5.44
Guntoor	40.53	0	20.70	25.23	10.17	3.37
Nellore	32.61	0	21.70	31.83	5.71	8.16
Cuddapah	24.03	0	29.07	30.13	10.98	5.79
<b><i>Kannada Speaking</i></b>						
Bellary	18.01	0	14.91	45.56	17.84	3.69
Seringapatam	7.83	0	3.75	48.61	25.77	14.02
<b><i>Malayalam Speaking</i></b>						
Malabar	18.64	0	0.70	30.90	23.04	26.72
<b><i>Tamil Speaking</i></b>						
North Arcot	9.60	0	8.66	66.76	7.40	7.59
South Arcot	9.57	0	3.55	76.19	8.27	2.42
Chingleput	12.75	0	6.30	71.47	6.72	2.76
Tanjore	16.16	2.12	1.27	61.17	13.92	5.32
Trichnopoly	11.76	0	2.25	76.00	3.23	6.77
Madura	8.67	0	8.18	52.99	21.77	8.39
Trinevelly	21.78	0	0	31.21	38.42	8.60
Coimbatore	11.30	0	3.56	78.52	2.78	3.84
Salem	10.75	0	7.59	39.15	32.38	10.12
<b><i>Madras</i></b>						
(i) Ordinary Schools	7.01	0	15.44	68.62	6.13	2.80
(ii) Charity Schools	12.56	0	11.11	41.55	32.37	2.42

In Malayalam-speaking Malabar, the proportion of the twice-born was still below 20% of the total, but because of a larger Muslim population the number of Muslim school students went up to nearly 27%, while the Soodras, and other castes accounted for some 54% of the school-going students.

In the largely Kannada-speaking Bellary the proportion of the twice-born (the Brahmins and the Vysees) went up to 33%, while the Soodras, and the other castes still accounted for some 63%.

The position in the Oriya-speaking Ganjam was similar, the twice-born accounting for some 35.6%, and the Soodras, and other castes being around 63.5%.

It is only in the Telugu-speaking districts that the twice-born formed the major proportion of the school-going students. In them the proportion of Brahmin boys varied from 24% in Cuddapah to 46% in Vizagapatam, of the Vysees from 10.5% in Vizagapatam to 29% in Cuddapah, of the Muslims from 1% in Vizagapatam to 8% in Nellore, and of the Soodras and other castes from 35% in Guntoor to over 41% in Cuddapah and Vizagapatam.

### **Schools according to Language of Teaching**

Some of the districts also provided information regarding the language in which education was imparted, and the number of schools where Persian or English were taught. The number of schools teaching English was only 10, the highest being seven in the district of North Arcot. Nellore, North Arcot and Masulipatam had 50, 40 and 19 Persian schools respectively, while Coimbatore had 10, and Rajahmundry five. North Arcot and Coimbatore had schools which taught Gruntham (1 and 5 respectively) as well as teaching Hindivee (16 and 14 respectively), and Bellary had 23 Marathi schools. The district of North Arcot had 365 Tamil and 201 Telugu schools, while Bellary had nearly an equal number of schools teaching Telugu and Kannada. Table IV indicates this data more clearly.

### **Age of Enrollment, Daily Timings, etc.**

As mentioned earlier, the data varies considerably from district to district. Many of the collectors provided information regarding the age at which boys (and perhaps girls too) were admitted to school, the usual age being five. According to the collector of Rajahmundry "the fifth day of the fifth month of the fifth year of the boy's age is the 'lucky day' for his first entrance into school" while according to the collector of Cuddapah the age for admission for Brahmin boys was from the age of five to six and that for Soodras from six to

TABLE IV  
Language of Schools\*

District	Grunthum	Tamil	Telugu	Kannada	Hindivee	Marathi	Persian	English	Total
Rajahmundry	–	–	285	–	–	–	5	1	291
Masulipatam	–	–	465	–	–	–	19	–	484
	–	–	(4,847)	–	–	–	(234+2)	–	(5,083)
Nellore	–	4	642	–	–	–	50	1	697
Bellary	–	4	226	235	–	23	21	1	510
Arcot	1	365	201	–	16	–	40	7	630
	(8)	(4,506)	(2,218)	–	(135)	–	(398)	(61)	(7,326)
Coimbatore	5	671	25	38	14	–	10	–	763

\* The figures in parentheses indicate the number of students under the particular category of schools. This information is not available for all the above mentioned districts.

eight. The collector of Cuddapah further mentioned two years as the usual period for which the boys stayed at school. Nellore and Salem mentioned 3 to 5 or 6 years, while most others stated that the duration of study varied from a minimum of five to about a maximum of 15 years. While some collectors did not think much of the then current education in the schools, or of the learning and scholarship of the teachers, some considered the education imparted useful, and the collector of Madras observed that “it is generally admitted that before they (i.e. the students) attain their 13th year of age, their acquirements in the various branches of learning are uncommonly great.”

From the information given it seems that the schools functioned for fairly long hours usually starting about 6 a.m., followed by one or two short intervals for meals etc., and finishing at about sunset, or even later. Table V charts out the information which was received on these points from the several collectors. The functioning of these schools, their methods of teaching, and the subjects taught are best described in the accounts of Fra Paolino Da Bartolomeo (1796) and of Alexander Walker (ca.1820).<sup>46</sup>

46 Further, in the Public Despatch to Bengal from London dated 3 June 1814, it was observed, “The mode of instruction that from time immemorial has been practised under these masters has received the highest tributes of praise by its adoption in this country, under the direction of the Reverend Dr. Bell, formerly chaplain at Madras; and it has now become the mode by which education is conducted in our national establishments, from a conviction of the facility it affords in the acquisition of language by simplifying the process of instruction.”

TABLE V  
Age of Enrollment, Daily Timings and Duration of Schooling\*

District	Age of Enrollment	Daily Timings	Duration in School
Ganjam		6 AM to 5 PM	
Vizagapattam		6-9 AM, 10-30 to 2 PM, 3 to 6 PM	
Rajahmundry	5th day of 5th month of 5th year of age		5 to 7 years
Masulipatam	At age five	6-9 AM, 11-6 PM,	7 years to 12 years
Guntoor		6-9 AM, 11-2 PM, 4-7 PM (afternoon for writing)	
Cuddapah: <i>Brahmins</i>	At age five or six	6-10 AM, 11-30 to 6 PM	2 years
<i>Sudras</i>	At age of six to eight		
Nellore	At age five		3 to 6 years
Bellary	At age five		5 years to 10 to 15 years
North Arcot		At age five	6 years and occasionally more
South Arcot		6-10 AM, 12-2 PM, 3-7 PM	
Tanjore			5 years
Trichnopoly		At age seven	8 years
Madura	At age five		7 to 10 years
Coimbatore	At age five	6-10 AM, 2-8 PM 4 holidays monthly, festivals	8 to 9 years
Salem			3 to 5 years
Madras	At age five		8 years, acquirement uncommonly great

\* No mention is made about these aspects in replies from collectors of Malabar, Seringapatam, Chingleput, Tinnevelly and Canara.

## **Books used in Schools**

The main subjects reported to be taught in these Indian schools were reading, writing and arithmetic. The following lists of books used in the schools of Bellary, as also of Rajahmundry, may be worth noting and may to some degree indicate the content of learning in these schools.

### **Names of the Books in use in the Schools in Bellary District**

#### *A. Most commonly used*

1. Ramayanum
2. Maha Bharata
3. Bhagvata

#### *B. Used by Children from Manufacturing Classes*

1. Nagalingayna-Kutha
2. Vishvakurma-Poorana
3. Kumalesherra Kalikamahata

#### *C. Used by Lingayat Children*

1. Buwapoorana
2. Raghavan-Kunkauya
3. Geeruja Kullana
4. Unbhavamoorta
5. Chenna-Busavaswara-Poorana
6. Gurilagooloo, & c.

#### *D. Lighter Literature read*

1. Panchatantra
2. Bhatalapunchavunsatee
3. Panklee-soopooktahuller
4. Mahantarungenee

#### *E. Dictionaries and Grammars used*

1. Nighantoo

2. Umara
3. Subdamumburee
4. Shubdeemunee-Durpana
5. Vyacurna
6. Andradeepeca
7. Andranamasungraha, & c, & c.

**Names of the books in use in the Schools in Rajahmundry**

1. Baula Ramauyanum
2. Rookmeny Culleyanum
3. Paurejantahpatraranum
4. Molly Ramauyanum
5. Raumayanum
6. Dansarady Satacum
7. Kreestna Satacum
8. Soomaty Satacum
9. Janakey Satacum
10. Prasunnaragara Satacum
11. Ramataraka Satacum
12. Bahscara Satacum
13. Beesanavecausa Satacum
14. Beemalingaswara Satacum
15. Sooreyanaraina Satacum
16. Narraina Satacum
17. Plaholanda Charatra
18. Vasoo Charatra
19. Manoo Charatra

20. Sumunga Charatra
21. Nala Charatra
22. Vamana Charatra
23. Ganintum
24. Pauvooloory Ganintum
25. Bhauratam
26. Bhaugavatum
27. Vejia Valousum
28. Kroostnaleelan Velausum
29. Rathamathava Velausum
30. Suptama Skundum
31. Astma Skundum
32. Rathamathava Sumvadum
33. Bhaunoomaly Paronayem
34. Veerabhadra Vejayem
35. Leelansoondary Paranayem
36. Amarum
37. Sooranthanaswarum
38. Voodeyagapurvem
39. Audepurvem
40. Gajandra Motchum
41. Andhranamasungraham
42. Coochalopurksyanum
43. Resekajana Manobharanum

## Institutions of Higher Learning

While several of the collectors observed that no institutions of higher learning were then known to exist in their districts, the rest reported a total of 1,094 such places which were enumerated under the term 'colleges' (as mentioned in the prescribed form). The largest number of these, 279, were in the district of Rajahmundry with a total of 1,454 scholars, Coimbatore coming next with 173 such places (724 scholars). Guntoor had 171 (with 939 scholars), Tanjore 109 (with 769 scholars), Nellore 107, North Arcot 69 (with 418 scholars), Salem 53 (with 324 scholars), Chingleput 51 (with 398 scholars), Masulipatam 49 (with 199 scholars), Bellary 23, Trichnopoly 9 (with 131 scholars), and Malabar with one old institution maintained by the Samudrin Raja (Zamorin), with 75 scholars. In most other districts where no such institutions were known, the collectors reported that such learning—in the Vedas, Sastras (Law), Astronomy, Ganeetsastram, Ethics, etc.,—was imparted in Agraharams, or usually at home. The data regarding such learning imparted privately, from Malabar may be indicative of the extent of such learning in other districts also (discussed in a subsequent section). The following table (Table VI) indicates these and other details more clearly.

While in most areas the Brahmin scholars formed a very small proportion of those studying in schools, higher learning, being more in the nature of professional specialisation, seems in the main to have been limited to the Brahmins. This was especially true regarding the disciplines of Theology, Metaphysics, Ethics, and to a large extent of the study of Law. But the disciplines of Astronomy and Medical Science seem to have been studied by scholars from a variety of backgrounds and castes, and this is very evident from the Malabar data where out of 808 studying Astronomy, only 78 were Brahmins; and of the 194 studying Medicine, only 31 were Brahmins. Incidentally, in Rajahmundry five of the scholars in the institution of higher learning were Soodras, and according to other Madras Presidency surveys, of those practising Medicine and Surgery it was found that such persons belonged to a variety of castes, and amongst them the barbers according to British medical men were the best in Surgery.<sup>47</sup>

Besides the account provided by the Samudrin Raja regarding the functioning of the institution supported by his family in Malabar, the collectors

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47 These surveys began to be made from 1812 onwards, and their main purpose was to find out what number of such medical men were in receipt of assignments of revenue. Some details of the castes of these practitioners may be found in Madras Board of Revenue Proceedings of 17th September 1821, and of 9th March 1837, and other proceedings referred to therein.

TABLE VI  
Institutions of Higher Learning\*

District	Number of Colleges/Teachers	Total Students	Vedum (or Theology)	Law	Astronomy (or Ganeet Sastrum)	Andhra sastrum (High Telugu Poetics)	Hindustanee Music	Other details
Rajahmundry	279	1,454	1,033 (198)**	358 (60)**	49 (14)**	14 (7)**	-	Brahmans 145 Soodra, 5
Masulipatam	49	199						All Brahmins
Nellore	137		(83)**	(45)**	(8)**	(1)**		In text of letter on separate details
Chingleput	51	398						All Brahmins
North Arcot	69	418	298 (43)**		117 (24)**	3 (2)**		All Brahmins
Tanjore	109	769						All Brahmins mostly students of Vedums
Trichnopoly	9	131						All Brahmins
Coimbatore	173	724	(94)**	(69)**	(10)**			All Brahmins
Malabar	1	75						All Brahmins
Guntoor	171	939						In text of letter some later proceed for further study to Banaras and Navadweepum
Salem	53	324						All Brahmins

\* While all the above districts give the number of colleges, or teachers of higher learning, many of them do not provide details regarding the number of students in them, or the divisions of the institutions into various categories.

\*\* Number of places of higher learning.

of Guntoor, Cuddapah, Masulipatam, Madura and Madras also wrote in some detail on the subject of higher learning. According to the collector of Madras "Astronomy, Astrology, etc. are in some instances taught to the children of the poorer class of Brahmins gratis, and in certain few cases an allowance is given proportionate to the circumstances of the parents or guardians". The collector of Madura, on the other hand, mentioned that:

"In agraaharam villages inhabited by Brahmins, it has been usual from time immemorial to allot for the enjoyment of those who study the Vaidams and Pooranams (religion and historical traditions) an extent of maunium land yielding from 20 to 50 fanams per annum and in a few but rare instances to the extent of 100 fanams and they gratuitously and generally instruct such pupils as may voluntarily be brought to them."

The collector of Masulipatam made a similar observation and stated:

"If the boys are of Vydeea Brahmins, they are, so soon as they can read properly, removed direct from schools to college of Vadums and Sastrums.

The former is said to be the mother of all the sciences of Hindoos, and the latter is the common term for all those sciences, which are in Sanscrit, viz. law, astronomy, theology & c. & c. These sciences are taught by Brahmins only, and more especially Brahmins holding Agraahrums, Mauniums, Rozunahs, or other emoluments, whose duty it is to observe their religious obligation on all occasions.

In most of the towns, villages and hamlets of this country, the Brahmins are teaching their boys the Vadum and Sastrums, either in colleges or elsewhere in their respective houses".

The more descriptive accounts however were from Cuddapah and Guntoor. The collector of Cuddapah stated:

"Although there are no schools or colleges supported by public contribution, I ought not to omit that amongst Brahmins, instruction is in many places gratuitously afforded and the poorer class obtain all their education in this way. At the age of from 10 to 16 years, if he has not the means of obtaining instruction otherwise, a young Brahmin leaves his home, and proceeds to the residence of a man of his own caste who is willing to afford instruction without recompence to all those resorting to him for the purpose. They do not however derive subsistence from him for as he is generally poor himself, his means

could not of course give support to others, and even if he has the means his giving food and clothing to his pupils would attract so many as to defeat that object itself which is professed. The Board would naturally enquire how these children who are so destitute as not to be able to procure instruction in their own villages, could subsist in those to which they are strangers, and to which they travel from 10 to 100 miles, with no intention of returning for several years. They are supported entirely by charity, daily repeated, not received from the instructor for the reasons above mentioned, but from the inhabitants of the villages generally. They receive some portion of alms daily at the door of every Brahmin in the village, and this is conceded to them with a cheerfulness which considering the object in view must be esteemed as a most honourable trait in the native character, and its unobtrusiveness ought to enhance the value of it. We are undoubtedly indebted to this benevolent custom for the general spread of education amongst a class of persons whose poverty would otherwise be an insurmountable obstacle to advancement in knowledge, and it will be easily inferred that it requires only the liberal and fostering care of Government to bring it to perfection”.

The collector of Guntoor was equally descriptive and observed that though there seemed to be “no colleges for teaching theology, law, astronomy, etc., in the district” which are endowed by the state:

“These sciences are privately taught to some scholars or disciples generally by the Brahmins learned in them, without payment of any fee, or reward, and that they, the Brahmins who teach are generally maintained by means of manniem land which have been granted to their ancestors by the ancient Zamindars of the Zillah, and by the former government on different accounts, but there appears no instance in which native governments have granted allowances in money and land merely for the maintenance of the teachers for giving instruction in the above sciences. By the information which has been got together on the subject, it appears that there are 171 places where theology, laws and astronomy etc are taught privately, and the number of disciples in them is 939. The readers of these sciences cannot generally get teachers in their respective villages and are therefore obliged to go to others. In which case if the reader belong to a family that can afford to support him he gets what is required for his expenses from his home and which is estimated at three rupees per month, but

which is only sufficient to supply him with his victuals; and if on the other hand, his family is in too indigent circumstances to make such allowance, the student procures his daily subsistence from the houses in the village where taught which willingly furnish such by turns.

Should people be desirous of studying deeper in theology etc than is taught in these parts, they travel to Benares, Navadweepum<sup>48</sup> etc where they remain for years to take instruction under the learned pundits of those places”.

### Some Books used in Higher Learning

The books used in these institutions may be assumed to have been the Vedas, the various Sastras, the Puranas, the more well known books on Ganeeta, and Jyotish-shastras, and Epic literature. Except in the report from Rajahmundry there is no mention of any books in the reports from other districts. According to Rajahmundry some of the books used there were:

### Names of the Books in use in the Colleges in Rajahmundry

#### *Vadams, etc.*

- |                                |                     |                |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| 1. Roogvadum                   | 1. Ragoovumsam      | ---            |
| 2. Yajoorvadum                 | 2. Coomarasumbhavem | 5.             |
| 3. Samavadum                   | 3. Moghasundasem    | 6. Nayeshadum  |
| 4. Sroudum                     | 4. Bhauravy         | 7. Andasastrum |
|                                | 5. Maukhum          |                |
| 5. Dravedavedum or Nunlauyanum |                     |                |

#### *Sastrums*

1. Sanscrit Grammar; Siddhanda Cowmoody
2. Turkum
3. Jeyoteshem
4. Durmasastrum
5. Cauveyems

48 This observation of the collector of Guntoor is corroborated by William Adam wherein he mentions that at Nadia many scholars came from “remote parts of India, especially from the South” (W. Adam, p.78, 1941 edition).

Besides, as Rajahmundry had a few Persian schools<sup>49</sup>, it also sent a list of Persian and Arabic books studied. These were:

### **Names of the books in use in the Persian Schools in Rajahmundry**

1. Caremah Aumadunnamah
2. Harckarum in Persian
3. Inshah Culipha and Goolstan
4. Bahurdanish and Bostan
5. Abbul Phazul Inshah
6. Calipha
7. Khoran

### **Private Tutition (or Education at Home)**

Several collectors, especially the collector of Canara, who did not send any statistical returns at all, mentioned the fact that many of the boys and especially the girls received education at home from their parents, or relatives, or from privately engaged tutors; and many also stated higher learning being imparted in Agraharums, etc. However it was only the collectors of Malabar and of the city of Madras who sent any statistical data on the subject. The collector of Malabar sent such data with regard to higher learning, while the collector of Madras about the boys and girls who were receiving education in their homes. Both the returns are reproduced in the tables (Table VII-A & VII-B).

Regarding the data concerning higher learning from Malabar it is possible that though such learning by private tutors did exist in most other districts, Malabar having a rather different historical and sociological background had such private learning to a far greater extent. As will be noted from the table (Table VII-A) those studying in this manner at this period (1823) were about 21 times the number of those attending the solitary college supported by the more or less resourceless family of the Samudrin Raja. This Malabar data also mentioned 194 persons to be studying medicine. As indigenous medical practitioners existed in every other district, perhaps in every village (and some of them were still in receipt of revenue assignments for their services to the community), it can

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49 It may be mentioned that Persian schools (in all about 145 in the Presidency) were predominantly attended by Muslims, and only a few Hindoos seem to have attended them (North Arcot: Hindoos 2, Muslims 396). However, quite a number of Muslim girls were reported to be attending these schools.

TABLE VII-A  
Details of Higher Learning by Private Tutors in Malabar 1823

	Brahmin Scholars		Vyse Scholars		Sooder Scholars		All other Castes		Grand Total No. 1 to 12 inclusive			Mussalman Scholars		Total Hindoos & Mussalms		Total Population								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Theology & Law	471	3	474	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	471	3	474	"	"	"	471	3	474	"	"	"
Astronomy	78	"	78	18	5	23	176	19	195	496	14	510	768	38	806	2	"	2	770	38	808	"	"	"
Metaphysics	34	"	34	"	"	"	"	"	"	31	"	31	65	"	65	"	"	"	65	"	65	"	"	"
Ethics	22	"	22	"	"	"	"	"	"	31	"	31	53	"	53	"	"	"	53	"	53	"	"	"
Medical Science	31	"	31	"	"	"	59	"	59	"	100	190	"	"	190	4	"	4	194	"	194	"	"	"
Total	636	3	639	18	5	23	235	19	254	658	14	672	1,547	41	1,588	6	"	6	1,553	41	1,594	4,58,364	4,49,207	9,07,571

TABLE VII-B  
Number of those receiving tuition at their homes in Madras District February 1825

	Brahmin Scholars		Vyse Scholars		Sooder Scholars		All other Castes		Grand Total No. 1 to 12 inclusive			Mussalman Scholars		Total Hindoos & Mussalms		Total Population								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
	7,586	98	7,684	6,132	63	6,195	7,589	220	7,809	3,449	136	3,585	24,756	517	25,273	1,690	0	1,690	26,446	517	26,963	2,28,630	2,33,415	4,62,045

logically be assumed that similar teaching in Medical Science existed in most other districts, too.

What number and proportions in the various disciplines were thus educated privately in the other districts, however, is a speculative question. Still, it may not be too erroneous to assume that the number of those 'privately' studying Theology, Law, Astronomy, Metaphysics, Ethics, Poetry and Literature, Medical Science, Music, and Dance (all of which existed in this period) was perhaps several times the number of those who were receiving such education institutionally.

The data from Madras about the number of boys and girls receiving tuition at their homes is equally pertinent (Table VII-B). In comparison to those being educated in schools in Madras, this number is 4.73 times higher. Though it is true that half of these privately tutored were from amongst the Brahmins and the Vysees still those from the Soodras form 28.7% of this number, and from the other castes 13%. Furthermore, the Indian part of Madras at this period was more of a shanty-town and in comparison to the older towns and cities of the Presidency a relatively badly organised place, the status of its Indian inhabitants being rather lower in the social scale than their counterparts in other places like Madura, Tanjore, Trichnopoly, etc. It, therefore, may be quite probable that the number of those privately educated in other districts, if not some 4 to 5 times more than those attending school as in Madras city, was still appreciably large. The observation of Thomas Munro that there was "probably some error" in the figure of 26,903 being taught at home in Madras city, which incidentally has been made much of by later commentators on the subject, does not however have much validity. If the number had been considered seriously erroneous, a new computation for the city of Madras, to which alone it pertained, would have been no difficult matter, especially as this return had been submitted to the Governor one whole year before this comment. It was perhaps required of Thomas Munro as head of the executive to express such a reservation and it undoubtedly was the sort of comment which the makers of policy in London wished to hear.<sup>50</sup> This draft however was followed by the remark that "the state

50 As in many other instances, it was unthinkable for the British that India could have had a proportionately larger number receiving education than those in England itself. Such views and judgements in fact were applied to every sphere and even the rights of the Indian peasantry were tailored accordingly. On the rights of the cultivator of land in India, the Fifth Report of the House of Commons stated: 'It was accordingly decided, "that the occupants of land in India could establish no more right, in respect to the soil, than tenantry upon an estate in England can establish a right to the land, by hereditary residence", and the meerassee of village was therefore defined to be, a preference of cultivation derived from hereditary residence, but subject to the right of Government as the superior lord of the soil, in what way it chuses, for the cultivation of its own lands.' (*House of Commons Papers*, 1812, volume VII, p.105)

of education here exhibited, low as it is compared with that of our own country, is higher than it was in most European countries at no very distant period". As may be guessed from the data pertaining to Britain the term "at no very distant period" really meant the beginning of the nineteenth century which had been the real start of the day schools for most children in the British Isles.

### Education of Girls

As mentioned earlier the number of girls attending school was very small. Leaving aside the district of Malabar and the Joypoor division of Vizagapatam district, the girls from the Brahmin, Chettri, and Vysee castes were practically non-existent in schools. There were however some Muslim girls receiving school education: 56 in Trichnopoly, and 27 in Salem. The Hindoo girls who attended school, though again not in any large number, were from the Soodra and other Hindoo castes and according to the collectors of Masulipatam, Madura, Tinevelly and Coimbatore most of them were stated to be dancing girls, or girls who were presumably going to be Devdasis in the temples. Table IX presents the district and caste-wise number of the girls attending school, or said to be receiving private tuition.

As will be noticed from Table IX the position in Malabar as also in the Joypoor Zamindary of Vizagapatam district was much different. The relative numbers of girls and boys attending school in these two areas were as Table VIII:

TABLE VIII  
Number of Girls and Boys attending School in Malabar & Jaypoor

Area	Brahmin	Vysee castes	Soodra	Other	Musalman	Total
<i>Malabar</i>						
(i) Girls	5	13	707	343	1122	2190
(ii) Boys	2230	84	3697	2756	3196	11963
(iii) Percentage of girls to boys	—	15.5%	19.1%	12.4%	35.1%	18.3%
<i>Joypoor (Vizagapatam)</i>						
(i) Girls	94	—	71	64	—	229
(ii) Boys	254	38	266	213	—	771
(iii) Percentage of girls to boys	37%	—	26.7%	30%	—	29.7%

TABLE IX  
Caste-wise Division of Female School Students

District	Brahmin	Vyase	Soodras	Other Castes	Mussalmans	Total Studing	Total Female Population	Other details
<b>Oriya Speaking</b>								
GANJAM	0	-	2	10	-	12	1,79,111	
<b>Telugu Speaking</b>								
VIZAGAPATTAM	99	0	73	131	0	303	4,58,914	
—of above in Jeypoor	94	0	71	64	0	229	36,419	
RAJAHMUNDRY	3	0	6	28	0	37	3,44,796	
MASULIPATAM	1	0	1	29	2	33	2,40,683	Stated largely as dancing girls.
<b>GUNTOOR</b>								
GUNTOOR	5	0	37	57	3	102	210985	
<b>NELLORE</b>								
NELLORE	0	0	55	0	3	58	4,06,927	
<b>GOODAPAH</b>								
GOODAPAH	0	0	68	39	1	108	5,15,999	
<b>Kannada Speaking</b>								
<b>BELLARY</b>								
BELLARY	2	1	26	31	0	60	4,38,184	
<b>SERINGAPATAM</b>								
SERINGAPATAM	0	0	14	0	0	14	16,761	
<b>Malayalam Speaking</b>								
<b>MALABAR</b>								
(i) School	5	13	707	343	1,122	2,190	4,49,207	
(ii) Private Higher Learning	3	5	19	14		41		
(a) Theology and Law	3	0	0	0	3	-		
(b) Astronomy	0	5	19	14	0	38		

<b>Tamil Speaking</b>													
NORTH ARCOT	1	0	32	8	11	52	2,78,481						
SOUTH ARCOT	0	0	94	10	0	104	2,02,556						
CHINGLEPUT	3	0	79	34	0	116	1,72,886						
TANJORE	0	0	125	29	0	154	1,87,145						
TRICHNOPLY	0	0	66	18	56	140	2,33,723						
MADURA	-		65	40	-	105	3,86,682						Stated largely as dancing girls,
TINNEVELLY	0	0	0	117	2	119	2,81,238						
COIMBATORE	0	0	82	0	0	82	3,21,268						Kyakakla caste (dancing girls)
SALEM	0	0	3	28	27	58	5,33,485						
MADRAS	-	-	-	-	-	-	7,33,415						
(i) Ordinary Schools	1	9	113	4	0	127							
(ii) Charity Schools	0	2	0	47	0	49							
(iii) At home	98	63	220	136	0	517							

In percentage terms of the total, the proportion of girls to boys in school was the highest, 29.7%, in the Joypoor Zamindary of the Vizagapatam district, and even more surprisingly the proportion of Brahmin girls to Brahmin boys in school there was as high as 37%. Similarly, in Malabar the proportion of Muslim girls to Muslim boys in school being at 35.1% is truly astonishing.<sup>51</sup> Even amongst the Vysees, the Soodras and the other castes in Malabar the proportion of girls to boys was fairly high at 15.5%, 19.1% and 12.4% respectively; the proportion of the totals being 18.3%. How two such widely separated areas (Malabar on the west coast while Joypoor Zamindary being in the hilly tracts on the southern border of Orissa) had such a sociological similarity requires deeper study.

## V

The undertaking of the survey was welcomed by London in May 1825 when it wrote to Madras, “we think great credit is due to Sir Thomas Munro for having originated the idea of this enquiry.” However, after receipt of the survey information and papers the reply Madras received ridiculed and altogether dismissed what had been reported to be functioning. In the Public despatch of 16 April 1828 Madras was told that “the information sent” while lacking in certain respects was “yet sufficiently complete to show, that in providing the means of a better education for the natives, little aid is to be expected from the instruments of education which already exist.”

### **Adam’s Report on Indigenous Education in Bengal and Bihar**

Thirteen years after the initiation of the survey in the Madras Presidency a more limited semi-official survey of indigenous education was taken up in the Presidency of Bengal. This was what is known as the celebrated Adam’s Reports, or to give the full title “Reports on the State of Education in Bengal 1836 and 1838.”<sup>52</sup> It consists of three reports, the first dated 1st July 1836 being a survey of the available existing information regarding indigenous education and its nature and facilities in the various districts of Bengal, the second dated 23 December 1835 being a survey of the prevalent situation undertaken by W. Adam in the Thana of Nattore in the district of Rajshahy, and

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52 Adam’s Reports were first published in 1835, 1836 and 1838. The three, together with some omissions, and a 60 page rather depressing and patronising introduction were published by Rev. J. Long from Calcutta in 1868. Still another edition of the whole (reintroducing the omissions made by Long and including Long’s own introduction) with a further new 42 page introduction by Anathnath Basu was published by the University of Calcutta, in 1941. It is this last edition which is used in the present work. The reports, while never sufficiently analysed, have often been quoted in most works on the history of education in India.

the last dated 28 April 1838 being a survey of the situation in parts of Murshedabad, and the whole of the districts of Beerbhoom, Burdwan, South Behar and Tirhoot ending with Adam's reflections, recommendations and conclusions.

### **Adam's Phraseology and Presentation**

In spite of the controversies which Adam's Reports have given rise to, especially his mention of there being perhaps 1,00,000 village schools still existing in Bengal and Bihar in some form till the 1830s, the total impression produced by the reports is one of extensive decay and their reading, especially because of Adam's evangelical moral tone, is a rather depressing business. Adam himself was no great admirer of the Indian teacher, or the nature and content of Indian education as he saw it. However, as Adam started from the view that the British Government of the day should interest itself in the sphere of elementary and higher Indian education and also support it financially, he perhaps thought it necessary to use all possible arguments and imagery to bring home this point. Perhaps under the circumstances it was necessary for him to dramatise the decay as well as the relative state of ignorance of the teachers, and the lack of books, buildings, etc., so that it evoked the desired sympathetic response. Furthermore, it may be mentioned that W. Adam initially had come to Bengal in 1818, as a Baptist Missionary, and though he left missionary activity after some years, and instead took to journalism, essentially he was a product of his contemporary British background in which the two main currents were either of evangelising India as advocated by men like William Wilberforce, or to westernise it as intended by men like T.B. Macaulay and William Bentinck. As indicated earlier, both ideas were encompassed in the Charter Act of 1813. Additionally, the reports of Adam though not formal official documents were nonetheless sanctioned and financed by the orders of the Governor General himself. Naturally, therefore, while they may imply many things, as do some of the reports of the Madras Presidency collectors, they were nevertheless phrased in such a way as not to lay the blame directly on past government policy and action.

### **Varied and Valuable Sociological Data**

The more important point which comes through Adam's voluminous writing, however, was his remarkable industry and the detail and variety of data which he was able to collect, firstly, from the post-1800 existing sources, and secondly, through his own investigations. While the controversy about his 1,00,000 village schools in Bengal and Bihar is finally forgotten, the material which he provided (regarding the caste composition of the pupils taught as well as the

teachers, their average ages at various periods, and the books which were then in use in the districts he surveyed) will still have great relevance.

### **Selections Reproduced**

Some selections from Adam's material are reproduced in the original publication (1983). These include (i) descriptions of elementary education taken from the first and second reports, (ii) description of higher learning, from the first report, (iii) a section on medical education taken from the second report based on investigations in Nattore, Rajshahy, and (iv) some tabulations of the basic data for the five surveyed districts contained in the third report. This latter tabulation is given under the following heads:

- (a) Elementary Schools and caste-wise division of students
- (b) Elementary Schools and caste-wise division of teachers
- (c) Books used in Elementary Schools
- (d) Details of institutions of Sanscritic Learning
- (e) Books used in Sanscritic Studies
- (f) Details of institutions of Persian and Arabic Learning
- (g) Books used in Persian and Arabic Studies
- (h) Subject and District-wise duration of Study

### **The First Report: A Survey of Post-1800 material**

In his first report which is a general statement of the situation and a presentation of the data which he could derive from post-1800 official and other sources, Adam came to the conclusion, firstly, that every village had at least one school and in all probability in Bengal and Bihar with 1,50,748 villages "there will still be 1,00,000 villages" that have these schools.<sup>53</sup> Secondly, on the basis of personal observation and what he had learnt from other evidence he

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53 W. Adam: *ibid*, I Report. Incidentally the observation that every village had a school was nothing peculiar to Adam. As mentioned earlier many others before him had made similar observations, including Thomas Munro in his evidence to a House of Commons committee. Munro had then observed that "if civilization is to become an article of trade" between England and India, the former "will gain by the import cargo". As symptomatic of this high state of Indian civilisation, he also referred to "schools established in every village for teaching, reading, writing and arithmetic". When Thomas Munro made this statement he already had had 30 years of intensive Indian experience. (*House of Commons Papers: 1812-13*, vol.7, p.131).

inferred that on an average there were around 100 institutions of higher learning in each district of Bengal, and consequently he concluded that the 18 districts of Bengal had about 1,800 such institutions. Computing the number studying in these latter at the lowest figure of six scholars in each, he also came to the conclusion that some 10,800 scholars should be studying in them. He further observed that while the elementary schools “are generally held in the homes of some of the most respectable native inhabitants or very near them”, the institutions of higher learning had buildings generally of clay with “sometimes three or five rooms” and “in others nine or eleven rooms”, with a reading-room which is also of clay. These latter places were also used for the residence of the scholars, and the scholars usually were fed and clothed by the teachers, and where required, were assisted by the local people. After describing the method of teaching in both types of institutions and going into their daily routine, Adam then presented and examined the post-1800 data on the subject, district by district. The foregoing table (Table X) gives an abstract of this examination.

### Survey of Nattore Thana

The second report was wholly devoted to Adam’s study of the situation in the Thana of Nattore in the district of Rajshahy. It was like a modern pilot survey in which Adam developed his methods and fashioned his tools for the more extensive survey which was his primary aim. The results of this Nattore survey of 485 villages were tabulated, village by village, by Adam, and further details were provided for some of them in another tabulation. The population of this Thana was 1,20,928; the number of families 30,028 (in the proportion of one Hindoo to two Muslims); the number of elementary schools 27, and of schools of learning 38 (all these latter being Hindoo). In 1,588 families (80% of these being Hindoo) children occasionally received instruction at home. The number of scholars in elementary schools was 262 and education in them was between the ages of 8-14, while the scholars in schools of learning were 397, 136 of these being local persons and 261 from distant places, the latter also receiving both food and lodging. The average period of study in these latter institutions was 16 years, from about the age of 11 to the age of 27. However, while the number in elementary schools was so low, these 485 villages nonetheless had 123 native general medical practitioners, 205 village doctors, 21 mostly Brahmin smallpox inoculators practising according to the old Indian method,<sup>54</sup> 297 women-midwives, and 722 snake conjurors.

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54 See Dharampal: *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century: Some Contemporary European Accounts*, pp.143-63, for an account of this old method.

TABLE X  
 Institutions of Higher Learning according to post-1800 other sources with Adam's observations

District or place	Population Estimate*	Hindoo Muslim	Institutions of Higher learning mentioned in Post-1800 accounts with Adams observations
<i>Dinajpur</i>	30,00,000 (1808)	3 to 7	Buchanan: 16 Adam: some mistake as Districts adjoin
<i>Purnea</i>	14,50,000 (1801)	57 to 47	Buchanan: 119
<i>Calcutta</i>	29,04,380 (1810)		
	2,00,000 (Approx.)		Ward: (1818): 28, Scholars: 173
<i>Nuddea</i>	7,64,430 (1802)	11 to 5	Ward: (1818) 31, Scholars: 747, Logic, Law.
(i) Koomaru Hutta			H.H. Wilson: (1829): 25, Scholars: 500-600
(ii) Bhatpara			Authorities: (1816) 46, Scholars: 380
24 Pergunnahs	16,25,000 (1801)		Ward: 7-8 Ward: 7-8 Hamilton (1801): 190
(i) Juyunugor			Ward: 17-18
(ii) Mujilee Pooru			Ward: 17-18
(iii) Andoollee			Ward: 10-12
<i>Midnapore</i>	15,00,000 (1801)	6 to 1	Hamilton: None, Adam: 40
<i>Cuttack (Puri)</i>	12,96,365	10 to 1	Stirling: Principal Street of 'Maths'

<i>Hugly</i>	(pp.57-58)	10,00,000 (1801)	3 to 1	Ward: (1818), Hamilton: (1801): 150, Law <i>Logic</i> : 12-14 : 7-8 <i>Nyaya</i> : 10 <i>Nyaya</i> : 10 <i>Nyaya</i> : 2-3 Hamilton:None; Adam: incredible
(i) Vansariya				
(ii) Triveni				
(iii) Gundulpara				
(iv) Bhudreshwuru				
(v) Valee				
<i>Burdwan</i>	(p.70)	14,44,487 (1813-14)	5 to 1	
<i>Jessore</i>	(p.81)	12,00,000 (1801)	7 to 9	No information
<i>Dacca Jelalpoor</i>	(p.93)	9,38,712 (1801)	1 to 1	Hamilton:some; Portion population slaves
<i>Backer gerunje</i>	(p.86)	9,26,723 (1801)	5 to 3	No information; Adam: some must exit
<i>Chittagong</i>	(p.88-89)	12,00,000 (1801)	2 to 3	No information; some Muslims Brahmanical
<i>Tipera</i>	(p.91)	7,50,000 (1801)	4 to 3	No information
<i>Mymensing</i>	(p.92)	13,00,000 (1801)	2 to 5	Hamilton: 2-3 for each of 25 Purgunnahs
<i>Sylhet</i>	(p.93-94)	4,92,945	3 to 2	No information
<i>Rajshahy</i>	(p.103-04)	15,00,000 (1801)	2 to 1	No information; Adam: expects several
<i>Rangpur</i>	(p.106-07)	27,25,000	12 to 15	Adam: 41 in 9 sub-divisions
<i>Moorsheadabad</i>	(p.96)	10,20,572 (1809)	2 to 1	1801 estimate; 21; Adam; expects more
<i>Beerbhoom</i>	(p.98-100)	12,67,067 (1801)	30 to 1	Hamilton: Silent; Adam: expects some

### Survey of Five Districts

It is the third report of Adam which has the most data. In this Adam gives the findings of his surveys in part of the district of Murshedabad (20 Thanas with a population of 1,24,804 out of 37 Thanas with a total district population of 9,69,447), and the whole of the districts of Beerbhoom and Burdwan in Bengal, and of South Behar and Tirhoot in Bihar. In one Thana of each district Adam carried out the enquiries personally and also gathered additional information, while in the rest it was done for him according to his instructions and proformas by his trained Indian assistants. Earlier Adam's intention was to visit every village in person but he found that "the sudden appearance of a European in a village often inspired terror, which it was always difficult, and sometimes impossible, to subdue." He, therefore, and also to save time, gave up this idea of a personal visit to every village.

### Language-wise Division

The total number of schools of all types in the selected districts numbered 2,566 and these schools were divided into Bengali (1,098), Hindi (375), Sanscrit (353), Persian (694), Arabic (31), English (8), Girls (6), and infants (1). The number of schools in the district of Midnapore were also given; it had 548 Bengali schools, 182 Oriya schools, 48 Persian schools, and one English school. The following table (Table XI) gives the position, district-wise:

TABLE XI  
Number and Type of Schools

Type of school	Moorsh-edabad part Dist.	Beer-bhoom whole Dist.	Burd-wan whole Dist.	South Behar whole Dist.	Tirhoot whole Dist.	Total of Surveyed Dist.	Midna-pore whole Dist.
BENGALI	62	407	629	—	—	1,098	548
HINDI	5	5	—	285	80	375	—
ORIYA	—	—	—	—	—	—	182
SANSCRIT	24	56	190	27	56	353	—
PERSIAN	17	71	93	279	234	694	48
ARABIC	2	2	11	12	4	31	—
ENGLISH	2	2	3	1	—	8	1
GIRLS	1	1	4	—	—	6	—
INFANTS	—	—	1	—	—	1	—
	113	544	931	604	374	2,566	779

### Four Stages of School Instruction

Adam divided the period spent in elementary schools into four stages. These according to him were, first, seldom exceeding ten days, the young scholar was taught "to form the letters of the alphabet on the ground with a small stick or slip of bamboo" or on a sandboard. The second stage, extending from two and a half to four years, was "distinguished by the use of the palm leaf as the material on which writing is performed," and the scholar was "taught to write and read", and commit "to memory the Cowrie Table, the Numeration Table as far as 100, the Katha Table (a land measure Table), and the Ser Table," etc. The third stage extended "from two to three years which are employed in writing on the plantain-leaf." Addition, subtraction, and other arithmetical rules were additionally taught during this period. In the fourth, and last stage, of up to two years, writing was done on paper, and the scholar was expected to be able to read the Ramayana, Mansa Mangal, etc., at home, as well as be qualified in accounts, and the writing of letters, petitions, etc. The following table (Table XII) indicates the numbers, using the various materials on which writing was done in the surveyed areas:

TABLE XII

Material used	Moorshedabad No. Scholars	Beerbhoom No. Scholars	Burdwan No. Scholars	South Behar No. Scholars	Tirhoot No. Scholars
<i>1st stage</i>	71	372	702	1,560	250
Ground Sand-board					
<i>2nd stage</i>					
Palm-leaf	525	3,551	7,113	—	—
Wooden-board	35	19	—	1,503	172
<i>3rd stage</i>					
Plantain-leaf	3	299	2,765	—	—
Sal-leaf		98	—	—	—
Brazen-plate	9	—	—	42	55
<i>4th stage</i>					
Paper	437	2,044	2,610	39	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,080</b>	<b>6,383</b>	<b>13,190</b>	<b>3,144</b>	<b>507</b>

### Elementary Education for All Sections

The first striking point from this broader survey is the wide social strata to which both the taught and the teachers in the elementary schools belonged. It is true that the greater proportion of the teachers came from the Kayasthas, Brahmins, the Sadgop and the Aguri castes. Yet quite a number came from

30 other caste groups also, and even the Chandals had 6 teachers. The elementary school students present an even greater variety and it seems as if every caste group is represented in the student population, the Brahmins and the Kayasthas nowhere forming more than 40% of the total. In the two Bihar districts they together formed no more than 15 to 16%. The more surprising figure is of 61 Dom, and 61 Chandal school students in the district of Burdwan, nearly equal to the number of Vaidya students, 126, in that district. While Burdwan had 13 missionary schools, the number of Dom and Chandal scholars in them were only four and as Adam mentioned, only 86 of the "scholars belonging to 16 of the lowest castes" were in these missionary schools while 674 scholars from them were in the "native schools".

### Teaching of Accounts

Regarding the content of elementary teaching Adam mentioned various books which were used in teaching. These varied considerably from district to district but all schools in the surveyed districts, except perhaps the 14 Christian schools, taught accounts and most of them taught both commercial and agricultural accounts. Below (Table XIII) is a districtwise detailed statement on this point:

TABLE XIII

Type Accounts	Moorshedabad No. Schools	Beerbhoom No. Schools	Burdwan No. Schools	South Behar No. Schools	Tirhoot No. Schools
1. Commercial	7	36	2	36	4
2. Agricultural	14	47	5	20	8
3. Both	46	328	609	229	68
Totals	67	411	616	285	80
4. Christian Instruction	—	1	13	—	—
Total all schools	67	412	629	285	80

The age of admission in elementary schools varied from 5 to 8 years and that of leaving school from 13 years to 16.5 years.

### Institutions of Sanscritic Learning

The schools of Sanscritic learning in the surveyed districts (in all 353) numbered as high as 190 in Burdwan (1,358 scholars) and as low as 27 in South Behar (437 scholars). The teachers (355 in all) were predominantly Brahmins, only 5 being from the Vaidya caste. The subjects predominantly taught were

Grammar (1,424 students), Logic (378 students), Law (336 students) and Literature (120 students). Others, in order of numbers studying them were Mythology (82 students), Astrology (78 students), Lexicology (48 students), Rhetoric (19 students), Medicine (18 students), Vedanta (13 students), Tantra (14 students), Mimansa (2 students), and Sankhya (1 student). The duration of the study and the ages when it was started and completed varied a great deal from subject to subject, and also from district to district. The study of Grammar started at the earliest age (9 to 12 years) and of Law, Mythology, Tantras, etc. after the age of 20. The period of study ordinarily lasted from about 7 to 15 years.

### **Institutions Teaching Persian and Arabic**

Those studying Persian (which was treated more as a school subject than one of higher learning by Adam) numbered 3,479, the largest, 1,424, being in South Behar. The age of admission in them ranged from 6.8 years to 10.3 years, and the study seemed to have continued for some 11 to 15 years. Over half of those studying Persian were Hindoos, the Kayasthas being predominant.<sup>55</sup>

Arabic was being studied by 175 scholars, predominantly Muslims, but 14 Kayasthas, 2 Aguris, 1 Teli, and 1 Brahmin were also students of Arabic. The books used in Persian learning were numerous and an appreciable number for the study of Arabic.

Finally, the teachers in all types of institutions were largely in their thirties.

## **VI**

### **Dr. G.W. Leitner on Indigenous Education in the Punjab**

Some 45 years after Adam, Dr G.W. Leitner, one time Principal of Government College, Lahore, and for sometime acting Director of Public Instruction in the Panjab prepared an even more voluminous survey of indigenous education there.<sup>56</sup> The survey is very similar to that of W. Adam; Leitner's language and conclusions, however, were more direct and much less complementary to British rule. Incidentally, as time passed, the inability of the

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55 This, as may be noticed, was quite at variance with the Madras Presidency districts where Persian was not only studied little, but the students of it were mainly Muslims. Interestingly, Adam mentions (p.149) that amongst the Muslims 'when a child...is four years, four months, and four days old', he, or she is on that day usually admitted to school.

56 *History of Indigenous Education in the Panjab since Annexation and in 1882* (Published 1883, Reprinted, Patiala, 1973).

British rulers to face any criticism grew correspondingly. The British perhaps had really begun to believe in their 'divinely ordained' mission in India, and other conquered areas.<sup>57</sup>

At any rate, Leitner's researches showed that at the time of the annexation of the Panjab the lowest computation gave "3,30,000 pupils in the schools of the various denominations who were acquainted with reading, writing and some method of computation" against "little more than 1,90,000" pupils in 1882. Further that 35-40 years previously "thousands of them belonged to Arabic and Sanskrit colleges, in which oriental Literature and systems of oriental Law, Logic, Philosophy, and Medicine were taught to the highest standards". Leitner went into great detail, district by district, basing himself on earlier official writings and then carried out a detailed survey of his own regarding the position in 1882. A few brief extracts from this work, pertaining to his general statement, the type of schools which had existed earlier, and the list of books used in the Sanscritic schools is included amongst the documents reproduced in this work.

In the documents reproduced in the original publication (1983), or in those others of the eighteenth, or early nineteenth century on the subject of education in India, while there is much on the question of higher learning, especially of Theology, Law, Medicine, Astronomy, and Astrology, there is scarcely any reference to the teaching and training in the scores of technologies, and crafts which had then existed in India. There is also little mention of training in Music, and Dance. These latter two it may be presumed were largely taken care of by the complex temple organisations. The major cause of the lack of reference about the former, however, is obviously because those who wrote on education whether as government administrators, or as travellers, as Christian missionaries, or as scholars were themselves uninterested in how such crafts were taught, or passed from one generation to another. Some of them evidently were interested in the particular technology, or craft as indicated by the writings on the manufacture of iron and steel, the fashioning of agricultural tools, the cotton and silk textiles, the materials used in architecture, and buildings, the materials

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57 Perhaps the idea of their being divinely ordained was really a much older English assumption. In *A Brief Description of New York Formerly called New-Netherlands*, published in 1670, referring to the indigenous people in that part of North America, Daniel Denton observes: 'It is to be admired, how strangely they have decreast by the Hand of God, since the English first settling of those parts; for since my time, where there were six towns, they are reduced to two small villages, and it hath been generally observed, that where the English come to settle, a Divine Hand makes way for them, by removing or cutting off the Indians either by wars one with the other, or by some raging mortal Disease.' (Reprint 1902, p.45).

used in the building of ships, the manufacture of ice, paper, etc. But even in such writings the interest lay in the particular method and technology and its technological and scientific details, and not in how these were learnt.

Yet another cause for the lack of information on the teaching of techniques and crafts may possibly lie in the fact that ordinarily in India most crafts were basically learnt in the home, and what was termed apprenticeship in Britain (one could not practise any craft, profession, etc., in England without a long and arduous period under a master craftsman, or technologist) was more informal in India, the parents usually being the teachers and the children the learners. Another reason might have been that particular technologies or crafts, even like the profession of the digging of tanks, or the transportation of commodities were the function of particular specialist groups, some of them operating in most parts of India, while others in particular regions, and therefore any formal teaching and training in them must have been a function of such groups themselves. Remarks like that “it is extremely difficult to learn the arts of the Indians, for the same cast, from father to son exercises the same trade and the punishment of being excluded from the cast on doing anything injurious to its interests is so dreadful that it is often impossible to find an inducement to make them communicate anything”,<sup>58</sup> appear to indicate some organisation of individual technologies at group levels. However, to know anything regarding their teaching, the innovations and improvisations in them (there must have been innumerable such instances even if these were on a decline), it is essential to have much more detailed information on such groups, the nature of these technologies, and what in essence constituted a formal, or informal apprenticeship in the different crafts. On this so far we seem to have little information.

The following indicative list of the crafts listed in some of the districts of the Madras Presidency (collected in the early 19th century records for levying tax on them) may however give some idea of their variety.

#### TANKS, BUILDINGS, ETC.

Stone-cutters	Wood Woopers (wood cutters)	Marble mine workers	Bamboo cutters
Chunam makers	Wudders (Tank diggers)	Sawyers	Brick-layers

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58 See letter of Dr. H. Scott to Sir Joseph Banks, President, Royal Society, London, dated 7.1.1790 in Dharampal: *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century*, p.265.

## METALLURGY

Iron ore collectors	Copper-smiths	Iron manufacturers	Lead washers
Iron forge operators	Gold dust collectors	Iron Furnace operators	Iron-smiths
Workers of smelted metal into bars	Horse-shoe makers		Gold-smiths
Brass-smiths			

## TEXTILES

Cotton cleaners	Fine cloth weavers	Cotton beaters
Coarse cloth weavers	Cotton carders	Chintz weavers
Silk makers	Carpet weavers	Spinners
Sutrenze carpet weavers	Ladup, or Penyasees cotton spinners	Cumblee weavers
	Cot tape weavers	Chay thread makers
Thread Purdah weavers	Chay root diggers (a dye)	Gunny weavers
Rungruaze, or dyers	Pariah weavers (a very large number)	Mudda wada, or dyers in red
Indigo makers	Mussalman weavers	Dyers in indigo
Barber weavers	Loom makers	Boyah weavers
Silk weavers	Smooth and glaze cloth men	

## OTHER CRAFTSMEN

Preparers of earth for bangles	Salt makers	Bangle makers
Earth salt manufacturers	Paper makers	Salt-petre makers
Fire-works makers	Arrack distillers	Oilmen
Collectors of drugs and roots	Soap makers	Utar makers, druggists

## MISCELLANEOUS

Boatmen	Sandal makers	Fishermen
Umbrella makers	Rice-beaters	Shoemakers
Toddy makers	Pen painters	Preparers of earth for washermen
Carpenters	Washermen	Dubbee makers
Barbers	Winding instrument makers	Tailors
Seal-makers	Basketmakers	Chucklers
Mat-makers		

From the foregoing it may be observed that the major common impression, which emerges from the 1822-25 Madras Presidency data, the reports of W. Adam on Bengal and Bihar 1835-38, and the later Panjab survey by G.W. Leitner is that of a sense of widespread neglect and decay in the field of indigenous education within a few decades after the onset of British rule. If studies of the detailed data pertaining to the innumerable crafts, technologies and manufactures of this period, or for that matter of social organisation were to be made, the conclusions in all probability will be little different. On the other hand, the descriptions of life and society provided by earlier European accounts (i.e., accounts written prior to the onset of European dominance) of different parts of India, and the data on Indian exports relating to this earlier period notwithstanding the political turmoil in certain parts of India, on the whole leaves an impression of a society which seems relatively prosperous and lively. The conclusion that the decay noticed in the early 19th century and more so in subsequent decades originated with European supremacy in India, therefore, seems inescapable. The 1769-70 famine in Bengal when, according to British record, one-third of the population actually perished, may be taken as a mere forerunner of what was to come.

In the context of some historical dialectic, however, such a decay might have been inevitable, perhaps even necessary and was to be deliberately induced. For instance, Karl Marx, as such no friend of imperialism or capitalism, writing in 1853 was of the view, that, "England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating—the annihilation of the old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundation of Western society in Asia".<sup>59</sup> However, it is not India only which experienced this phenomenon of deliberate destruction.

59 First published in *New York Daily Tribune*, August 8, 1853; also recently quoted by Yuri. I. Semenov: 'Socio-economic formations and world history,' in: *Soviet and Western Anthropology*, edited by Ernest Gellner, 1980.

Other areas of the world, especially the Americas and Africa seem to have experienced such destruction to an even greater extent. The nearly total annihilation of the aboriginal people of the Americas after their subjugation by Europe from 1500 A.D. onwards, who by modern scholars are estimated to have been in the range of 90 to 112 million around 1500<sup>60</sup> (far more numerous than the estimated total population of Europe then) but dwindled down to merely a few million by the end of the 19th century, is an occurrence of far greater import. It is possible that while differing in extent and numbers similar destruction and annihilation had occurred in different parts of the world through conquest and subjugation at various times during human history. Further, quite possibly no people or culture in the world can altogether claim innocence for itself from any participation at one time or another in such occurrences. Nonetheless, whatever may be the case regarding the world before 1500, the point that after this date ancient functioning, established cultures in most areas of the world, if not wholly eliminated, had largely become depressed, had come under a great cloud with the expansion of European dominance requires little proof. It is obvious.

During the latter part of the 19th century impressions of decay, decline and deprivation began to agitate the mind of the Indian people. Such impressions no doubt resulted from concrete personal, parental and social experience of what had gone before, but were perhaps somewhat exaggerated at times. By 1900 it had become general Indian belief that India had been decimated by British rule in all possible ways; that not only impoverished<sup>61</sup>, it had been degraded to the furthest extent; that the people of India had been cheated of most of what they had; that their customs and manners were ridiculed, and that the infrastructure of their society mostly eroded. One of the statements which thus came up was that the ignorance and illiteracy in India was caused by British rule and that conversely at the beginning of British political dominance India had had extensive education, learning and literacy. By 1930 much had been written on this point in the same manner as had been written on the deliberate destruction of Indian crafts and industry, and the impoverishment of the Indian countryside.

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60 *Current Anthropology*, volume 7, No.4, October 1966, pp.395-449, 'Estimating Aboriginal American Population', by Henry F. Dobyns.

61 Writing as early as 1804, William Bentinck, the young Governor of the Madras Presidency, wrote to the President of the Board of Control, Lord Castlereagh, that "we have rode the country too hard, and the consequence is that it is in the most lamentable poverty." (Nottingham University: Bentinck Papers: Pw Jb 722). In 1857-58 a military officer wrote to Governor General Canning, "it may be truly said that the revenue of India has hitherto been levied at the point of the bayonet" and considered this to be the major cause of the Mutiny. (Leeds: Canning Papers: Military Secretary's Papers: Misc. No.289).

However, to many of the expanding strata of westernised Indians (whether Marxists, Fabians, or capitalist-roaders, their views on India and the contempt for it almost equalled that of William Wilberforce, James Mill, or Karl Marx) such charges seemed far-fetched, and even if true, irrelevant.

It is against this background that during his visit in 1931 to attend the British-sponsored conference on India (known as the Round Table Conference) Mahatma Gandhi was invited to address the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London. In this address Gandhiji also briefly dwelt on the causes of illiteracy in India and what he said seemed to have made sparks fly.

The meeting held on 20 October, 1931 under the auspices of the Institute, is reported to have been attended by influential Englishmen and Englishwomen drawn from all parts of England and was presided over by Lord Lothian.<sup>62</sup> The subject on which Gandhiji spoke was 'The Future of India', but before describing this future he dealt with issues like (i) the Hindu-Muslim-Sikh problem, (ii) the problem of untouchability, and (iii) "the deep and ever deepening poverty" of the 85% of the Indian people who lived in the villages. From this he moved on to the problems which required urgent attention and how "if the Congress had its way" they would be dealt with. Amongst the foremost he placed the "economic welfare of the masses" and the provision of adequate occupations for those requiring them. Then he turned to possible solutions to the problems of sanitation and hygiene, and of medical assistance which he felt not only needed packets of quinine, etc., but more so milk and fruit. From this he moved on to education, and from that to the neglect of irrigation and the need for using long-known indigenous methods and techniques to achieve it. In conclusion he stated that while he had told them "what we would do constructively", yet "we should have to do something destructive also". As illustrative of the required destruction he mentioned "the insupportable weight of military and civil expenditure" which India could ill afford. Regarding the former he stated that "if I could possibly have my way, we should get rid of three-quarters of the military expenditure." Regarding civil expenditure he gave an instance of what he meant. He said, "Here the Prime Minister gets fifty times, the average income; the Viceroy in India gets five thousand times the average income" and added that "from this one example you can work out for yourselves what this civil expenditure also means to India." But to revert back to Gandhiji's observation on education. The two main points he made were (i) "that today India is more illiterate than it was fifty or a hundred years ago", and (ii) that "the British administrators instead of

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<sup>62</sup> *International Affairs*, London, November 1931, pp.721-739; also *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol.48, pp.193-206.

looking after education and other matters which had existed began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that and the beautiful tree perished.” He stated all this with conviction and a sense of authority and said that he was “without fear” of his “figures being challenged successfully.”

The challenge came immediately however from Sir Philip Hartog, a founder of the School of Oriental Studies, London,<sup>63</sup> a former vice chancellor of the University of Dacca and member and chairman of several educational committees on India set up by the British between 1918 and 1930. After questioning Gandhiji at the meeting itself, a long correspondence ensued between them during the next 5-6 weeks, ending with an hour long interview which Philip Hartog had with the Mahatma. In the interval Philip Hartog was referred to some of the sources which Gandhiji had relied on, including two articles from *Young India* of December 1920 by Daulat Ram Gupta: (i) The Decline of Mass Education in India, and (ii) How Indian Education was crushed in the Panjab. These latter were largely based on Adam’s reports and G.W. Leitner’s book and some other officially published material from the Panjab, Bombay and Madras. These, however, did not seem sufficient proof to Philip Hartog, and he repeatedly insisted that Gandhiji should withdraw the statement he had made at the Chatham House meeting. Gandhiji promised that after his return to India he would look for such material which Hartog could treat as substantiating what Gandhiji had said, and promised that “if I find that I cannot support the statement made by me at Chatham House, I will give my retraction much wider publicity than the Chatham House Speech could ever attain.”

Another important point which according to Hartog emerged during Hartog’s interview with Gandhiji was that Gandhiji said that “he had not accused the British Government of having destroyed the indigenous schools, but they had let them die for want of encouragement.” To this Hartog’s reply was that “they had probably let them die because they were so bad that they were not worth keeping.”

In the meantime Hartog had been working and seeking opinion including advice and views of the historian Edward J. Thompson. Thompson agreed with Hartog that Gandhiji could not possibly be right and that he himself also did not “believe we destroyed indigenous schools and indigenous industry out of malice. It was inevitable.” He nonetheless felt that, with regard to general education,

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63 See P.J. Hartog : *Origins of the School of Oriental Studies, London Institution, C.I.E., M.A., 1917.*

“we did precious little to congratulate ourselves on until the last dozen years.”<sup>64</sup> In a further letter Thompson elaborated his views on the subject, on how little was done until after 1918, and thought that it seemed to him that “the very hopelessness of the huge Indian job used to oppress” even those who had had often “first class record of intellect” in places like Oxford “before entering the ICS.” He further mentioned that “I am reading old records by pre-mutiny residents, they teem with information that makes you hope that the Congresswallah will never get hold of it.” Somehow the correspondence between Hartog and Edward Thompson ended on a sour note, and perhaps did not provide Hartog the sort of intellectual or factual support he was actually looking for. At any rate, after the interview with Gandhiji, Hartog finally despatched his rebuttal of Gandhiji’s statement (as intended from the beginning) for publication in *International Affairs*.<sup>65</sup> In this he concluded that “the present position is that Mr Gandhi has so far been unable to substantiate his statement in any way” but “he has undertaken to retract that statement, if he cannot support it.”

Within a few days of reaching India, Gandhiji was in the Yervada Prison. From there he wrote to Hartog on 15 February 1932 informing him of his inability at that moment to satisfy him but mentioned that he had asked Prof K.T. Shah to look into the matter. K.T. Shah’s long and detailed letter reached Hartog soon after. In it K.T. Shah also referred to the various known writings on the subject including those of Max Mueller, Ludlow, G.L. Prendergast, and the more celebrated Thomas Munro, W. Adam, and G.W. Leitner, already referred to in the foregoing pages. For Bombay, Shah quoted G.L. Prendergast, a member of the Council in the Bombay Presidency (briefly referred to earlier) who had stated in April 1821 that:

“I need hardly mention what every member of the Board knows as well as I do, that there is hardly a village, great or small, throughout our

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64 A graphic image of the more privileged products of this British initiated education was given by Ananda K Coomaraswamy as early as 1908. Coomaraswamy then wrote: “Speak to the ordinary graduate of an Indian University, or a student from Ceylon, of the ideals of the *Mahabharata*—he will hasten to display his knowledge of Shakespeare; talk to him of religious philosophy—you find that he is an atheist of the crude type common in Europe a generation ago, and that not only has he no religion, but is as lacking in philosophy as the average Englishman; talk to him of Indian music—he will produce a gramophone or a harmonium and inflict upon you one or both; talk to him of Indian dress or jewellery—he will tell you that they are uncivilised and barbaric; talk to him of Indian art—it is news to him that such a thing exists; ask him to translate for you a letter written in his own mother-tongue—he does not know it. He is indeed a stranger in his own land”. (*Modern Review*, Calcutta, vol.4, Oct.1908 p.338)

65 January 1932, pp.151-82.

territories, in which there is not at least one school, and in larger villages more; many in every town, and in large cities in every division; where young natives are taught reading, writing and arithmetic, upon a system so economical, from a handful or two of grain, to perhaps a rupee per month to the school master, according to the ability of the parents, and at the same time so simple and effectual, that there is hardly a cultivator or petty dealer who is not competent to keep his own accounts with a degree of accuracy, in my opinion, beyond what we meet with amongst the lower orders in our own country; whilst the more splendid dealers and bankers keep their books with a degree of ease, conciseness, and clearness I rather think fully equal to those of any British merchants".<sup>66</sup>

Knowing of what Hartog considered as sufficient proof, Shah began his letter by saying that he "need hardly point out that at the time under reference, no country in the world had like definite, authoritative, statistical information of the type one would now recognise as proper proof in such discussions" and that "all, therefore, that one can expect by way of proof in such matters, and at such a time, can only be in the form of impressions of people in a position to form ideas a little better and more scientific than those of less fortunately situated, or less well endowed, observers." Shah finally concluded with the view that "the closer enquiry of this type conducted by Leitner is far more reliable, and so also the *obiter dicta* of people in the position to have clear impressions," and felt that "even those impressions must be held to give rather an under-estimate than otherwise."

But Shah's long letter was a wasted effort as far as Hartog was concerned, and constituted perhaps a further provocation. In his reply Hartog told Shah that "your letter does not touch the main question which I put to Mr Gandhi", and concluded that "I am afraid that I am altogether unable to accept your conclusion with regard to the history of literacy in Bengal during the past 100 years, of which there remains a good deal to be said".

Though it is not fair to compare individuals and to speculate on the motivations which move them, it does seem that at this stage Sir Philip Hartog had a similar feeling to that of W.H. Moreland after Vincent Smith's observation in his book on *Akbar the Great Mogul* that "the hired landless labourer in the time of Akbar and Jahangir probably had more to eat in ordinary years than he has now."<sup>67</sup> In reviewing the book, Moreland had then said, "Mr. Vincent Smith's authority in Indian History is so deservedly great that this statement, if allowed

66 Also in *House of Commons Papers: 1831-32*, vol.9, p.468.

67 Clarendon Press, 1917, p.394.

to stand unquestioned, will probably pass quickly into a dogma of the schools; before it does so, I venture to plead for further examination of the data.”<sup>68</sup> And from then on, Moreland seems to have set himself the task of countering such a ‘heretical view, and of stopping it from becoming a dogma of the schools’.

Whatever the motivation, Philip Hartog set himself the task of proving Gandhiji wrong on this particular issue. The result was presented in three ‘Joseph Payne Lectures for 1935-36’ delivered at the University of London Institute of Education under the title, *Some Aspects of Indian Education: Past and Present*.<sup>69</sup> The lectures, along with three Memoranda: (A) Note on the statistics of literacy and of schools in India during the last hundred years, (B) The Reports of William Adam on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Bihar 1835-38, and the legend of the ‘1,00,000 schools’, and (C) Dr. G.W. Leitner and Education in the Panjab 1849-82, were published in early 1939 by the Oxford University Press under the above title. In Memorandum ‘A’ using the low figures sent by A.D. Campbell for the district of Bellary, Hartog questioned Thomas Munro’s calculation that “the proportion of males educated in schools was nearer one-third than one-fourth”, and suggested that “Munro’s figures may have been over-estimates based on the returns of collectors less careful and interested in education than Campbell.” Hartog’s conclusion at the end was that “until the action taken by Munro, Elphinstone, and Bentinck in the three Presidencies, the British Government had neglected elementary education to its detriment in India. But I have found no evidence that it tried to destroy or uproot what existed.” In a footnote Hartog further observed that in “Great Britain itself it was not until 1833 that the House of Commons made a grant of 30,000 pounds for the purposes of education.” Further, he praised various Indian personalities, and more so India’s quaint mixture of “most ancient and most modern.”

In his Preface, after referring to “the imaginary basis for accusations not infrequently made in India that the British Government systematically destroyed the indigenous system of elementary schools and with it a literacy which the

68 In *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, London*, 1917, pp. 815-25.

69 Philip Hartog’s lectures were announced in the *London Times* (March 1,4,6, 1935) and two of them reported in it on March 2 and 5. On 2nd March the *Times* reported that Sir Philip Hartog, submitted that under successive Governor Generals, from Warren Hastings to Lord Chelmsford, an educational policy was evolved as part of a general policy to govern India in the interests of India, and to develop her intellectual resources to the utmost for her own benefit. It is interesting, however, to note that the *Times* while it gave fairly constant though brief notices to Gandhiji’s 1931 visit to England, and some of the public meetings he addressed and the celebration of his birthday, the meeting at Chatham House did not reach its pages. It was not only not reported the next day, October 21, 1931, but was also not announced along with various other notices of various other meetings, etc., on the morning of October 20. Possibly it was a convention not to report any meetings at Chatham House in newspapers.

schools are presumed to have created,” Hartog observed “when Mr. Gandhi, in an address given at the Royal Institute of International Affairs on 20 October 1931, lent his powerful support to those accusations, and challenged contradiction, it was obviously necessary to re-examine the facts.”<sup>70</sup>

It may be fair to observe that despite his considerable learning and experience, Hartog seemed to have lacked imagination, a sense of history, and was far too committed to the dogmas of pre-1939 Britain. His immigrant Jewish background may have accentuated such an outlook further. Whatever the reasons, it seemed inconceivable to Hartog that late eighteenth, or early nineteenth century India could have had the education and facilities which Gandhiji and others had claimed, as it had been inconceivable to William Wilberforce, 125 years earlier, that the Hindoos could conceivably have been civilised (as was stated by many British officers and scholars who in Wilberforce’s days had had long personal experience of life in India) without the benefits of Christianity. It should therefore not be surprising that to Hartog, as also to Edward Thompson, and before them to an extent even to W. Adam, and some of the Madras Presidency Collectors it was axiomatic that these Indian educational institutions amounted to very little and that the Indian system had “become merely self-perpetuating, and otherwise barren.”

Besides Gandhiji’s statement two other facts seem to have had quite an upsetting effect on Philip Hartog. The first, already referred to, were the writings of G.W. Leitner, but the second seems to have hurt him even more. This latter was a statement concerning what Hartog called “what of the immediate future.” In this context Hartog noted that, “an earnest Quaker missionary has predicted that under the new regime [evidently meaning the post-British regime] there will be a Counter-Reformation in education, which will no longer be Western but Eastern” and he observed, “thus India will go back a thousand years and more to the old days [...] to those days when she gave out a great wealth of ideas, especially to the rest of Asia, but accepted nothing in return.” Such a prospect was galling indeed to Philip Hartog, burdened as he was, like his illustrious predecessors with the idea of redeeming India morally as well as intellectually, albeit by the western road.

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70 The Book of Lectures was reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement* under the caption “Mr Gandhi Refuted.” Complimenting Hartog the review stated: “There are many deserved criticisms of past British administrators in this particular field, but other charges dissolve into thin air when exposed to the searching analysis Sir Philip Hartog has applied to a statement of Mr. Gandhi [...] Sir Philip took up the challenge at once [...] he shows how facts were distorted to fit an educational theory.”

As Gandhiji was the prime cause of this effort, Hartog sent a copy of his lectures to him and wrote that he had “little doubt that you will find that a close analysis of the facts reveals no evidence to support the statement which you made at the Royal Institute of International Affairs”, adding that Gandhiji “will therefore feel justified now in withdrawing that statement.”

Gandhiji replied some months later and it was a classic reply. In it he said “I have not left off the pursuit of the subject of education in the villages during the pre-British period. I am in correspondence with several educationists. Those who have replied do support my view but do not produce authority that would be accepted as proof. My prejudice or presentiment still makes me cling to the statement I made at Chatham House. I don’t want to write haltingly in *Harijan*. You don’t want me merely to say that the proof I had in mind had been challenged by you!”

There the matter ended as far as Gandhiji was concerned, but on September 10, 1939 after learning of Gandhiji’s statement regarding the War in Europe, Hartog wrote to Gandhiji a very grateful letter saying “I cannot wait to express to you my profound gratitude, shared, I am sure by an innumerable number of my fellow countrymen, all over the world, for the attitude you have taken up in regard to the present War at your interview with the Viceroy, reported in the Times.”

Hartog’s book of lectures led to much immediate writing in India on the subject, even a new edition of the complete Adam’s Reports was published by the University of Calcutta. Yet, what was written produced the same data and analysis all over again and in the main covered the same ground, and advanced more or less the same arguments as had already been advanced by K.T. Shah in his long letter to Philip Hartog in February 1932.

## VII

The significance of what Gandhiji said at Chatham House in October 1931 has, however, to be understood not in the literal way in which Philip Hartog treated it but what it really implied in the context of Mahatma Gandhi’s whole address. The upshot of what he had stated at the meeting was the overall disruption and decline of the society and people of India during British rule. That a great decay had set in by the 1820s, if not a few decades earlier, in the sphere of education was admitted by the Madras Presidency survey, as well as by W. Adam as regards Bengal and Bihar. In 1822-25 the number of those in ordinary schools was put at over 1,50,000 in the Madras Presidency. Evidently

the inference that the number was appreciably, perhaps a great deal higher some 20 or 30 years previously, cannot be ruled out. At any rate, nowhere was there any suggestion that it was much less before, than in 1822-5. The population of the Madras Presidency in 1823 was estimated at 1,28,50,941, while the population of England in 1811 was estimated at 95,43,610. From this it may be noted that while the differences in the population of the two are not that significant the numbers of those attending the various types of schools (Charity, Sunday, Circulating) in England was in all in the neighbourhood of around 75,000 as compared to at least double this number in the Madras Presidency. Further, more than half of this 75,000 in English schools consisted of those who attended school at the most only for 2-3 hours on a Sunday.

However, after about 1803, every year a marked increase took place in the number of those attending schools in England, with the result that the maximum of 75,000 attending any sort of school around 1800 rose to 6,74,883 by 1818, and 21,44,377 in 1851, i.e., an increase of about 29 times in a period of about fifty years. It is true that the content of this education in England did not improve much during this half century. Neither did the period spent in school increase from more than an average of one year in 1835 to about two years in 1851. The real implication of Gandhiji's observation, and of the information provided by the Madras Presidency collectors, W. Adam, G.W. Leitner is, that in India for the following 50-100 years what happened, if not exactly the opposite of that in England, was such that it gave rise to a situation of relative collapse and stagnation. It is such a feeling and the intuition of such an occurrence which made Gandhiji, firstly, to make his observation in London in October 1931, and secondly, not agree to withdraw it eight years later. Gandhiji seemed to be looking at the issue from a historical, social, and a human viewpoint, while men like Sir Philip Hartog, as so commonly characteristic of the specialist, were largely quibbling about phrases, picking holes in what did not fit the prevailing western theorisations of social and political development.

Yet, as statistical comparisons were what Sir Philip Hartog and many others in his time wanted, and these to a large extent can settle this debate, some comparison of the 1822-25 Madras school-attending scholars may be made here with the Madras Presidency data pertaining to the 1880s and 1890s. Because of incompleteness of earlier data for Bengal and Bihar, and also for the Presidency of Bombay<sup>71</sup> such a comparison does not seem possible for these areas, much less for the whole of India.

71 The available material on the survey of indigenous education in the Presidency of Bombay has been brought out in a valuable book *Survey of Indigenous Education in the Province of Bombay 1820-30* by R.V. Parulekar in 1951. This survey, however, appears to have covered only certain parts of the Bombay Presidency.

According to the 1879-80 Report of the Director of Public Instruction for the Madras Presidency, the total number of educational institutions of all types (including colleges, secondary, middle and primary schools, and special, or technical institutions) then numbered 10,553. Out of these the primary schools numbered 10,106. The total number attending them was 2,38,960 males, and 29,419 females. The total population of the Presidency at this time is stated as 3,13,08,872. While the number of females attending these institutions was evidently larger in 1879-80 compared to 1822-25, the proportionate numbers of males was clearly much reduced. Using the same computation as used in 1822-25 (i.e., one-ninth of the total population treated as of schoolgoing age) those of this age amongst the male population (taking males and females as equal) would have numbered 17,39,400. The number of males in primary schools being 2,18,840 the proportion of this age group in 'schools thus turns out to be 12.58%': this proportion in the decayed educational situation of 1822-25 was put at one-fourth, i.e., at 25%. If one were to take even the total of all those in every type of institution, i.e. the number 2,38,960, the proportion in 1879-80 rises only to 13.74%.

From 1879-80 to 1884-85 there was some increase however. While the population went down slightly to 3,08,68,504 the total number of male scholars went up to 3,79,932, and that of females to 50,919. Even this larger number of male scholars came up only to 22.15% of the computed school-age male population, and of those in primary schools to 18.33%, still much lower than the 1822-25 officially calculated proportion. Incidentally, while there was an overall increase in the number of females in educational institutions, the number of Muslim girls in such institutions in the district of Malabar in 1884-85 was only 705. Here it may be recollected that 62 years earlier in August 1823 the number of Muslim girls in schools in Malabar was 1,122 and at that time the population of Malabar would have been below half of that in 1884-85.

Eleven years later in 1895-96 the number in all types of educational institutions increased further. While the population then had grown to 3,56,41,828 the number of those in educational institutions had increased to 6,81,174 males, and 1,10,460 females. It is at this time then that the proportion (taking all those males attending educational institutions) rose to 34.4% just about equal to the proportion which Thomas Munro had computed in 1826 as one-third (33.3%) of those receiving any education whether in indigenous institutions, or at home. But even at this period, i.e. 70 years after Munro's computation, the number of males in primary education was just 28%.

Coming to 1899-1900, the last year of the nineteenth century, the number of males in educational institutions went up to 7,33,923 and of females to 1,29,068. At this period the number of school-age males was calculated by the Madras

Presidency Director of Public Instruction as 26,42,909 thus giving a percentage of 27.8% attending any educational institution. Even taking a sympathetic view of the later data, what clearly comes out of these comparisons is that the proportion of those in educational institutions at the end of the nineteenth century was still no larger than the proportions estimated by Thomas Munro of the number attending the institutions of the decaying indigenous system of the Madras Presidency in 1822-25.

Yet, considering the temptations which there must have been for the late nineteenth century British authorities (as they also exist in the state system in our times) to show their achievement in rather brighter hues and thus err on the side of inflating figures, it may be assumed that if anything, this later data may be treated with some scepticism as to its veracity, while the data of 1822-25 in the climate of that period could not in any sense be considered as inflated, rather, as pointed out by many, the reverse may have been its attribute.

From the above, it may be inferred that the decay which is mentioned in 1822-25 grew in depth during the next six decades. In this period most of the indigenous institutions more or less disappeared and any surviving remnants absorbed by the late 19th century British created system. Further it is only after 1890 that the new system begins to equal the 1822-25 officially calculated proportions of males in schools quantitatively, whatever may have been its quality in comparison to the indigenous system.

The above comparison of the 1822-25 Madras indigenous education data with the data pertaining to the 1880s and 1890s also seems to provide additional support, if such support were necessary, to the deductions which G.W. Leitner had come to in 1882 pertaining to the decline of indigenous education in the Panjab in the previous 35-40 years.

## VIII

The point which, during this prolonged debate was seldom touched upon and about which in their various ways, the Madras Presidency collectors, the reports of Adam, and the work of Leitner provided a variety of clues, pertains to the question of how all this education, the 1,00,000 schools in Bengal and Bihar, and “a school in every village” according to Munro and others, were actually organised and maintained. For, it is ridiculous to suppose that any system of such wide and universal dimensions could ever have maintained itself without the necessary conceptual and infrastructural supports over any length of time.

It is customary in modern India to quote foreigners in most matters reflecting on India's present, or its past. One school of thought uses all such foreign backing to show India's primitiveness, the barbaric, uncouth and what is termed 'parochial' nature of the customs and manners of its people, and the ignorance, oppressions and poverty which Indians are said to have always suffered from. To them India for most of its past had lived at what is termed, the 'feudal' stage or what in more recent Marxist terminology is called the 'system of Asiatic social organisms'. Yet to another school, India had always been a glorious land, with minor blemishes, or accidents of history here and there, but all in all remaining a land of 'Dharmic' and benevolent rulers; for yet others subscribing to the observations of the much quoted Charles Metcalfe, and Henry Maine, it has mostly been a happy land of 'village republics'.

Unfortunately, perhaps due to their British-oriented education, or may be because of some deeper causes (like the scholastic and hairsplitting tendency of Brahmanical learning) Indians since the past century have become too literal, too much caught up with mere words and phrases, and seemed to have lost practically all sense of the symbolic nature of what is said, or written.<sup>72</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that when Indians think of 'village republics', what occurs to them is not what the word 'republic' implies in substance, but the visual images of its shell, the elected assembly, the system of voting, etc.

What Charles Metcalfe, and especially Henry Maine wrote on this point was primarily on the basis of the earlier British information, i.e. what had been derived from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century British travellers, administrators, etc., as well as from the writings of other Europeans before them. What it implied was, and quite naturally the British had no particular reason to spell it out for the Indians, that the 'village' (it is immaterial how they defined it), to an extent, had all the semblance of the State, it controlled revenue and that it exercised authority within its sphere. How this 'village' State was constituted, whether in the manner of an oligarchy, or by the representation of the various caste, craft, or other groups within it, or by representation of all families, or in some other manner, while important in itself as a subject for exploration, was not its basic element. The basic element of this 'village republic' was the authority it wielded, the resources it controlled, and dispensed,

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72 Judging from their products this, in a certain sense, may apply even more to the writings on India by most non-Indians. But quite understandably their writings on various aspects of Indian society and polity will obviously be influenced, if not wholly conditioned, by their respective cultural and educational ethos. Even when some of them may comprehend India better as men like Alexander Walker in the early 19th century and Prof. Burton Stein today seem to do, it is not really for them to map out such perception and awareness of his own society for the Indian. Such a task can only be undertaken by India itself.

and the manner of such resource utilization. Notwithstanding all that has been written about empires Ashokan, Vijayanagar, Mughal, etc. and of 'oriental despotism' it is beyond any doubt that throughout its history, Indian society and polity has basically been organised according to non-centralist concepts. It is not only recent research which brings out this point. The eighteenth and early nineteenth century European reports, manuscripts as well as published writings also bear evidence to it. That the annual exchequer receipts of Jahangir did not amount to more than 5% of the computed revenue of his empire, and that of Aurangzeb with all his zeal for maximising such receipts, did not ever exceed 20% is symptomatic of the concepts and arrangements which governed Indian polity.

It can of course be argued that it is such a non-centralist polity that made India politically weak, or rather, soft in the military sense, given that only hierarchical and centralist states are politically and militarily strong and viable. This may all be true and is worthy of serious consideration. Nonetheless, the first requisite is to understand the nature and functioning of Indian society and polity especially as it functioned two or three centuries ago. Further, its various dimensions and contours, strengths and weaknesses need to be known, and not only from European writings but much more so from Indian sources, from the traditions and beliefs of various areas, communities, groups, etc., with special attention being paid to their own images of the society of which they were a part.

It is suggested here, and there is voluminous data scattered in the British records themselves which confirm the view, that in terms of the basic expenses, both education and medical care, like the expenses of the local police, and the maintenance of irrigation facilities, had primary claims on revenue. It was primarily this revenue which not only maintained higher education but also, as was sometimes admitted in the British records the system of elementary education.<sup>73</sup> It is quite probable that in addition to this basic provision the parents and guardians of the scholars, according to their varying capacities, also contributed a little by way of presents, occasional feeding of the unprovided scholars, etc. towards the maintenance of the system. But to suppose that such a deep-rooted and extensive system which really catered to all sections of society was maintained on the basis of tuition fees, or through not only gratuitous

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73 *Public Despatch to Bengal*, 3 June 1814: "We refer with particular satisfaction upon this occasion to that distinguished feature of internal polity which prevails in some parts of India, and by which the instruction of the people is provided for by a certain charge upon the produce of the soil, and other endowments in favour of the village teachers, who are thereby rendered public servants of the community".

teaching but also feeding of the pupils by the teachers, is to be grossly ignorant of the actual functioning of any system, or society.

According to the Bengal-Bihar data of the 1770s, and 1780s, the revenues of these areas were divided into various categories, in addition to what was called the 'Khalsa', i.e., the sources whose revenue was received in the exchequer of the ruling authority of the province, or some larger unit. These categories together i.e., excluding the Khalsa, seem to have been allocated the major proportion of the revenue sources (perhaps around 80% of the computed revenue of any area) and two of these categories were termed 'Chakeran Zemin', and 'Bazee Zemin' in the Bengal and Bihar records of this period. The former, 'Chakeran Zemin', implied such recipients of revenue who were engaged in the administrative, economic, accounting activities, etc., and were remunerated by assignments of revenue; while the latter, 'Bazee Zemin', meant those who according to the British, were in receipt of what were termed "religious and charitable allowances." A substantial portion of these religious allowances was obviously assigned for the maintenance of religious places, largely temples of all sizes and celebrity, but also Mosques, Dargahs, Chatrams, Maths, etc. Another part was assigned to the Agrahrams, or what perhaps were also termed 'Brahmdeya' in South India as well as in Bengal. Yet, other assignments were given over to a variety of individuals, to great and other pundits, to poets, to joshis, to medical practitioners, to jesters, and even for such purposes as defraying the expenses of carrying Ganga water in areas of Uttar Pradesh to certain religious shrines on certain festivals.<sup>74</sup>

Regarding the extent of such assignments from Hedgelee in Bengal, it was stated in 1770 that "almost one-half of the province is held upon free tenure" under the 'Bazee Zemin' category.<sup>75</sup> The number of these 'Bazee Zemin' (one may reasonably assume the term included individuals, groups, as well as institutions) in many districts of Bengal and Bihar were as high as 30,000 to 36,000 recipients for the district. According to H.T. Prinsep,<sup>76</sup> in one district of Bengal around 1780, the applications for the registration of 'Bazee Zemin' numbered 72,000.

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74 The revenue records of all areas, especially of the years 1770-90 for the Bengal Presidency, and of 1801-20 for the Madras Presidency provide very extensive information regarding such assignments. The information regarding assignments for the purpose of carrying Ganga water to religious shrines is taken from *Mafee Register* for 1847 for the district of Hamirpur and Kalpi in the Uttar Pradesh State Archives at Allahabad.

75 I.O.R. Factory Records: G/27/1, Supervisor Houghly to Murshedabad Council, 10.10.1770, p.88.

76 In a note dated circa 1830.

The position in the Madras Presidency was not very different, even after all the disorganisation, dispossession and demolition of the period 1750-1800 during which the British made themselves masters of the whole area. As late as 1801, over 35% of the total cultivated land in the Ceded Districts (the present Rayalseema area and the Kannada District of Bellary) came under the category of revenue free assignments, and it was the task of Thomas Munro to somehow reduce this quantity to a mere 5% of the total cultivated land. The reduction intended in the Ceded Districts was also carried out in all other districts earlier in some, and later in others, and in some the dispossession of such vast numbers of assignees of revenue took a long time.

The returns from the various districts of the Madras Presidency, especially during the years 1805-1820, provide much information on the varied nature of these revenue assignments (or grain, or money allowances), which in some measure had till then continued to be permitted, or disbursed to a variety of institutions, and individuals in the several districts. Such information usually got gathered whenever the government was contemplating some new policy, or some further steps concerning one, or more categories of such assignees, or those to whom any sort of allowances were being paid. As illustrative of such information, a return from the district of Tanjore of April 1813, relating to the money assignments, which by this time were mostly minute, received by 1,013 big and small temples,<sup>77</sup> and between 350-400 individuals, is reproduced at the end [cf. Annex G&H 1983]. These payments amounted at this time to a total of Star Pagodas 43,037 for the temples, and Star Pagodas 5,929 to the individuals, annually. A Star Pagoda was valued at about three and one-half rupee.

What was true of Bengal, Bihar and the Madras Presidency applied equally to other areas in India, whether in the areas of the Bombay Presidency, or of Panjab, or in the Rajasthan States. The proportions allocated to particular categories, as far as the British record indicates also seem fairly similar, and it may not be far wrong to assume that about a quarter to one-third of the revenue paying sources (not only land, but also sea-ports, etc.) were according to some ancient practice assigned, till the British overturned it, for the requirements of the social and cultural infrastructure.

Further still, the rate of assessment which was paid by cultivators of the revenue assigned lands till the British completely took over, was fairly low. According to the supervisors of the Bengal Districts in the 1770s and early 1780s the rate of assessment charged by the 'Bazee Zemin' revenue assignees was around one-quarter to one-third of the rate which the British had begun to

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77 The total number of *maths* and temples in Tanjore about this time was around 4,000.

demand from the lands which were treated as 'Khalsa'<sup>78</sup> and which category was just swallowing up practically all the other categories. A more or less similar phenomena obtained in the various districts of the Madras Presidency even as late as the 1820s.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, though it may seem unbelievable, the area which constituted Malabar had, till about 1750, never had a land tax.<sup>80</sup> It had a variety of other mercantile and judicial taxes, but land in Malabar, according to British investigators themselves never paid revenue of any kind till its peace was wholly shattered by the Europeans, Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. Even during Tipu's period the actual receipts from Malabar were fairly small.

The major dispossession of the various categories of revenue assignees (starting from those who had assignment for the performance of military duties, and who formed the local militias, and going on to those who performed police duties, etc.) started as soon as the British took over *de facto* control of any area, i.e. in Bengal and Bihar from 1757-58 onwards. The turn of the 'Chakeran Zemin' and the 'Bazee Zemin' came slightly later but by about 1770 they had also begun to be seriously affected. By about 1800, through various means, a very large percentage of these had been altogether dispossessed, and most of the remaining had their assignments greatly reduced through various devices. One of the devices used was the application of the newly established enhanced rate of assessment even to the sources from which the assignees had received the revenue. This device, to begin with, implied a reduction of the quantity of the assigned source in accordance with the increased rate of assessment. The next step was in most cases to reduce the money value itself with the result that the assignee, whether an individual or an institution even when allowed a fraction of the previous assignment, was no longer able because of such steep reduction to perform the accompanying functions in the manner they had been

78 I.O.R. *Factory Records*: G/6/4. Proceedings of Burdwan Council on Beerbhoom, 24.5.1775.

79 The problem of peasants deserting *sirkar* lands (i.e. lands paying revenue to government) because of the exorbitant rate of government assessment even in the 1820s was of such frequency that it was deliberated upon by Thomas Munro as Governor of Madras in November 1822. At that time Munro observed that "it would be most satisfactory if the sirkar ryots were induced to give a voluntary preference to the sirkar land" and felt that the rest of the village community paying revenue to government should not "allow a ryot to throw up sirkar land liable to adjustment merely that he may occupy Enam land which is liable to none". But if such "inducement" did not work Munro was of the view, that "if necessary, measures for the protection of the rights of Government may be directed more immediately to the Enamdars, either by taking their Enams or by resuming them". (Tamil Nadu State Archives: *Board of Revenue Proceedings*: Volume 930, Proceedings 7.11.1822, pp.10292-96).

80 For fairly detailed information on Malabar see the voluminous Report of Commissioner Graeme, 16.7.1822 in TNSA: *Revenue Consultations*, especially volume 277A.

performed only some decades previously. Those whose assignments were completely abrogated were of course reduced to penury and beggary, if not to a worse fate. Naturally, many of the old functions dependent on such assignments like teaching, medicine, feeding of pilgrims, etc., because of want of fiscal support as also due to state ridicule and prohibitions, had to be given up.

There are references in the reports from some of the Madras Presidency collectors to certain revenue assignments here and there, and to daily cash or grain allowances received by some of those who were occupied in imparting Sanscritic learning, or Persian, and in some instances even education at the elementary level. A few other collectors also made reference to certain revenue assignments which used to exist in the area but were said to have been appropriated by Tipu, and that, when the British took over these areas, they formally added such revenue to the total State revenue. The various area reports of the period 1792 to about 1806 make much mention of dispossession of revenue assignees by orders of Tipu in the area over which he had control. But at the same time it is also stated that through the connivance of the revenue officers, etc. such dispossession during Tipu's reign was, in most cases, not operative at all. What Tipu might have intended merely as a threat to opponents, became a *de facto* reality when these areas came under formal British administration.

But in most areas which the British had conquered either on behalf of the Nabob of Arcot, or on behalf of the Nizam of Hyderabad, or administered in the name of the various Rajas of Tanjore, most such dispossession was pre-1800. The process started soon after 1750 when the British domination of south India began, gathering momentum in the early 1780s when the revenues of the areas claimed by the British to be under the nominal rulership of the Nabob of Arcot were formally assigned over to the British. One major method leading to such dispossession was by slashing down what were termed 'District charges', i.e., the amounts traditionally utilised within the districts, but which, for purposes of accounting, were shown in the records of the Nabob. The slashing down in certain districts like Trichnopoly was up to 93% of the 'district charges' allowed until then, a mere 19,143 Star Pagodas being allowed in place of the earlier 2,82,148 Star Pagodas.

It is the report from the collector of Bellary which is most known and mentioned in the published records on indigenous education.<sup>81</sup> It is long and fairly comprehensive, though the data he actually sent was much less detailed. In it he actually, to the extent a collector could, came out with the statement

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81 Philip Hartog, who made much play of this reply as mentioned earlier, used it to throw doubt on the educational data from the other districts. It is possible that because of his contrary concerns, he was not able to comprehend this report fully.

that the degeneration of education “is ascribable to the gradual but general impoverishment of the country”; that the “means of the manufacturing classes have been greatly diminished by the introduction of our own European manufactures”, that “the transfer of the capital of the country from the native government and their officers, who liberally expended it in India, to Europeans, restricted by law from employing it even temporarily in India, and daily draining it from the land, has likewise tended to this effect”, that “in many villages where formerly there were schools, there are now *none*,” and “that learning, though it may proudly decline to sell its stores, has never flourished in any country except under the encouragement of the ruling power, and the countenance and support once given to science in this part of India has long been withheld.” In elaboration he added that “of the 533 institutions for education now existing in this district, I am ashamed to say not one now derives any support from the State”, but that “there is no doubt, that in former times, especially under the Hindoo Governments, very large grants, both in money and in land, were issued for the support of learning”; that the “considerable *yeomiah*s or grants of money, now paid to brahmins in this district [...] may, I think, be traced to this source”, and concluded with the observation that:

“Though it did not consist with the dignity of learning to receive from her votaries hire, it has always in India been deemed the duty of Government to evince to her the highest respect, and to grant to her those emoluments which she could not, consistently with her character, receive from other sources; the grants issued by former Governments, on such occasions, contained therefore no unbecoming stipulations or conditions. They all purport to flow from the free bounty of the ruling power, merely to aid the maintenance of some holy or learned man, or to secure his prayers for the state. But they were almost universally granted to learned or religious persons, who maintained a school for one or more of the sciences, and taught therein gratuitously; and though not expressed in the deed itself, the duty of continuing such gratuitous instruction was certainly implied in all such grants.”<sup>82</sup>

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82 Bellary was part of the Ceded Districts and was administered from 1800-7 by Thomas Munro. As mentioned earlier, it was here that Munro seemed outraged by 35% of the total cultivated land being still assigned for various local purposes, and expressed his determination to reduce it to as low as 5% of the total revenue of the Ceded Districts. Munro at that time also advocated the imposition of an income-tax of about 15% on all those (revenue assignees, as well as merchants, artisans, labourers and the rest) who did not pay land revenue. The Madras Government accepted his recommendation and this tax, under various names, (*Veesabuddy*, *Mohtarpha*, etc.) was imposed not only in the Ceded Districts but also in many other districts of the Madras Presidency. It is this background of exorbitant taxation and the cutting down of all expenses, even on the repair of irrigation sources that largely led to the conversion of Bellary and Cuddapah into the latter day arid and impoverished areas. Quite naturally then the educational returns from Bellary were low.

The Collector of Bellary, A.D. Campbell, it may be mentioned was an experienced and perceptive officer, previously having held the post of Secretary of the Board of Revenue, and was perhaps one of Thomas Munro's favourites. It may be said to Munro's credit that in his review of March 10, 1826 he did admit in his oblique way that indigenous education "has, no doubt, been better in earlier times". The fact that it got disrupted, reduced and well-nigh destroyed from the time the British took over *de facto* control and centralised the revenue, was obviously not possible even for a Governor as powerful as Thomas Munro to state in formal government records.

Such illustrations as the above can be multiplied ad infinitum. It only requires searching the records pertaining to the early period of British rule in different areas of India. This with much industry and in a fairly objective manner, Leitner tried to do for the Panjab. For Gandhiji an intuitive understanding of what could have happened was enough, and thus as shown earlier he could reply to Hartog that, "my prejudice or presentiment still makes me cling to the statement I made at Chatham House."

At the meeting at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in October 1931, Mahatma Gandhi was of the view that instead of supporting the indigenous system, nay even allowing it to continue, the British administrators on the contrary, began to root it out, and as a consequence it perished. The result was that there was greater illiteracy in India from thereon. Some weeks after this observation in the account of his interview with Gandhiji, Philip Hartog stated that Gandhiji had told him that "he had not accused the British Government of having destroyed the indigenous schools, but they had let them die for want of encouragement". To this Hartog's comment was "that they had probably let them die because they were so bad that they were not worth keeping". That a century earlier the ruling authority in London also considered them 'bad', perhaps intolerable, is obvious from its April 1828 comment that the papers of the Madras survey were "sufficiently complete to show, that in providing the means of a better education for the natives, little aid is to be expected from the instruments of education which already exist".

## IX

Whatever may be the historical assessment of the content of the reported indigenous system of education, it is beyond controversy that in the early decades

of the nineteenth century it was under great stress. The much-quoted A.D. Campbell, collector of Bellary, whose long letter has been used by Hartog to show how 'bad' the Indian system was and a century earlier was used by London to establish that reading and writing were acquired "solely with a view to the transaction of business", and that "nothing whatever is learnt except reading, and with the exception of writing and a little arithmetic, the education of the great majority goes no farther", had as mentioned earlier, also indicated what seemed to him the primary cause of this stress. He had come to the conclusion that the major cause of it was "the transfer of the capital of the country from their native government and their offices, who liberally expended it in India, to Europeans restricted by law from employing it even temporarily in India, and daily draining it from the land". Further, Campbell had stated that, "there is no doubt, that in former times, especially under the Hindoo governments, very large grants, both in money and land, were issued for the support of learning". The term 'former times' often used in this period, it may be mentioned, usually referred to the time before the formal establishment of British authority and not of a time centuries earlier. As indicated earlier, views similar to those expressed by Campbell were later shared by G.W. Leitner in respect of the Punjab, and in an indirect way by W. Adam in his reports on Bengal and Bihar.

The question of content however is crucial because it is that which led to indigenous education being termed 'bad' and hence to its dismissal, and in Gandhiji's phrase to its uprooting. Yet it was not the apparent content 'the mere reading and writing and a little arithmetic' which was of any consequence in such a decision. For, the school education in contemporary England, except in the sphere of religious teaching, covered the same ground, and perhaps much less thoroughly. As mentioned earlier the average period of schooling in 1835 England was just about one year, and even in 1851 only two. Further, as stated by A.E. Dobbs "in some country schools writing was excluded for fear of evil consequences".

While the limitless British hunger for revenue so forcefully described by A.D. Campbell starved the Indian system of the resource base it was its cultural and religious content and structure which seem to have led to a deliberate uprooting of it. For the relatively undisturbed maintenance and continuance of British rule, it was imperative to somehow uproot the Indian indigenous system. It is such imperativeness which decided Macaulay, Bentinck,

etc. to deliberately neglect large-scale school education, as desired by men like Adam, till a viable system of Anglicised higher education had first been established in India.

The imperativeness of such a step was, in 1813, publicly and powerfully expressed by William Wilberforce when he depicted Indians as being “deeply sunk, and by their religious superstitions fast bound, in the lowest depths of moral and social wretchedness”.<sup>83</sup> T.B. Macaulay expressed similar views using different imagery, in his comment that the totality of Indian knowledge and scholarship did not even equal the contents of “a single shelf of a good European library” and that all the historical information contained in books written in Sanscrit was “less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgement used at preparatory schools in England”.<sup>84</sup> To Macaulay all Indian knowledge, if not despicable, was at least absurd: absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics, absurd theology.

A little later Karl Marx seems to have had similar impressions of India despite his great study of British state papers and other extensive material relating to India. Writing in the *New York Daily Tribune* on June 25, 1853 he shared the view of the perennial nature of Indian misery and approvingly quoted an ancient Indian text which according to him placed “the commencement of Indian misery in an epoch even more remote than the Christian creation of the world”. According to him Indian life had always been undignified, stagnatory, vegetative, and passive, given to a brutalizing worship of nature instead of man being the “sovereign of nature” as contemplated in contemporary European thought. And therefore Karl Marx concluded, “whatever may have been the crimes of England” in India, “she was the unconscious tool of history” in bringing about what Marx so anxiously looked forward to, India’s westernisation.

The complete denunciation and rejection of Indian culture and civilisation was, however, left to the powerful pen of James Mill. This he did in his monumental three volume *History of British India*, first published in 1817, and thenceforth an essential reading and reference book for those entrusted with administering the British Indian Empire. As Mill’s *History*, from the time of its publication, has till recently provided the framework in

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83 *Hansard*: June 22, 1813.

84 *Minute on Indian Education*: March 1835.

the writing of most histories of India, the relevance of his judgments on India and its people cannot be gainsaid.

“The same insincerity, mendacity, and perfidy; the same indifference to the feelings of others; the same prostitution and venality” were according to Mill the conspicuous characteristics of both the Hindus and the Muslims. The Muslims however were perfuse, when possessed of wealth, and devoted to pleasure; the Hindus almost always penurious and ascetic; and in truth, “the Hindu like the eunuch, excels in the qualities of a slave”. Furthermore similar to the Chinese the Hindus were “dissembling, treacherous, mendacious, to an excess which surpasses even the usual measure of uncultivated society”. Both the Chinese and the Hindus were “disposed to excessive exaggeration with regard to everything relating to themselves”. Both were “cowardly and unfeeling”. Both in “the highest degree conceited of themselves, and full of affected contempt for others”. And above all both were “in the physical sense, disgustingly unclean in their persons and houses”.

Compared to the people of India, the people of Europe even during the feudal ages, notwithstanding the vices of the Roman Church and the defects of the schoolmen, were according to Mill superior in philosophy. Further, the Europeans “were greatly superior, notwithstanding the defects of the feudal system, in the institutions of government and in laws”. Even their poetry was “beyond all comparison preferable to the poetry of the Hindus”. Mill felt that it was hardly necessary to assert that in the art of war the “Hindus have always been greatly inferior to the warlike nations of Europe”. The agriculture of the Europeans “surpassed exceedingly that of the Hindus”, and in India the roads were little better than paths, and the rivers without bridges; there was not one original treatise on medicine, considered as a science, and surgery was unknown among the Hindus. Further still, “compared with the slavish and dastardly spirit of the Hindus” the Europeans were to be placed in an elevated rank with regard to manners and character, and their manliness and courage.

Where the Hindus surpassed the Europeans was in delicate manufactures, “particularly in spinning, weaving, and dyeing”; in the fabrication of trinkets; and probably in the art of polishing and setting the precious stones; and more so in effeminate gentleness, and the winning arts of address. However in the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture the Hindus in no way excelled Europe. Further, “the Hindu loom, with all its appurtenances, is coarse and ill-fashioned,

to a degree hardly less surprising than the fineness of the commodity which it is the instrument of producing". The very dexterity in the use of their tools and implements became a point against the Indians for as James Mill proclaimed, "A dexterity in the use of its own imperfect tools is a common attribute of rude society."

These reflections and judgments led to the obvious conclusion, and Mill wrote, "Our ancestors, however, though rough, were sincere; but under the glossing exterior of the Hindu lies a general disposition to deceit and perfidy. In fine, it cannot be doubted that, upon the whole, the Gothic nations, as soon as they became a settled people, exhibit the marks of a superior character and civilization to those of the Hindus".<sup>85</sup>

As to James Mill so also to Wilberforce, Macaulay, and Karl Marx and the thought and approaches they represented (for it is more as spokesmen of such thinking and approaches that they are important in the context of India rather than as outstanding individuals), the manners, customs and civilisation of India were intrinsically barbarous. And to each of them India could become civilised only by discarding its Indianness, and by adopting "utility as the object of every pursuit"<sup>86</sup> according to Mill, by embracing his peculiar brand of Christianity for Wilberforce, by becoming anglicised according to Macaulay, and for Marx by becoming western. Prior to them, for Henry Dundas, the man who governed India from London for twenty long years, Indians not only had to become subservient to British authority but also had to feel "indebted to our beneficence and wisdom for advantages they are to receive", and in like manner "feel solely indebted to our protection for the countenance and enjoyment of them"<sup>87</sup> before they could even qualify for being considered as civilised.

Given such complete agreement on the nature of Indian culture and institutions, it was inevitable that because of its crucial social and cultural role, Indian education fared as it did. To speed up its demise it not only had to be ridiculed and despised, but steps also had to be taken so that it was starved out of its resource base. True, as far as the known record can tell, no direct dismantling or shutting up of each and every institution was resorted to, or any

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85 J.S. Mill : *History of British India*, 1817, vol.I, pp.344, 351-2, 466-7, 472, 646.

86 Ibid, p.428.

87 *Revenue Despatch to Madras*: 11.2.1801.

other more drastic physical measures taken to achieve this demise. Such steps were unnecessary, the reason being that the fiscal steps and ridicule performed the task far more effectively.

An official indication of what was to come was conveyed by London to the Madras Presidency when acknowledging the information that a survey of indigenous education had been initiated there, much before the papers of the survey were sent to London. In this acknowledgement, the London authorities expressed their appreciation of this initiative and also approved of the collectors having been cautioned “against exciting any fears in the people that their freedom of choice in matters of education would be interfered with”. However this approval was followed by the observation: “But it would be equally wrong to do anything to fortify them [i.e. the people of the Madras Presidency] in the absurd opinion that their own rude institutions of education are so perfect as not to admit of improvement”. The very expression of such a view in the most diplomatically and cautiously worded of official instructions as the despatches from London to its subordinates in Bengal, Bombay and Madras generally were, was a clear signal. Operatively it implied not only greater ridicule and denunciation of the Indian system but further that whatever residual fiscal and state support, which might have still remained with the educational institutions, was no longer to be tolerated. Not surprisingly, the indigenous system had little option except to stagnate and die.

The neglect and uprooting of Indian education, the measures which were employed to this end, and its replacement by an alien and rootless system (its products so graphically described by Ananda Coomaraswamy) had several consequences for India. To begin with it led to an obliteration of literacy and knowledge of such dimensions amongst the Indian people that recent attempts at universal literacy and education have so far been unable to make an appreciable dent in it. Next it destroyed the Indian social balance in which, traditionally, persons from all sections of society appear to have been able to receive an optimum schooling which, amongst others, had enabled them to participate openly and appropriately and with dignity not only in the social and cultural life of their locality but, if they wished ensured participation at the more extended levels. It is this destruction along with similar damage in the economic sphere which led to great deterioration in the status and socio-economic conditions and personal dignity of those who are now known as the scheduled

castes, and to only a slightly lesser extent to that of the vast peasant majority encompassed by the term 'backward castes'. The recent movements embracing these sections, to a great extent, seem to be aimed at restoring this basic Indian social balance.

And most importantly, till today it has kept most educated Indians not only ignorant of the society they live in, the culture which sustains this society, and their fellow beings but yet more tragically for over a century it has induced a lack of confidence, and loss of bearing amongst the people of India in general.

What India had in the sphere of education two centuries ago and the factors which led to its decay and replacement are indeed a part of history. Even if the former could be brought back to life, in the context of today, or of the immediate future, many aspects of it may no longer be apposite. Yet what exists has little relevance either. An understanding of that which existed and of the process which created the irrelevance India has today, in time, could however help devise what best suits India's requirements and the ethos of its people.

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India's Polity, Its Characteristics and  
Current Problems (1992)



## India's Polity, Its Characteristics and Current Problems (1992)

This seminal essay was written in early 1992 for an international conference, held at Lisbon in April 1992. It was published in: Wolfgang Reinhard (ed.), *The Origins of the Modern State in Europe, 13th to 18th Century: The Heritage of the Pre-industrial European State*, Lisboa 1996, pp.137-163, as part of a project on the 'State in Europe' sponsored by the European Science Foundation. In this extended text, Shri Dharampal provides incisive insights from a *longue durée* perspective about Indian societal formations and political constellations, which are corroborated meticulously by statistical data, also pertaining to economic configurations. This important paper was reprinted in: Dharampal, *Collected Writings*, Other India Press: Mapusa, 2000 (reissued 2003 & 2007), vol.V., pp.109-144. Translations into Gujarati and Hindi were published in *Dharampal Samagra Lekhan* (11 vols.), edited by Indumati Katdare, Punarutthan Trust, Ahmedabad 2005 and 2007, respectively.



# India's Polity, Its Characteristics and Current Problems (1992).

## I

The *Mahabharatam*, a work of around 100,000 verses is the most ancient and major text on Indian polity. The *Mahabharatam*, besides serving as a chronicle of Indian memory and self-consciousness, also deals with the manner of the creation of the universe, of the division of the movement of the universe into specified periods, called the *yugas*, of the qualities of each of these *yugas*, and provides a detailed narrative of the *Dwapara*, the third of the four *yugas*, and gives an account of the great battle which occurs at the end of the *Dwapara*.

Geographically, the India of the *Mahabharatam* was more or less similar in extent to what is today identified as the Indian subcontinent. The *Mahabharatam* lists some one hundred major regions referred to as *janapadas* in it—around 38 in the north-west; 20 in the centre, the area of the river Ganga; 10 in the east; 12 in the mountainous central area; 12 in the south; and 10 in the centre west.<sup>1</sup> It also suggests that each region was governed by some specific, identifiable, extended kinship community. Further, besides Sanskrit, various regions together, or separately, seem to have had a language or dialect of their own. Sanskrit seems to have been used on a pan-Indian scale, and even at the domestic cultural and social level in numerous homes in all parts of India.

The *Mahabharatam*, as also several other Indian texts, mention that at some early stage there was little differentiation between beings; that man was in a state of bliss, and was devoid of passions. This state changed in time, passions arose, and then disorder; and men were then advised to have a king to govern them.<sup>2</sup> Around the same time they were given a *Veda*, and then agriculture, and then crafts. This changed state led to much greater differentiation and to the formation of the four varnas (classes), and subsequently, it may be assumed, to the formation of numerous communities based on conduct, occupation, and extended kinship. This movement in due time created the science of *Ayurveda*, i.e. the science of medicine, and led to the sciences of *Jyotisha* (astronomy), *Silpa* (architecture), and to the arts of manufacture of things in general. Later the one *Veda* was divided into four, and subsequently into many more parts.

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1 *Mahabharatam*: Sabhaparvam: Chapter 14, verses 5–6; also Bhagwaddatt: *Bharat Ka Itihas* (in Hindi), 1944, pp.146-149.

2 *Mahabharatam*: Santiparvam: Chapter 67, verse 12; Chapter 59, verses 13–28; also earlier and subsequent chapters.

While the *Mahabharatam* advises men to have a king, the king is bound not only by *dharma*, custom and morality, but also is to govern with the assistance of a council of ministers. The number of ministers suggested is 37 and of these 4 were to be from the *Brahmanas*, 8 from the *Kshatriyas*, 21 from the *Vaisyas* (the peasant and trading communities of the age when the *Mahabharatam* was composed), 3 from the *Sudras* (the craftsmen of the time), and one, who was versed in every field of knowledge from the *Suta* (charioteer) community.<sup>3</sup> This representation possibly reflected the proportion or their weight, or both, in the polity of that time.

A concept which arises from the idea of the need of a king is that of *chakravartya*. A *chakravartin* is a sort of a superking to whom all others, in any major part of India or in the whole of it, pay homage and treat as their superior. The *chakravartin*, however, like the king, is not to interfere with the internal polity of any region and is expected to leave the governance of any region to its own people (the idea of *chakravartya* and its relation to other kings comes through much of Indian literature including the *Raghuvamsa* of Kalidasa, as also in some of the ca.1800 European writings on India).

While the *Mahabharatam* provides the basic ideas and texts on polity, there are many other works, though of somewhat later date, which exclusively deal with polity or the science of political economy. The more outstanding of these is the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya of around 300 B.C.<sup>4</sup> The *Arthashastra* is a detailed work and its main theme, in contrast to the *Mahabharatam*, is to centralise all authority, and to bring the innumerable autonomous or sovereign regions, under the control of a superking. Thus for the *Arthashastra*, the idea of *chakravartya* assumes a wholly different meaning. It is said and believed in India that the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya is relevant only in a period of great crisis, whereas the *Mahabharatam* is for all times. The dharmic status of the *Arthashastra* never seems to have been high in India.

It must be said that neither the *Mahabharatam*, nor the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, describe the actual reality on the ground in much detail. Detailed descriptions of the reality to an extent come through ancient Indian high literature,

3 *Mahabharatam*: Santiparvam: Chapter 85: verses 7–11.

4 There is much disagreement between indigenous Indian and western scholarship on the question of dating Indian events. According to the late P.V. Kane, the author of *The History of the Dharmasastras*, western scholars do not like any Indian dates to be considered prior to the dates of similar events in Europe. The Indians, and also the Chinese, for instance place Gautama Buddha sometime around the 18th century B.C., while European scholarship on India, which still dominates Indian scholarly circles, places the Buddha in the 6th century B.C. A similar disagreement exists on the dating of Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, and in fact on the dating of every single ancient Indian event and text.

and much more so through inscriptions some of which go back at least to around 200 B.C. A more well-known inscription dates back to the early 10th century A.D. and pertains to Uttaramerur, a prosperous town-cum-village, and a centre of learning, near the city of Madras in southern India, where these inscriptions can still be seen. Uttaramerur had a *mahasabha* (council) of 42 members, and these constituted five committees. Each member had to meet rigorous qualifications, and was to be free of specified disabilities. The age of members was between 37 and 70 and they held such membership through a balloting device. Besides these sabhas and committees, "there were in existence many other groups and corporations of a social, religious or economic character, each interested in looking after some definite local institution or function."<sup>5</sup> Later material seems to suggest that the concept of the community based on extended kinship and/or on shared locality, region, etc. is of very early origin in India, and it will be correct to say that elements of this concept continue to be very powerful even in the India of today. While the number of extended kinship communities in individual regions, and even in some individual localities was perhaps fairly large (from about 10–50 in any region), the epic and other literary and historical evidence suggests that, in a political and public sense, most individual regions were largely dominated by a specific community. Ordinarily any such dominant community in any region would largely have been from amongst the peasantry. It is possible, and so suggested by ancient classical Indian literature, that the king ordinarily came from those who were broadly termed the *Kshatriyas*. Even when such practice actually obtained, the direction and objectives of kingly rule in ancient and later times seem to have been, as is also inferred from the *Mahabharatam* referred to above, in accordance with and dependent on the dominant community.

## II

Not much detailed work, however, has been done so far from the standpoint of these localities as well as communities. Their perspectives could have offered some graphic accounts of the Indian polity as it obtained through the centuries, with elements that are still to be found in most Indian localities and amongst most of India's kinship communities. While major indigenous Indian sources on the ground reality of India have yet to be located and explored, some fairly detailed material on such reality is available for certain areas for the latter part

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5 An account and English translation of these Uttaramerur inscriptions is given in T.V. Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, University of Madras, 1955, pp.344–353; also K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, University of Madras, 1935, (1984), pp.487, 495–496; Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society, in Medieval South India*, Oxford (OUP), 1980, pp.146–147. Uttaramerur's society, its institutions and election procedure are also referred to in J.P. Narayan, *Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity*, 1959, pp.25–27.

of the 18th century. One such area comprises a whole district—one of some 400 districts of India—around the City of Madras and is known as Chengalpattu. Besides making a survey, all the available local data for each of the two thousand and more localities of this district regarding land, population, institutional structures and arrangements, agricultural production etc., was collated by the British on the basis of local records and fresh enquiries during 1767–1774.

The district of Chengalpattu comprised of approximately 2,200 localities around 1770.<sup>6</sup> A majority of the localities also had one or several sub-habitats situated at some distance from the main habitat. These localities were largely villages, where the main economic activity was agriculture and animal husbandry. But quite a number had very little agriculture. Some of these latter were towns and places of great learning and many of pilgrimage, while others were centres of weaving, fishing, oil manufacture, stone work and other crafts. The twin towns constituting Kanchipuram were an ancient centre of learning; and had been a centre of politics, administration, industry and commerce in southern India until at least the 7th century A.D. Even in 1770, Kanchipuram was a major religious centre, as it is today as well. It was surrounded by numerous separate villages or townships of weavers, stone carvers, and of people engaged in various other crafts.

While around 2,200 localities are listed in this 1770 survey, the main data available pertains to only 1,910 localities. Amongst these, 1,554 had human habitation, and 356 had no habitation at all around 1770. These 1,554 localities had 62,529 houses, in addition to temples, shrines, centres of scholarship, resting places for travellers, and the like. The number of temples and shrines in the district was around 3,000 to 4,000; some of their structures dated back to the 7th century A.D.

These 1,910 localities together had a land area of 779,132 *kanis*, or about 400,000 hectares (a *kani* being slightly more than 0.5 hectare). Out of this total, 182,172 *kanis* were under irrigated cultivation; and 88,069 *kanis* under cultivation which solely depended upon rain. 130,790 *kanis* of land (around 17% of the total) were occupied by woods; and 14,055 *kanis* by orchards, groves, gardens, etc. Another 100,806 *kanis* were occupied by reservoirs of water for irrigation (known as *eri*, *maduvu*, *thangal* in Tamil); and 24,088 *kanis*

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6 The information in this and the following section is based on material written in English, pertaining to a survey of around 2,200 localities in the district of Chengalpattu during the period 1767–1774. This material is held in the Tamil Nadu State Archives in Madras. Many more details relating to a number of these localities are still available on palm leaf manuscripts, now kept at the Tamil University at Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu. A detailed analysis of this data is presently being done by the PPST Foundation and the Centre for Policy Studies, Madras.

was used for human habitats. The size of the land for a house and backyard ranged from a low of 0.06 *kanis* to a high of 1.75 *kanis*. Most houses were in the range of 0.2 *kanis* (i.e. about 1000 square meters). 4,190 *kanis* were used as salt pans for making salt from sea water. 109,289 *kanis* of land, though cultivable, was not being cultivated around this time, and the rest, 121,072 *kanis*, was either under hills and rain water rivers, or was treated as waste. The total area of this district, where these 1,910 localities were situated, was perhaps 50% more than the 779,132 *kanis* mentioned above, as many of the localities until then would not have taken note of any land which lay between the boundary of one locality and that of another one more or less adjoining it.

The average land area of a locality comes out as 408 *kanis* (210 hectares). But 82 localities had less than 20 *kanis* of land, 143 had between 20–50 *kanis* each, and 248 between 50–100 *kanis* each. The agriculturally important localities seem to have been between 100–200 *kanis* (445 localities), 200–500 *kanis* (623 localities) and 500–1,000 *kanis* (262 localities). There were 124 localities which were between 1,000–5,000 *kanis* each, and two localities above 5,000 *kanis* each.

Though the average number of houses for each of the 1,554 inhabited localities is 40–41, there is very large variation in the number of houses within any given locality. 153 localities had no more than 5 houses each; 199 had 6–10 houses each; 324 had 11–20 houses each; and 242 had 21–30 houses each. Only 296 localities had between 31–50 houses; 118 between 51–70 houses; 96 between 71–100 houses; and 83 between 101–200 houses. 28 localities, many of these being towns, had between 201–500 houses, and just 5 had above 500 houses each. These latter were Chinna Kanchipuram with 801 houses, Periya Kanchipuram with 593 houses, Pudupakkam with 726 houses, Pillaipalayam with 608 houses, and Uttaramerur, with its 10th century inscriptions on its polity, with 691 houses. This gradation in the size of localities by houses, or population, as it obtained in Chengalpattu, seems to be no different from such gradation of localities there, 200 years later, today. Further, such gradation is not unique to Chengalpattu. It obtains in similar fashion in most regions of India.

The 225 localities with less than 50 *kanis* of land had little agriculture and a large number of them were industrial centres; many of them were also centres of banking, trade and commerce. Many localities, some 50–100 amongst the 1,554, were pilgrimage centres also.

The number of households engaged in industrial and allied pursuits, or in banking, commerce and trade was around 15,000, nearly 23% of the total households of the district of Chengalpattu. In addition, around 40,000 households

must have been spinning cotton yarn to provide yarn for the cloth which was woven by the weaver houses of the district.

Weavers living in 233 localities were the single largest industrial group with 4,031 households. In 55 of these localities, they constituted more than 30% of the total houses, and in 34 they formed the majority. Some places had very large concentrations of weavers, especially in the neighbourhood of Kanchipuram. One place had 198 weaver houses out of a total of 290 houses. Five other localities, with a weaver majority, had 106 out of 129, 114 out of 191, 87 out of 116, 69 out of 133, and 62 out of 108 houses. Around 80 places had more than 10 weavers in each. There were also many localities in which the fishermen, the woodcutters, those working in stone, potters, and vegetable oil manufacturers together constituted 30% and more of the total houses of such localities. Even those concerned with banking, commerce, trade and shopkeeping together constituted at least 30% in 47 localities and in 11 of them they were more than 50%.

Such preponderance of a particular extended kinship group, or of an occupation group, in 1770 Chengalpattu is even more marked in the case of groups mainly engaged in agriculture and in the case of the Brahmins. In around 1,225 of the 1,544 inhabited localities, one group or the other (and in a few two groups) constituted 30% or more of the total number of houses. And in around 460 localities out of these, one or the other specific group constituted the majority. The total houses for the main groups, the number of localities in which each group resided, and the number in which some of them formed 30% or more, or were the majority, are given in the annex in Table I. The total number of cattle in Chengalpattu is also given in the annex in Table II.

The total annual agricultural production for years 1762 to 1766 can be estimated on the basis of available data for 1,458 of these localities. The amount of total production is estimated to be around 1,479,646 *kalam*s, one *kalam* being roughly equal to 125 kilograms. This means an annual grain production of 184,955 tons. A fairly large proportion of the irrigated land, though the soil of Chengalpattu was only of medium fertility, gave high agricultural yields. In many localities the yield from paddy lands seems to have been of the order of 4–6 tons per hectare, i.e. equal to the yield of paddy in present-day Japan.

Around 27% of this produce was put apart, at four different stages (from before threshing of the crop to after the final measurement of it), for the expenses of the locality and outside institutions with whom the localities were associated, as well as for payment to individuals who were part of the agricultural and community infrastructure. Many of these institutions and persons had also the

land tax from certain lands assigned to them. The total amount of land so assigned in 1770 Chengalpattu was around 44,057 *kanis* of irrigated land and 22,684 *kanis* of rain-fed land. It may also be inferred here that the rest of the economy, industry, commerce, shopkeeping, etc., (which might perhaps have accounted for about one third to one half of the economic activity of the district) had made similar contributions to most such groups, institutions and functions. Table III in the annex gives the major allocation from the total agricultural produce for each category of institution or function in these 1,458 localities.

### III

The 1770 data establishes the existence not only of a high level of agricultural productivity, but also of diverse industrial activities and services in the society of Chengalpattu at that time. There are indications of a careful tending of the physical space and natural resources of the region as well. An elaborately worked out system of sharing the produce of the region also seems to have ensured a fairly equitable distribution of economic and cultural prosperity among the various communities and occupational groups that inhabited the region. What concerns us here, however, are the details of the political arrangements through which the polity of Chengalpattu functioned in the late eighteenth century.

The polity seems to have operated on the basis of complex interactions between distinct and separate groups. Such distinctness at times is expressed in the separateness of their living space within a locality; in certain places separateness of the religious shrine to which a group was especially attached (even when several such shrines may have been dedicated to the same gods); in separateness of their drinking water sources, smaller and larger tanks; and with regard to several other aspects. For instance, there were localities of 100 to 200 houses in which there were as many as 10–12 temples or shrines of Ganesa, the god symbolising auspiciousness.

Thirupporur, one of the numerous temple towns near Madras, offers an interesting illustration of the principle of distinctness that formed the basis of organisation of the Chengalpattu polity. With its Kandaswami temple, Thirupporur was as major a centre of pilgrimage for people of the 18th century as it is even today. Substantial agricultural produce allocations were received by it for its expenses and maintenance from over 250 localities of Chengalpattu. This temple town had over 20 *mathams*, each of which was related to a specific community or to a group of localities. A *matham* is a place of worship, which also arranges for the stay of the pilgrims, and for the performance of tasks associated with pilgrimage. *Mathams* were also places where spiritual and higher learning were imparted. They almost certainly had a savant or a scholar looking after them.

The large number of *mathams*, each linked to a specific community or a group of localities, indicates that while the various groups participating in the Chengalpattu polity all came to worship at the same temple of Kandaswami at Thirupporur, yet each such group preferred to stay separately and be culturally interlinked with a distinct *matham*.

The people and localities of 1770 Chengalpattu, however, seem to have concerned themselves with many more things than the distinctiveness of groups, their living spaces, shrines, water sources, etc. While at one level, separate requirements were attended to, at another level the groups seem to have got together to operate in the public domain of a locality or group of localities. The detailed budgetary allocations made for numerous functions, including irrigation, administration, learning and scholarship, police and militia are illustrative of this joint concern. These functions and institutions, however, were often looked after by specific and exclusive groups. The data mention almost a hundred groups, functionaries, and institutions that had a share in the budgetary allocations of one locality or the other. And most localities made such allocations for scores of functionaries and institutions. The arrangements described above, the separateness of groups and communities and their interlinking as well as the interlinking of localities were not unique to Chengalpattu, and seem to have obtained in most other regions and localities of India until around 1800.

One infers from such data that India's polity was constituted in a manner peculiar to India or to areas around it. The building blocks of this polity evidently are not individuals but distinct and exclusive groups, who at one point emphasise their separateness almost to the point of sovereignty. Having established their separateness, such groups, within every locality, come together to form the local polity. The polity then functions through elaborate systems of sharing of resources and responsibilities. It may be mentioned that, in spite of the attitudes of sovereign exclusiveness which these groups seem to exhibit, the nature of the groupings and the occupational specialisation ensured that none of them could have made the polity or the economy functional, standing alone. Functioning in any locality or larger region required the coming together of several such groups—at least, seven or eight of them. Working out the arrangements of interaction between such exclusive sovereign groups and between locality and adjoining localities then becomes the major aspect of political functioning.

#### IV

The polity described above was perhaps relatively weak at the time of the above compilation of Chengalpattu data. Possibly the linkages between the

localities themselves had become considerably eroded by this time. The factors which still kept them linked in some manner seem to have been the permeating Indian *dharmic* view of life; the great gods and their majestic temples; the infrastructure, both local as well as regional, which in various ways linked them to their institutions and persons who performed the numerous functions which were needed by them all; the scholarly institutions which they honoured in their various ways; and their militias, which in southern India were commanded by persons known as *palayakkarans*. These links had weakened during the centuries. Such weakening was far more pronounced in northern, western and parts of eastern India, large areas of which had been overrun since about 1200 by invaders professing Islam. These invasions had led to prolonged plunder and social chaos. Much more so, they had led to the breakdown of links between localities, between localities and a region, and between regions. As a result, the idea of *chakravartya* protecting and supporting Indian civilization had largely been lost.

Such a situation had its impact on southern India too. Not only parts of southern India had to face one or the other alien Islamic invasion, especially in the 14th and 17th centuries, but the possibility of their becoming more frequent reduced the Indian sense of balance and contentedness, and led to a sense of insecurity and impending danger. Such a mental state also caused varying symptoms of psychological and political emergency. Thus, even in the south, the links between localities and regions lost much of their virtue and strength. But by about 1690, the Islamic rule of Delhi, and thus of its *subedars*, governors and *nabobs* in the several regions, began to collapse, largely because of the play of time, and possibly also because of the historical burden of conquest and oppression such rule had got saddled with, along with its inability to integrate itself with the Indian culture. And so from about 1690, perhaps somewhat earlier in Maharashtra, in most regions of India there was an assertion of the indigenous which had all the possibility of throwing away the 500 year old alien Islamic oppression and bringing forth a new resurgence of the indigenous. However, in these five hundred years India had got so involved within itself that it had lost track of world events, lost touch even with its neighbours, and did not realise that to be successful it had to move and rebuild itself at a much faster pace. Its indigenous rulers and scholars and the regional communities, despite the havoc caused by the Portuguese and other Europeans in parts of India in the early 16th century, seem to have been unable to derive any lessons from this experience.

The result was that when India started to experience the full force of European conquest and expansion from around 1750, its rulers and people found themselves largely unprepared.

## V

It is not, however, as if the British and earlier the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese, had an easy time in India. From the beginning, there was constant armed as well as unarmed resistance to their conquering mission, dominance, and rule. The first 110 years, from 1748—when the extended British conquest began in the region around Madras—to 1858, were like a long-drawn hundred years' war between the people of India and Britain (the latter supported by the military men from several Germanic countries). The climate of India was not hospitable to European men. In order to overcome that, the British began to establish military stations, garrisons and towns in the Himalayas and other high mountains of India.

Unarmed resistance was resorted to not only by the Indian peasantry, but also by city and town people in most parts of India<sup>7</sup> until they were wholly exhausted (especially in southern and eastern India), by about 1840. Then came the great battle of 1857–1858 between India and Britain, by the end of which India had conclusively lost.

But even their conclusive victory had to be paid for by the British. From 1780 to 1857, the British had believed that if they had one European soldier to 4 or at the most 6 Indian soldiers, all officered by Europeans, they would be militarily safe in India. 1857–1858 changed this view altogether. From 1858 until about 1910, Britain decided to have one British soldier to every two Indian soldiers in the British Indian armies. While the actual number of Indians in the army was drastically reduced in 1858, it still meant that a British force of around 100,000 soldiers had to be constantly kept in India for the next 50 years and more. It may be of interest to mention here that in 1946, the British again felt that they could maintain their control of India only with an overwhelming display

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7 Some account of such unarmed resistance, especially regarding widespread resistance against the imposition of a tax on houses in the Varanasi region in 1810–1811, is provided in Dharampal, *Civil Disobedience in Indian Tradition: With Some Early Nineteenth Century Documents*, Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan: Varanasi 1971 (republished in Dharampal, *Collected Writings*, 5 vols., Other India Press: Mapusa 2000; reissued in 2003 and 2007, vol.II).

of military power as neither any major sector of the Indian people nor the Indian military personnel could be depended upon. But at this time they found that, after their losses in the 1939–45 war, they no longer commanded the number of personnel which was required. A different solution was, however, soon found as the Indian National Congress—somewhat exhausted and with an ageing leadership—agreed to a compromise on the question of Indian independence, and to the manner of the transfer of power to Indian hands.<sup>8</sup>

After the British terror of 1857–58, for the next 10–15 years the Indians seem to have been wholly quiet, trying to heal their extensive and deep wounds. By slow degrees, however, unrest began to emerge again. One of its major manifestations was in the 1880s and early 1890s, in the shape of the anti-cow killing movement, which stirred up high emotion and created an uncontrollable ferment, especially in northern, central and western India. The then British Viceroy thought that its intensity, extent and explosive power was as high as that of the events of 1857–1858.<sup>9</sup> Queen Victoria advised the Viceroy that he must realise that this movement was aimed at them, and not at the Muslims.<sup>10</sup> Most Indian Muslims felt so too and Indian Muslims in various places met and came to the conclusion that, as the Hindus did not like the killing of cows, the Muslims by themselves should decide to abandon such killing.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, from 1894 onwards, the movement got diverted to clashes between Muslims and Hindus. Thereafter, it ceased to be a major threat to British power.

But the British—at least in India—had always played with several cards, apparently each of them opposed to the others. In 1942, at the time the British were engaged in the armed suppression of the Quit India movement, a leader of the scheduled castes submitted a memorandum to the British and offered his support to them. The British Secretary of State for India had then written to the British Viceroy that till then the British had one card, i.e. the Muslim card,

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8 There is much material on this in Mansergh, Nicholas, ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-7. Constitutional Relations between Britain and India*, 12 vols., HMSO: London 1970-1983, vol. VII, documents 297, 407, 442, 455, 509, 510 and 527, and vol. VIII, documents 7 and 8 directly pertain to this matter.

9 The India Office Library and Records (IOLR) in London have much material on this agitation in the papers of the British Viceroys Lord Lansdowne as well as Lord Elgin, and far more in the series L/P & J.

10 IOLR: Letter from Queen Victoria to Viceroy Lansdowne, 1893.

11 IOLR: L/P & J/J & P 254/1894: Note on the Agitation against Cow-killing by D.F. McCracken, Offg. Gen. Supdt., Thagi and Dacoity Dept., 9.8.1893.

against Indian nationalism; but now, after this memorandum, they had a second card in the scheduled castes.<sup>12</sup>

The old game of acquiring such cards began to be played around the 1870s in a new way. Scholarship came to the aid of authority and began to create new images for the Indian Muslims, for the Sikhs, and also for some of the Hindu *jatis*. Great Christian sympathy began to be displayed, especially for the *pariars* of the Tamil areas, and other untouchable groups of Hindu society in various parts of India. In fact, groups which had been historically opposed to one another, like the *pariars* and the *chakkiliars* of the Tamil areas, began to be clubbed together initially under the title *pariars*, and later under the more extended term of the ‘scheduled castes’.<sup>13</sup> The process in due time led to the inclusion of many *jatis* in the ‘untouchable’ category. Until at least the mid-nineteenth century, these had not been treated or labelled as such by Indian society.

Another British card was to placate the increasing number of westernised Indians: to divert their discontent and their sense of discrimination into safer channels. The purpose was to detach all such groups from the larger indigenous Indian polity and thus to reduce the possibility of another 1857–1858. It was then felt that one such safe channel could be a conservative-cum-moderate political platform where the grievances of the vocal westernised could be aired more publicly, and thus reduce the chances of their aligning themselves with their own people. This led to the formation of the Indian National Congress under the patronage of liberal Englishmen and loyal and prosperous Indian subjects. This new card seems to have worked effectively for quite some time and did help separate most of the westernised Indians from their own people. Most of the former only wished to be treated as English gentry.

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12 *The Transfer of Power*, op.cit., vol.III, No.280 (16.12.1942) (HMSO, London). The expressions one card and the second card are in the original file (in IOLR) on the Secretary of State’s draft on this subject. The draft also carries a marginal comment by the Secretary of State’s deputy, the under Secretary of State for India, stating that the second card, i.e. the card of the scheduled castes, was weak as it had already been cut by Gandhi. A few months later the Secretary of State seems to have had some after-thought. Writing to the British Viceroy in India he then said: “The fundamental weakness of the scheduled castes is that they are neither one thing nor the other”, and added: “If they had the courage to turn Christian or Muslim en bloc it would be much easier to legislate for them. But so long as they remain a part of the Hindu system, with no separate religion or basis of organisation as such, and continue to regard themselves as Hindus, it does look as if their only chance of betterment lay, not on the political side, but on gradually winning their way socially in the Hindu Community.” This was on February 2, 1943 (cf: *The Transfer of Power*).

13 The *pariars* in south India had belonged to what were known as the *Valangai*—right hand—castes and were their guardsmen; while the *chakkiliars* had belonged to the opposite *Idangai*—left hand—castes group, and had been the guardsmen for them.

However, the innocuous Indian National Congress of the 1880s became a great movement of the Indian people for the achievement of their freedom from 1920 onwards. Its new constitution drafted, explained and introduced by Mahatma Gandhi provided for the enrolment of every Indian, who believed in its new objective, as its member; the individual members in a locality constituting the Congress committee at the village, town, or city level; and these latter in their turn constituting Congress committees at the provincial and national levels.<sup>14</sup> Within two years of this historical transformation, the Indian Congress had 5,000,000 members, and its annual budget had multiplied a hundredfold from around Rs.30,000 until 1920 to over Rs.3,000,000 from 1922 onwards. The 1920 constitution of the Congress had also provided for the constitution of provinces based on commonality of language. It had demarcated India into 21 provinces based on this principle.

The 1920 constitution also gave the National Congress and India a new objective: the attainment of “*Swarajya* (complete independence) by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means.”<sup>15</sup> For the attainment of this objective, various nationwide non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements were launched under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi from 1920 to 1942. Finally, in 1946, an agreement was arrived at between Britain and India to facilitate the early achievement of freedom by India. The process was not easy, however. It implied that the Indian freedom movement abandon or dilute many of its earlier aims. The result was that freedom got converted largely into a transfer of power, and India also got partitioned into two sovereign nation states.

As free India needed a new constitutional structure, a Constituent Assembly was created in the later part of 1946 by means of indirect elections by the provinces and what were known as Indian states to frame a Constitution for free India. This Constitution was completed in November 1949, and came into operation on January 26, 1950.

## VI

Since 1930, the people of India had been pledging and dedicating themselves on each January 26 to the achievement of complete independence. The pledge drafted by Mahatma Gandhi had stated:

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14 *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, vol.XIX, pp. 190–198, text of the constitution of the Indian National Congress adopted at Nagpur, December 1920. The information following in this paragraph is taken from the University of Oxford doctoral dissertation (of around 1960) on the Indian National Congress 1920–1923 by Gopal Krishna.

15 *Ibid*, p.190.

“We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom, but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe therefore that India must sever the British connection and attain *Purna Swaraj* or complete independence.”<sup>16</sup>

The period 1946–1949, during which the Constitution was being made, was a very demanding and exacting time for the people of India as well as for their government. The British move and decision to split India had led to fairly widespread bloodshed, and a movement between the split parts, largely in the north, of some 15 million people, who had to trek hundreds of miles from one part to the other. In the process, mostly during 1947, perhaps one million persons lost their lives. Like newly established Pakistan, India was saddled with the problem of transporting, sheltering, feeding and settling the millions who had been uprooted by the partition decision. In such a state, the making of the Constitution excited little public debate and interest. It seems to have been treated by India’s main leaders, especially after Mahatma Gandhi’s death, as something which could be left to lawyers and to those with legal expertise and administrative experience.

Yet, in certain matters, the discussions in the Constituent Assembly gave rise to much misgiving and deep concern. One of these matters related to the place of the locality—villages, towns, cities—in the new polity.<sup>17</sup> As mentioned above, the 1920 constitution of the Indian Congress was based on the principle that “individual members in a locality will join together to form the Congress committee of the locality; the localities in a region will together form the regional committee; the regional committees in a province will form the provincial committee; and all these together will constitute the national Congress”.

At the very beginning of the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly, around January 1947, a member had reminded the Assembly of the ideas which

16 CWMG, vol.XLII, pp.384–385, January 10, 1930.

17 Proceedings of the Constituent Assembly of India during December 1946–January 1947, August 29, 1947, November 4–9, 1948, November 22, 1948, and November 17–26, 1949. These Proceedings are also reproduced in Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD) (compiled and edited by Dharampal), *Panchayat Raj as the Basis of Indian Polity: An exploration into the Proceedings of the Constituent Assembly*, Delhi, 1962 (republished in: *Collected Writings*, op.cit., vol.IV).

had been generated in the previous 25 years (to an extent embodied in the Independence pledge of January 1930) and had quoted Mahatma Gandhi as saying: "The centre of power now is in New Delhi, or in Calcutta and Bombay, in the big cities. I would have it distributed among the seven hundred thousand villages of India". According to him, Mahatma Gandhi had also said that "there will then be voluntary cooperation between these seven hundred thousand units", and that such "cooperation will produce real freedom and a new order".<sup>18</sup>

The making of the Constitution was entrusted to a senior Indian member of the British officer corps, who was appointed as the Constitutional Adviser. A committee of seven members was formed, six of whom had been leading legal and administrative luminaries under the British administration. The committee was constituted on August 29, 1947. It was given the task of scrutinising the draft which emerged from the Adviser's labour.<sup>19</sup> This drafting and scrutiny evidently took a whole year. When the draft of the Constitution was placed before the Constituent Assembly, there was no mention in it of villages, towns, cities or even of districts. The Law Minister who placed it before the Assembly was in fact proud that no such mention had been made in the draft. In his speech, he observed:

"Another criticism against the Draft Constitution is that no part of it represents the ancient polity of India. It is said that the new Constitution could have been drafted on the entire ancient Hindu model of a State and that instead of incorporating Western theories the new Constitution should have been raised and built upon village panchayats and district panchayats."

And he added: "The love of the intellectual Indian for the village community is of course infinite if not pathetic". Quoting an early 19th century British authority, he considered that no one could feel any pride in them. Then he added:

"That they have survived through all vicissitudes may be a fact. But mere survival has no value. The question is on what plane they have survived. Surely on a low, on a selfish level. I hold that these village republics have been the ruination of India [...]. What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism? I am glad that the Draft Constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit".<sup>20</sup>

18 Ibid., pp. 20–21: Speech of M.R. Masani (Bombay).

19 Ibid., p.23: resolution appointing the Scrutiny Committee.

20 Ibid., pp.2–25: speech of Law Minister B.R. Ambedkar (Bombay).

The Law Minister's observations produced great anger and much anguish. Of the 32 members who spoke in the Constituent Assembly at this stage, only three came to his defence. The others, including several past, contemporary and future prime ministers of Indian provinces, felt greatly hurt and betrayed. A member felt that the "Constitution as a whole, instead of being evolved from our life and reared from the bottom upwards is being imported from outside and built from above downwards".<sup>21</sup> Another member said that "in the whole Draft Constitution we see no trace of Congress outlook, no trace of Gandhian social and political outlook. I feel the whole Constitution lacks in Congress ideal and Congress ideology". Answering the point that "the villages have been the ruination of India", he said, "our villages have been starved; our villages have been strangled deliberately by the foreign governments; and the townspeople have played a willing tool in this ignoble task."<sup>22</sup> A very senior and prominent member from the south, prime minister of the Madras Presidency around 1947–1948 stated:

"I was hoping, having seen the Preamble, that everything would follow in regular course and bring out a Constitution that will give food and cloth to the millions of our people and also give education and protection to all the people of the land. But to the utter disappointment of myself and some of us who think with me, this Draft Constitution has drifted from point to point until at last it has become very difficult for us to understand where we are, where the country is, where the people are, what is it that they are going to derive out of this Constitution when it is put on the statute book."<sup>23</sup>

Most members who spoke found the Draft Constitution "totally foreign".<sup>24</sup> A member even implied that when most of India was fighting for freedom, the Law Minister and his colleagues "were applying grease on the backs of the British".<sup>25</sup>

These discussions, however, got side-tracked. A modification was brought in to calm the anger and anguish of the members, and it was decided that another article should be inserted in the Constitution stating that, "The state should take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such

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21 Ibid., p.25: speech of Damodar Swarup Seth (UP).

22 Ibid., pp.29–30: speech of Arun Chandra Guha (West Bengal).

23 Ibid., pp.30–32: speech of T. Prakasam (Madras).

24. Ibid., p.37: speech of Dakshyani Velayudhan (Madras); also pp.72–74: Kamalapati Tripathi (UP); also others.

25 Ibid., p.40: speech of Mahavir Tyagi (UP).

powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.”<sup>26</sup> This, though welcome, produced little joy. Many members felt unhappy with the Constitution to the last. But in the process some had realised that such an unsatisfactory state was the result of lack of vigilance on their part.<sup>27</sup> It was said that the work of Constitution-making was left to those who were not “in sympathy with the freedom movement”, that therefore “they naturally brought their outlook and knowledge of things into the Constitution-making”; and that this was “not the kind of psychology or the knowledge” that the country needed. The same member further observed that “we wanted the music of *Veena* and *Sitar*, but here we have the music of an English band”, and this “was because our Constitution-makers were educated that way”.<sup>28</sup> Another member wondered that if “the Constitutional Adviser could go to Ireland, Switzerland or America to find out how the people of those countries are running their governmental systems, could you not find a single person in this country who was well read in the political lore of this country who could have told you that this country has also something to contribute; that there was political philosophy in this country which had permeated the entire being of the people of this country and which could be used beneficially in preparing a Constitution, for India.”<sup>29</sup> Another member felt that after adopting the Constitution “the picture from the villager’s point of view is dull and dead. I cannot give any argument to convince the villager that from 26th January 1950 his lot will be better.”<sup>30</sup> According to another, it appeared that “under this Constitution, there will be two classes, a new ruling class at the helm of affairs and at the bottom there will be the common man exercising a vote once in five years.”<sup>31</sup> Finally, many had to be satisfied with the feeling that the Constitution they had adopted was “only a stopgap arrangement”,<sup>32</sup> and another said that in due time they “will have to change this Constitution”.<sup>33</sup>

The adoption of the article on *Panchayats* led to new statutory legislations to devolve some authority and resources on villages, sub-districts, and districts. However, several such attempts at decentralisation had already been adopted by the British since about 1884. The major British experiment in decentralisation

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26 Ibid., p.44: addition of Article 31A regarding the State to take steps to organise village panchayats.

27 Ibid., p.46: speech of T. Prakasam (Madras).

28 Ibid., pp.55–56: speech of K. Hanumanthaiya (Mysore).

29 Ibid., p.60: speech of Raghu Vira (C.P. Berar).

30 Ibid., p.77: speech of Mahavir Tyagi (UP).

31 Ibid., p.66: speech of Loknath Misra (Orissa).

32 Ibid., p.60–61: speech of Arun Chandra Guha (West Bengal).

33 Ibid., p.75: speech of Basanta Kumar Das (West Bengal).

of authority and resources to district bodies and bodies at the sub-district and locality level had been conducted during the 1920s. At that time, these bodies were permitted to make their own rules, create their own procedure, and could hire, direct and dispense with the persons who worked for them, including high technical personnel. The resources put at their disposal within a province, or the larger British presidencies (Bengal, Bombay and Madras) were also substantial. In the Madras Presidency, it amounted to around 25% of the presidency budget.

But within a few years the experiment had come to a dead end. The reason was that the centralised system established by the British in India could not tolerate any departure from the line laid down by central authority. The experiment collapsed by 1930.

There were, however, other attempts in many provinces at decentralisation between 1937 and 1949, and again during 1950–1956, and from 1957 to around 1966. These latter attempts were much less ambitious than the one in the 1920s. In them far less authority and resources were provided to the decentralised bodies. Even then they again reached similar dead ends. Whenever any such bodies began to function at all, their manner of handling tasks and their worldview began to seem intolerable to the directing central authority. The consequence was that each time they were reduced to low level, low-functional branches or offices of the directing authorities at provincial or state capitals.<sup>34</sup>

## VII

Within ten years of the adoption of the Constitution, disquiet about it had grown apace. The process of direct elections, etc. at every level seems to have led to widespread factionalism in most parts of India, and further disrupted localities and regional societies. A major expression to it was given by Jayaprakash Narayan in *A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity*, published and circulated privately in 1959.<sup>35</sup> In it, Jayaprakash Narayan, a prominent freedom fighter and later an eminent Indian leader and statesman, spelled out the nature of the disruption which was occurring. He suggested recourse to a several-tiered polity from the base upwards in which direct elections were to take place only for the level of the locality, the other tiers being elected by the elected institutions at the locality and other levels.

34 The observations in this paragraph are dealt with in greater detail in Dharampal, *The Madras Panchayat System: A General Assessment*, Impex India: Delhi 1972, vol.II (reprinted in *Collected Writings*, op. cit., vol.IV). The book is based on a study made and completed during 1964 and 1965 on behalf of the All India Panchayat Parishad.

35 Jayaprakash Narayan, *A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity* (draft for private circulation), Kashi (Akhil Bharatiya Sarva Seva Sangha), 1959.

Three years later, he commented on the afore-mentioned debate in the Constituent Assembly. As these comments seem to reflect the Indian approach and view on the subject, some part of what he wrote is reproduced here:

“As I look at it, there are two entirely different concepts of society involved here. Even though not clearly expressed, this is implicit throughout Gandhiji's discussion on the subject. One concept is that put forward by Dr. Ambedkar, and accepted as the basis of the Constitution, namely, the atomised and inorganic view of society. It is this view that governs political theory and practice in the West today. The most important reason for that is that Western society itself has become, as a result of a certain form of industrialisation and economic order, an atomised mass society. Political democracy is reduced to the counting of heads. It is further natural in these circumstances for political parties, built around competing power-groups, to be formed, leading to the establishment not of government by people, but of government by party: in other words, by one or another power-group.

The other is the organic or communitarian view. This view treats man not as a particle of sand in an inorganic heap, but as a living cell in a larger organic entity. It is natural that in this view the emphasis should be laid more on responsibility than on right, just as in the inorganic view it is natural that it should be the opposite. When the individual lives in community with others, his rights flow from his responsibilities. It cannot be otherwise. That is why, in Gandhiji's sociological thought, the emphasis is always laid upon responsibility.”<sup>36</sup>

It may be useful to recollect here Mahatma Gandhi's thinking on this subject, as he expressed it in 1931 in London within the framework of the Second Round Table Conference on India, organised by the British government. He stated:

“We must remember that we have 700,000 villages. I believe that the 700,000 includes the Princes' India also. I speak subject to correction. We have perhaps 500,000 or a little more in popular India. We may have these 500,000 units. Each unit would elect its own representative, and these representatives would be the electorate that would elect, if you will, representatives to the Central or the Federal legislature. I have simply given you an outline of the scheme. It can be filled in if it commends itself to your attention. If we are going to have adult suffrage, I am afraid that we shall have to fall back upon a scheme somewhat after the style that I have suggested to you. Wherever it has been working, I can only give

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36 See also, Dharampal: *Panchayat Raj as the Basis of Indian Polity*, op. cit., pp.10-11.

you my evidence that it has worked with excellent results, and there has been no difficulty in establishing contact through these representatives with the humblest villager.”<sup>37</sup>

When he said “that it has worked with excellent results”, what Gandhiji had most in view was the 1920 constitution of the Indian National Congress and the working of the Congress under the provisions of that constitution.

## VIII

Some of those close to Mahatma Gandhi, wondering at the transformation wrought in India since 1917 from a state of fearfulness to fearlessness and from despair to hope,<sup>38</sup> used to ask him what was it that he did to bring about such transformation. His reply was that he really did nothing more than articulate the feelings, ideas and preferences of Indian society and India’s people, which they themselves had been unable for decades to so articulate. Earlier on, it might have seemed that he was being unduly modest; while in retrospect, it appears that this was in fact what had happened. The shock and manner of the British conquest and the prolonged terror which accompanied it had not only disrupted Indian society, its localities, the interrelationships between its numerous localities as well as extended kinship groups; but even worse, had made them dumb. The greatest social contribution that Gandhiji seems to have made was to restore his society’s voice, and by his example, helped to make it and its varied constituents fearless and articulate. In a way, what the members of the Constituent Assembly were trying to express, or what Jayaprakash Narayan felt regarding the basis of Indian polity was an inheritance they had derived from Mahatma Gandhi. But in another sense, the concern they felt seems to have been of very ancient origin, and was integral to the world view of Indian civilization, in fact, to the way this civilization approached life, and considered how such life should be organised and constituted.

With the weakening of the locality structure and the interrelationships amongst localities which made them whole and functional, the interrelationship of the various extended kinship groups came under heavy pressure as well. Further, with the breakdown of Indian political and administrative institutions, men from the more scholarly and more literate groups allowed themselves to be co-opted into the system created by the British. Though their co-optation

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37 *CWMG*, vol.XLVIII, pp.26–38, speech at Federal Structure Committee, September 17, 1931.

38 According to the American author Louis Fischer, the transformation in India within 10 years of 1917 was such that, though still subject to British rule, Indians by and large had begun to feel free by 1928, 1929, and 1930—the year when Gandhiji had launched the satyagraha against the tax on salt.

until the early 20th century was mainly to fill the subordinate positions in the governing and coercive apparatus, later these groups became the immediate instruments of terrorising their own people. Within a few decades, they and the communities they came from became not only objects of awe but also of relative hatred. Such a situation seems to have prevailed in practically all parts of India by the 1860s.

However, events like those of 1857–1858 and the passing of time changed many equations. By the 1870s, the British, as mentioned earlier, began to establish new alliances. The disruption and injustice which had been heaped upon Indian society, the way most of its people had been pauperised and degraded by British rule and law, also became more apparent to many more people. Even the Maharaja of the southern Indian state of Mysore seems to have felt the horror of the inequity which had arisen around him, and which had deprived most groups in the Mysore state of honour, dignity and well-being by the 1880s. His solution was that the personnel of the government, to begin with at the more subordinate levels, instead of being recruited only from one or two communities, should from then on be taken from all major communities in proportion to their number in the population of Mysore.<sup>39</sup>

This solution, albeit within the framework of the British system, began to be adopted in most parts of southern India from the early years of the 20th century. A major share of recruitment to employment under government, or government-controlled institutions at more subordinate levels, began to be made on the basis of the numerical strength of the respective communities in the total population of a region or province. While little could be done through this method to re-link communities, or even to wholly atomise them to create a mass society, such steps did offer individual benefits to some of those who had been totally excluded from public affairs during the first century of British rule.

The Constitution of free India also gave attention to this matter of social inequity and provided for its correction by including two articles on it in the Constitution. These articles—16(4) and 46—provide for reservation in education and public employment for the weaker sections, backward classes and the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

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39 It is possible, however, that for some complex political reasons such a solution originated from the British Political Resident in Mysore. Residents had begun to be appointed to all such territories which had been brought under British protection (i.e. indirect authority) but still were formally said to be ruled by Indian Maharajas, rajas, nawabs, and in the case of Hyderabad, by the Nizam. The process had been initiated around 1770 in Avadh, and the rule of the so-called 'Indian states' was under the complete control of the political Residents from 1799 to 1947. The solution suggested by the Maharaja of Mysore is also referred to in the *Report of the Second Karnataka Backward Classes Commission*, vol.I, 1986, pp.11–16.

A few years later, these articles of the Constitution led to the appointment of a Backward Classes Commission at the pan-Indian level. Thereafter similar Commissions were appointed in several states of India; and by 1980, the idea of some proportionate representation based on caste or community in recruitment to governmental employment had become quite respectable and legitimate in most parts of India and in practically all sectors of public employment.

But just as decentralisation of administration to district and sub-district and locality levels did not succeed in rejuvenating localities, this device of recruitment to public employment on the basis of the relative numerical strength of the community also did not rejuvenate communities, nor in any sense lead to the restoration of intercommunity cooperation and friendliness. By the very nature of the British-given structures and framework, both were, from the start, doomed to failure.

## IX

The British conquest of India, and the imposition of British law, institutions, concepts, theories, etc. (no doubt largely of late 18th-early 19th century British origin, and thoroughly antiquated by about 1900) should have, according to European experience and theory, wholly atomised Indian society by the beginning of the 20th century, or at least by the time the British quit India in 1947. However, that did not happen to any appreciable extent. But this was not for any lack of trying. All possible efforts, physical and intellectual, were made to smash or completely subordinate Indian society. In addition, varied efforts were also made to ally and incorporate it within the European world view so that it could be governed and administered with a minimum of expense and violence. Three such efforts were through the advocacy and promotion of Christianity, westernisation and indology.

The christianisation of India was approved and advocated by the British House of Commons as early as 1813. Westernisation of India became a major programme by the 1830s. Indology, and the theory of ancient kinship between Indian and European languages, and, by implication, between Indians and Europeans has continued to be hawked in the corridors of academia as well as in international politics since about the 1780s. One of the ideas originating from indological theory was even shared by Roosevelt, the President of the United States of America, when he advised the British in August 1942 that “we should try to think of some arrangement by which India found its place in the European and American, i.e. western, orbit rather than the Asiatic.” He partly justified

this advice on the view that “racially the mass of the Indians were really the cousins of us Westerners”.<sup>40</sup>

While these efforts led to further pauperisation, disorientation and depression, they failed to generate any major atomisation of India's communities and extended kinship groups. Even those who converted to Christianity from about 1800 (similarly to those who converted to Islam from about 1200 A.D.) did not get individualised or reduced to nuclear families: their attachment to extended kinship seems to be of the same order as obtaining amongst the larger Hindu society.

If Indian society had got atomised like that of western Europe, it perhaps could have followed on the West European or the North American path. Atomisation for mere survival, if for no other reason, according to the Western model, would have generated drive, the kind of motivation, which Americans are supposed to acquire in their early childhood, and enterprise and inventiveness at least amongst a section of the Indian people. The compulsions of the drive and enterprise then could have provided new structures and institutions to the Indian people. But this has not happened. The reason may be that European assumptions and experience, on the basis of which Indian political and public institutions have been structured, do not necessarily have any universal validity. That things happened in a certain manner in Europe need not imply that this sequence gets repeated everywhere else, too. That European civilization happens to be dominant in the world for the last 400–500 years, and has been able to put its stamp on a worldwide scale in itself has little uniqueness.

## X

The European historical experience and thus the European ideas of the State seem to be alien to India. It may be that there are certain other areas of the world, perhaps like Japan, where it is said that feudalism of the European kind did prevail at some stage, which have had similar historical experience and institutions as Europe is known to have had. But India does not seem to be one of such areas. Here, state formation of the European type does not seem to have taken place, despite the centralisation theories of the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, and texts of that type. Kingship here, it seems, did not lead to the formation of a state. The king seems to have remained as a constituent of society; and, more often than not, was no more than an elevated member of the numerically dominant extended kinship community. It is for such a reason that

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40 *The Transfer of Power*, op. cit., vol.II, No.424, Sir R. Campbell, Washington D.C., to Sir A. Cadogan, 5, August 1942 reporting on the conversation he had had with F.D. Roosevelt, the President of the United States of America.

there were no hard and fast boundaries, except what the Himalayas, the great rivers, and the oceans provided. Localities, regions, and *janapadas* seem to have gradually merged into one another. They ordinarily had no distinct fixed boundaries which marked where one *janapada* ended and another began.

It may be mentioned here that India, unlike Europe and post-Columbus America, is not an area of immigrants. Though India has experienced numerous foreign invasions, mostly minor but some major, India really is not a conquered civilization (as Europe perhaps is, and as post-Columbus America became soon after 1492, and much more during the 19th century). The Indian people, therefore, established very different arrangements to run their social, economic, cultural and religious life. It is not that there were no fights, battles, or wars between locality and locality, region and region, or one extended kinship group and another extended kinship group. There obviously also was movement of groups from one region to another, or over long distances: some groups from southern India went and settled in the Himalayas; or many Brahmins from Kanyakubja<sup>41</sup> in Uttar Pradesh migrated over 700 years ago and settled in the region of the temple of Jagannath at Puri, on the shore of the Bay of Bengal. It is mentioned in the 18th century data on the district of Chengalpattu that sometime in the 17th century a warrior leader, or perhaps a small king, or banker, from Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh was journeying with his family deity to the temple of Rameshwaram at the southern tip of India with an armed guard of around 200. When he reached the area of Chengalpattu after a journey of one thousand miles and more, he came across some plundering group which had for sometime been harassing the people of the region. At the request of the people of Chengalpattu, he is said to have vanquished this group. But thereafter the people of the Chengalpattu region would not let this man from Uttar Pradesh leave. They wanted him to settle in their region and be one of them. He ultimately agreed. He and his descendants thereafter were incorporated in the local structure as *palayakkarans*, i.e. militia commanders or small kings. Numerous similar instances can be found in Indian literature or chronicles, or amongst the innumerable inscriptions which are found in most regions of India.

Despite such migrations, it seems that most of India's present people, as well as their political heads, kings, *palayakkarans*, etc., have lived in the same localities or in their neighbourhoods, i.e. within the same *janapadas*, where their ancestors had resided from fairly ancient times, and many perhaps from the time of the great Gautama Buddha. It is possible that over time many or some of them changed their faiths; became Buddhists, Jains, or Saivites,

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41 Kanyakubja was a major ancient centre of learning and also the capital of the celebrated king Harsha of the 7th century A.D.

Vaishnavities, Tantriks, snake worshippers, etc., or at later times, even Muslims or Christians. But such a change does not seem to have affected their institutions in any appreciable degree. So there remained a spiritual, cultural and civilizational continuity. It is such continuity that, on the one hand, amazed men like Voltaire; and, on the other, gave rise to the impression of Indian stagnancy, or of India being the home of various conquerors from the West, from the days of the adventurer Alexander, and perhaps from earlier on. It may be added here that Alexander hardly moved any major distance into India from the eastern bank of the river Indus. But the historical texts of modern times, and perhaps of Greek antiquity too, seem to treat him as a conqueror of India. Most conquests of India which historical texts take into consideration seem to be of the same genre as the crossing of the Indus by Alexander.

## XI

Notwithstanding their social and cultural continuities, India, its people and its polity are in a state of stalemate today. The seeds of such a stalemate may possibly have been sown much before the intrusion of Islam in Sindh in the seventh century A.D. But the extension and deepening of this state of affairs is of fairly recent origin, no older than 100–150 years. The major cause seems to be the mental confusion that has taken over Indian minds, leading to a loss of self-image and loss of identity with the larger, yet still highly diverse Indian society.

Such mental confusion and alienation, leading to a loss of self-image and identity, began to affect the prosperous and the scholarly Indian elite most. Even many of those who have had little personal contact with European civilization and its artifacts began to lose their civilizational moorings as time passed. The British saw this happening as early as 1830.<sup>42</sup> By the 1890s, the decline had reached a stage when the great Swami Vivekananda felt convinced, “that we shall not be able to rise unless the Western people come to our help. In this country no appreciation of merit can yet be found, no financial strength, and what is most lamentable of all, there is not a bit of practicality.”<sup>43</sup>

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42 The British Governor-General of India, William Bentinck, was very pleased around 1830 with such a development and welcomed the news that many prosperous Indians were moving away from Indian ways and were giving up the feeding of the poor, *sanyasis*, *brahmins*, etc., and were instead spending their wealth in the “ostentatious entertainment of Europeans”.

43 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta (Advaita Ashram), 1989, vol.V, pp.126–127: Swami Vivekananda to Saraladevi Ghoshal, 6.4.1897. This view was expressed by Swami Vivekananda several times during the later part of his life.

In the next 30 years, the Indian elite seemed to have surrendered to the West completely. This is how one of them, an up-and-coming leader of the Indian National Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru, saw it in 1928. In a letter to Mahatma Gandhi he wrote:

“You have stated it somewhere that India has nothing to learn from the West and that she had reached a pinnacle of wisdom in the past. I certainly disagree with this viewpoint. [...] I think that western or rather industrial civilization is bound to conquer India, maybe with many changes and adaptations, but none the less, in the main, based on industrialism. You have criticised strongly the many obvious defects of industrialism and hardly paid any attention to its merits. Everybody knows these defects and the utopias and social theories are meant to remove them. It is the opinion of most thinkers in the West that these defects are not due to industrialism as such but to the capitalist system which is based on exploitation of others.”<sup>44</sup>

17 years later, in 1945, he seemed even more convinced of his views and said:

“I do not understand why a village should necessarily embody truth and non-violence. A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow-minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent.”<sup>45</sup>

Given such loss of self-image and identity, accompanied by the increasing alienation of the elite from the people and the reality of India, the split in Indian society became even deeper and wider.

Moreover, by the time of the making of India's Constitution in 1947–1949, the anglicised or westernised Indians had come to occupy seats of power and decision-making in the institutional frame of the British-created Indian state. Therefore, any return to the earlier Indian norms became far more difficult. Finding it difficult to establish the primacy of the locality, indigenous Indian sentiment took to emphasising instead the place of the *jati*, or the extended kinship group. That the locality and extended kinship groups are complementary and cannot be functional separately, was improperly recognised. Further, it has yet to be fully realised that it was the primacy enjoyed by the localities which made them relate one with the other to form the larger Indian polity, and thus, Indian civilization itself.

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44 CWMG, vol.XXXV, p.457, J. Nehru to Mahatma Gandhi, Jan.12, 1928.

45 J. Nehru, *Selected Works*, vol.XIV, pp.554–557, J. Nehru to Mahatma Gandhi, October 4, 1945.

During 1947, at the time of the departure of British power, someone had asked Mahatma Gandhi what was to be expected from the regaining of freedom. He had then written that “we would need at least half that much time to cleanse our body-politic of the virus that has infiltrated every cell and pore of our being during our subjection” after “150 years of slavery”. The full letter, dated July 6, 1947, originally in Gujarati, read:

“You are gravely mistaken in assuming that as soon as *swaraj* comes prosperity will flood the country. If, before assuming that, you had used your imagination a bit to see that after 150 years of slavery, we would need at least half that much time to cleanse our body-politic of the virus that has infiltrated every cell and pore of our being during our subjection, you would not have found it necessary to ask me. I am sure you will understand what I mean, namely, that far greater sacrifices will be needed after the attainment of self-government to establish good government and raise the people than we required for the attainment of freedom by means of *satyagraha*.”<sup>46</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi of course defined and understood such things from the point of *swarajya*, i.e. self-rule, not only in localities and communities but also in individuals, too. This kind of definition of life seems to be central to the Indian view of life and society and man's artifacts. It therefore seems that many of the problems which India's polity faces are due to lack of proper definition and perspective and not so much only because of past plunder or physical suffering caused by Islam or Europe. An analysis of the basic Indian concepts and institutions like locality and extended kinship groups, and *janapadas*, kings, and council of ministers, etc., could perhaps help India in finding a solution to the problems of its polity and society.

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46 CWMG, vol.LXXXVIII, pp.86–87.

## ANNEX: CHENGALPATTU (1767–1774)\*

The data from the Chengalpattu Survey of 1767–1774, either in English in some 20 registers or in Tamil on around 50,000 surviving palm-leaves, may be treated as an approximation to the then ground reality. The survey not only had certain defined purposes but was also governed by the outlook and understanding of those who directed or conducted it. For instance, an obvious understatement pertains to the number engaged in salt manufacture, which is given as 39, while the district of Chengalpattu had a coastline of over 100 kilometers, and salt pans covering an area of over 2,000 hectares. It is possible that the survey recorded only those who were engaged in the supervision of salt manufacture and not the number of actual manufacturers. Various other industrial professions engaged in building houses, temples and other public places, or those who assisted the manufacture of cloth in various other ways, like dyeing, etc., or were engaged in the manufacture of chemicals, or taught in schools, or professed medicine, etc. also seem to have by and large escaped the notice of this survey. Yet, that it covered as much ground as it actually did is indicative of the practice of extensive record-keeping by the pre-British south Indian society and of their awareness of themselves, as also of the industry and perseverance of those engaged in the survey.

An effort has been made in Tables I, II, III to give some statistical idea of the society of Chengalpattu at this time, its dwindling cattle, sheep and goat population, and the allocation of the agricultural produce to various institutions and functions (like temples, mathams, irrigation, police, militia, accounting, etc.) and to various persons like artificers, barbers, washermen, potters, panisevans, kanakpillais, etc. It may, however, be added that these allocations were not the only income which these institutions or persons had. Most of them must have also received remuneration for their work from persons in the non-agricultural sector, as also individual personal payments (or in the case of temples, etc., offerings, donations and so on) for such work. Many institutions as well as individuals also had land *manyams*. All families invariably also had a house site (*gramanattam*), each one to itself, wherever it lived.

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\* This annexure did not appear with the printed version of the European Science Conference paper.

TABLE I  
 Details of Number of Houses of People from Various  
 Occupations and Jatis in Chengalpattu ca.1770

	No. of Houses	No. of Houses in which residing	No. of Houses in which at present	
			50% or more	30% or more
<b>Total Households</b>	<b>62,529</b>	<b>1,544</b>		
Peasantry and Cattle-keeping	33,963			
Vellalas	7,411	—	53	182
Pallys	9,693	1,112	172	423
Pariars	11,052	1,108	82	344
Reddys	1,417	256	7	30
Kammawars	1,005	185	12	32
Cow-keepers	2,573	796	14	51
Shanars	812	256	10	25
<b>Industries &amp; Crafts</b>	<b>8,234</b>			
Weavers	4,011	218	34	55
Fishermen	590	79	9	15
Shroffs (Banking)	422	344	—	—
Cotton-refiners	85	73	—	—
Carpenters	536	414	—	—
Iron-smiths	394	313	—	—
Artificers	45	18	—	—
Braziers	36	17	—	—
Gold & Silver-smiths	209	113	9	38
Vegetable Oil manufacturers	637	270	—	—
Potmakers	389	309	—	—
Wood cutters	596	182	—	—
Salt manufacturers	39	—	—	—
Shoemakers	78	27	—	—
Stone cutters	89	21	—	—
Other Industrial work (approx.)	500	—	—	—

	No. of Houses	No. of Houses in which residing	No. of Houses in which at present	
			50% or more	30% or more
<b>Merchant and Traders</b>	<b>4,312</b>			
Chettis	2,051	725	11	47
Other traders (Komatis, Cavaris)	1,839	—	—	—
<b>Essential Services</b>	<b>1,685</b>			
Barbers	664	506	—	—
Washermen	862	719	—	—
Medical men	159	131	—	—
<b>Scholars, Higher Learning, Ritual Performances and Culture</b>	<b>8,064</b>			
Brahmins	6,646	—	34	154
Pandarams	1,054	373	2	10
Devadasis	622	152	2	2
Valluvans	137	91	—	—
Wochuns	173	153	—	—
Musicians	27	25	—	—
Kootadi (Stage performers)	25	22	—	—
<b>Locality Administration, Accounts, etc.</b>	<b>1,974</b>			
Kanakkupillai (Registry/ Record keeping/ Accountancy)	1,660	714	2	2
Panisevans	314	213	1	1
Taliars (Police)	707	298	—	—
Militia System	1,479	—	11	39
Muslims	733	—	—	—
Moormen	671	154	7	8
Fakirs	62	39	—	—
<b>Remaining Other Households</b>	<b>748</b>			

TABLE II  
Total Number of Domestic Cattle\*

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Cows	94,685
Buffaloes	5,417
Goats	14,931
Sheep	14,970
Bullocks	59,550

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\* The period from 1748 to 1770 was a period of war, plunder, and the butchering of men as well as cattle by the British and by those who contested them in large parts of south India, and much more in areas around Madras. It is therefore possible that the number of cattle recorded in this survey was much less at the time of enumeration than what it might have been 20 years earlier.

TABLE III  
Amount of Estimated Total Agricultural Produce,  
Allocated to Various Institutions and Functions in Chengalpattu

	In kalam <sup>*</sup>	In tonnes	No. of individual recipients	No. of localities contributing <sup>**</sup>
Total Agricultural Production	14,79,644	1,84,955	—	(1,458)
Total Allocations	3,94,950	49,369	—	(1,458)
For institutions and occupation within each locality	2,64,824	33,103	—	(1,458)
Local Kovils (Temples, Shrines)	13,882	1,735	—	(1,409)
Pandarams/Devadasis/ Astrologers	18,503	2,313	—	(1,440)
Cultivators' Servants	87,504	10,938	—	(1,363)
Irrigation Fund	19,806	2,467	—	(1,047)
Artificers (Carpenters Ironsmiths)	19,470	2,435	975	(1,453)
Potters	2,749	344	389	(709)
Barbers	6,169	771	644	(1,439)
Washermen	6,058	757	862	(1,436)
Corn measurers	11,561	1,445	—	(1,303)
Shroffs	9,332	1,166	422	(1,201)
Kanakkupillais	31,624	3,953	1,660	(1,456)
Panisevans	3,110	389	314	(762)
Tottys	1,371	171	—	(272)
Chief Inhabitants	31,197	3,899	—	(1,332)
Various Others	2,488	32	—	—
For Outside institutions and persons	1,30,126	16,266	—	(1,458)
Great Kovils/Mathams (Places of higher learning) <sup>***</sup> / Scholars	25,321	3,165	—	(1,280)
Administration	53,572	6,697	707	(1,347)
Palayakkarans (Militia)	45,936	5,742	1,479	(1,457)
Fakirs/Mosques/Darghas	2,518	351	—	(506)
Various Others	2,779	345	—	—

\* One kalam is equal to 125 kilograms.

\*\* The number in parenthesis gives the number of localities which made contributions to the particular category of institutions or functions.

\*\*\* One such institution, the great Vishnu temple in Chinna Kanchipuram, had grain allocations from the total agricultural produce from 1,265 localities. Nine others received such allocations from over 200 to 450 localities, and seven were receiving such allocations from 118 to 184 localities. Many of such scholarly centres, temples, great scholars, etc. in various regions of India would have also received similar contributions from localities in the adjoining districts, and some perhaps from very distant areas going up to the Himalayas. The great Jagannath temple at Puri and its allied institutions were receiving contributions from all over India, even from places which are now in Pakistan. Similarly, the famous temple at Tirupati, in the region adjoining Chengalpattu, received regular contributions and gifts sent, until around 1810, amongst others from the Marathas as well as from the king of Nepal.

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**Bharatiya Chitta, Manas and  
Kala (1991/1993)**



## Bharatiya Chitta, Manas and Kala (1991/1993)

This philosophical-historical piece, containing deep insights into the Indian civilisational ethos, was first written in Hindi (emanating from discussions with friends in Chennai) in early 1991. In the form of essays, it was published in *Jansatta*, April 1991 (April 16, 17, 18, 19, and 23, with a more extensive concluding section). A few months later the *Jansatta* articles were published together in book form. The translation into English, which is being reproduced here, was composed by J.K. Bajaj, and accompanied by a terminological glossary; it was published in early 1993 by the Centre for Policy Studies, Chennai. The text was republished in: Dharampal, *Collected Writings*, Other India Press, Mapusa 2000 (reissued 2003 & 2007), vol.V, pp.145–223. Translations into Gujarati and Hindi were published in *Dharampal Samagra Lekhan* (11 vols.), edited by Indumati Katdare, Punarutthan Trust, Ahmedabad 2005 and 2007, respectively. Given its wide appeal, this treatise has also been published in Kannada under the title *Bharatiya Chithha, Manasikathe, Kaala*, translated by S.R. Ramaswamy from Hindi (Rashtrottana Sahitya, Bangalore 1996). A shorter version of the text was also published in the Kannada monthly, *Uthhana*, in April 1993 (pp.82–112). It has also been published in Hindi as a popular booklet by Azadi Bachao Andolan, Allahabad. *Bharatiya, Chitta, Manas and Kala* attracted the attention of specialists in intercultural religious studies and a symposium on the book was published by the *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin* (No.8, 1995, pp.2-19). Francis Clooney, who edited the symposium, initiated the discussion with a detailed summary of the book. This was followed by responses from Lance Nelson, Anantanand Rambachan, Nilima Chitgopekar and Anand Amaladass. A response to this symposium by J.K. Bajaj and M.D. Srinivas was published in the *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin* (No.9, 1996).



# Bharatiya Chitta, Manas and Kala (1991/1993)

## I

On January 9, 1915, Gandhiji returned to India from his sojourn in South Africa. On his way back, he visited Britain for a short while. After that homecoming, he went abroad only once: in 1931, when he had to go to Britain to attend the Round Table Conference. During that journey, he managed to make brief halts in France, Switzerland, and Italy. The Americans wanted him to extend his visit to the United States of America, too. But Gandhiji could go to America, neither then nor later.

The journey to Britain in 1931 constituted Gandhiji's only foreign travel after 1915 excepting, of course, his short visits to neighbouring Sri Lanka and Burma. Gandhiji, in fact, felt no need to frequently leave the shores of India. On the contrary, he was of the firm opinion that the struggle for the freedom of India had to be waged mainly in India. The world outside, according to him, could be of little help in this.

The people of India had begun to repose great faith in Gandhiji even before his arrival in 1915, and several national dailies took editorial note of his homecoming. The phrases used and the expectations expressed in these editorial comments suggest that in India he was already being seen as an Avatara, as a manifestation of the divine.

The city of Bombay accorded an unprecedented welcome to Gandhiji and Kasturba. Numerous receptions were hosted in their honour. And the high elite of Bombay turned out enthusiastically to attend these receptions. Even members of the British Governor's Council of the Bombay Presidency and judges of the Bombay High Court participated in some of them.

Within three days of their arrival, however, Gandhiji and Kasturba began to feel somewhat out of place in the high society of Bombay. Already on January 12, Gandhiji was giving public expression to his feeling of unease. On that day, at a reception attended by more than 600 guests and presided over by Sir Ferozeshah Mehta, Gandhiji observed:

“He did not know that the right word would come to him to express the feelings that had stirred within him that afternoon. He had felt that he would be more at home in his own motherland than he used to be in South Africa among his own countrymen. But during the three days that

they had passed in Bombay, they had felt—and the thought he was voicing was the feelings of his wife, too—that they were much more at home among those indentured Indians who were the truest heroes of India. They felt that they were indeed in strange company here in Bombay.” (quoted from: *CWMG*, vol.13, pp.5–6).

Soon afterwards, Gandhiji’s life-style began to change radically. His participation in the festivities of high society declined, and he started moving more and more among the ordinary people of India. The latter saw such transparent divinity in him that by the end of January he was being addressed as ‘Mahatma’ in his native Saurashtra. Just three months later, people in as far away a place as Gurukul Kangari near Haridwar, more than a thousand miles from Bombay, were also addressing him as ‘Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi’.

The arrival of Mahatma Gandhi gave rise to an immediate awakening of the Indian people. They probably felt that the gods had responded to their sufferings and had sent someone from amongst them to lessen their burdens. And this feeling of having been taken under the protection of the gods, through the divine presence of Mahatma Gandhi, remained with them for the next thirty or more years. Many Indians might have never seen him. A large number of them might have sharply disagreed with his ways. Some might have doubted, until as late as 1945–1946, the viability of his methods in achieving the goal of freedom. Yet practically all Indians perceived the presence of the divine in him; and that was probably the source of the self-confidence and the courage that India displayed in such large measure during his days.

Indians have a long-standing belief that the divine incarnates in various forms to lessen the burdens of the earth. This happens oft and again. There are times when the complexity of the world becomes too much to bear; when the sense of right and wrong gets clouded; and when the natural balance of life, the Dharma, is lost. At such times, according to Indian beliefs, the divine incarnates on the earth to help restore the balance and the Dharma, and to make life flow smoothly once again.

Indians have held this belief in the repeated incarnations of the divine for a very long time, at least since the time of the compilation of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas. The Mahabharata is in fact the story of one such divine intervention. By the end of the Dvapara Yuga, the Dharma had got so emaciated that the earth, unable to bear the burdens of the a-Dharmic life on

her, went to Vishnu and prayed for his intervention. On the advice of Vishnu, the Devas worked out an elaborate strategy. Many of them took birth in various forms. Vishnu himself was born as Srikrishna. And Srikrishna, along with the other Devas, fought the great war of the Mahabharata to rid the earth of her burdens.

Buddhist epics like the Lalita Vistara similarly present the story of the birth of Gautama Buddha as another instance of the process of divine incarnation for the restoration of Dharma. And Jaina epics tell similar stories about the incarnations of the divine as the Tirthankaras.

To solve the problems of life on this earth, and to restore the balance, the divine incarnates, again and again, at different times in different forms. This is the promise that Srikrishna explicitly makes in the Srimad Bhagavadgita. And the people of India seem to have always believed in this promise of divine compassion. It is therefore not surprising that, when Mahatma Gandhi arrived in India in 1915, many Indians suddenly began to see him as another Avatara of Vishnu.

The state of India at that time would have seemed to many as being beyond redress through mere human efforts, and the misery of India unbearable. The time, according to Indian beliefs, was thus ripe for another divine intervention. And it is true that, with the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi, the state of hopelessness and mute acceptance of misery was relieved almost at once. India was set free in her mind. The passive acceptance of slavery as the fate of India disappeared overnight, as it were. That sudden transformation of India was indeed a miracle, and it had seemed like a divine feat to many outside India too.

But though Mahatma Gandhi awakened the Indian mind from its state of stupor, he was not able to put this awakening on a permanent footing. He was not able to establish a new equilibrium and a secure basis for a re-awakened Indian civilisation. The search for such a secure basis for the resurgence of Indian civilisation in modern times would have probably required fresh initiatives and a fresh struggle to be waged following the elimination of political enslavement. Unfortunately, Mahatma Gandhi did not remain with us long enough to lead us in this effort, and it consequently never took off.

It seems that the spirit which Gandhiji had awakened in the people of India was exhausted with the achievement of Independence. Or, perhaps, those who came to power in independent India had no use for the spirit and

determination of an awakened people, and they found such awakening to be a great nuisance. As a result, the people began to revert to their earlier state of stupor, and the leaders of India, now put in control of the State machinery created by the British, began to indulge in a slave-like imitation of their British predecessors.

The self-awakening of India is bound to remain similarly elusive and transient until we find a secure basis for a confident expression of Indian civilisation within the modern world and the modern epoch. We must establish a conceptual framework that makes Indian ways and aspirations seem viable in the present, so that we do not feel compelled or tempted to indulge in demeaning imitations of the modern world, and the people of India do not have to suffer the humiliation of seeing their ways and their seekings being despised in their own country. And this secure basis for the Indian civilisation, this framework for the Indian self-awakening and self-assertion, has to be sought mainly within the Chitta and Kala of India.

Gandhiji had a natural insight into the mind of the Indian people, and their sense of time and destiny. We shall probably have to undertake an elaborate intellectual exercise to gain some comprehension of the Indian Chitta and Indian Kala. But we can hardly proceed without that comprehension. Because, before beginning even to talk about the future of India, we must know what the people of this country want to make of her. How do they understand the present times? What is the future that they aspire to? What are their priorities? What are their seekings and desires? And, in any case, who are these people on whose behalf and on the strength of whose efforts and resources we wish to plan for a new India? How do they perceive themselves? And what is their perception of the modern world? What is their perception of the universe? Do they believe in God? If yes, what is their conception of God? And if they do not believe in God, what do they believe in? Is it Kala that they trust? Or is it destiny? Or is it something else altogether?

We, the educated elite of India, are wary of any attempt to understand the Indian mind. Many of us had felt uneasy even about Gandhiji's efforts to delve into the Chitta and Kala of the people of India (and voice what he perceived to be their innermost thoughts and feelings). We are somehow afraid of those inner thoughts of the people of India. We want to proceed with the myth that there is nothing at all in the Indian mind, that it is a clean slate on which we have to write a new story that we ourselves have painstakingly learnt from the West.

But we are also probably aware that the Indian mind is not such a clean slate. In reality it is imbued with ideas on practically all subjects. Those ideas are not new. They belong to long-standing traditions, some of which may be as old as the Rig Veda. Some other aspects of these traditions may have emerged with Gautama Buddha, or with Mahavira, or with some other leader of Indian thought of another Indian epoch. But from whatever source and at whatever epoch the various ideas that dominate the minds of the Indian people may have arisen, those ideas are indeed etched very deep. Deep within, we, the elite of India, are also acutely conscious of this highly elaborate structure of the Indian mind. We, however, want to deny this history of Indian consciousness, close our eyes to the long acquired attributes of the Indian mind, and wish to reconstruct a new world for ourselves in accordance with what we perceive to be the modern consciousness.

Therefore, all efforts to understand the Chitta and Kala of India seem meaningless to us. The study of the history of the eighteenth and nineteenth century India, which I undertook in the nineteen-sixties and the seventies, was in a way an exploration into the Indian Chitta and Kala, and to many educated Indians that exploration, too, had seemed a futile exercise. That study, of course, was not the most effective way of learning about the Indian mind. Yet it did help in forming a picture of the physical organisations and technologies through which Indians prefer to manage their ordinary routines of daily life. It also provided some grasp of the relationships between various constituents of society and polity within the Indian context. But it was not enough to provide an insight into the inner attitudes and attributes of the Indian mind. The mind of a civilisation can probably never be grasped through a study of its physical attributes alone.

However, many who came to know of this work were disturbed even by this limited study of the Indian way. When I began to look into the eighteenth and nineteenth century documents relating to Indian society in 1965–66, a close friend in Delhi wanted to know why I had started digging up the dead. He suggested, with great solicitude, that I should spend my time more usefully in some other pursuit.

Later, many others said that what I had discovered about the state of Indian society in the eighteenth century might have been true then. Indian society of that time might have practised highly developed agriculture, produced excellent steel, discovered the process of inoculation against smallpox and the art of plastic surgery. That society might have also evolved highly competent structures

of locality-centered social and political organisation. All this, they said, was fine. It felt good to talk and hear about such things. This knowledge may also help, they conceded, in awakening a feeling of self-respect and self-confidence amongst the Indian people. But all such arts, techniques and organisational skills of Indian civilisation, they were convinced, were of hardly any relevance in the present context. What could be gained by delving into this irrelevant past of India and learning about her lost genius?

I was asked this question repeatedly then, and many keep asking the same question now. Some time ago, I had an opportunity to meet the then Prime Minister of India, Sri Chandra Sekhar. He, too, wanted to know why I was so caught up with the eighteenth century. We should be thinking, he felt, of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, since India of the eighteenth century was anyway long past and dead. My close friends express the same sentiment even more strongly. It seems that all of us are so immersed in the thoughts of the twenty-first century that we have no patience left for even a preliminary study of our own Chitta and Kala.

But whose twentieth and twenty-first centuries are we so anxious about? The epoch represented by these terms has little to do with our Chitta and Kala. The people of India, in any case, have little connection with the twentieth or the twenty-first century. If Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is to be believed, they are perhaps still living in the seventeenth or the eighteenth century. Pandit Nehru often used to say this about his fellow Indians, and he was very worried that Indians obstinately continue to persist within the eighteenth century and refuse to acknowledge the arrival of the twentieth.

The people of India, in fact, may not be living even in the eighteenth century of the West. They may still be reckoning time in terms of their Pauranic conceptions. They may be living in one of the Pauranic Yugas, and looking at the present from the perspective of that Yuga. It is possible, for we know next to nothing about the Chitta and Kala of the Indian people, that they are living in what they call the Kali Yuga, and are waiting for the arrival of an Avatara Purusha to free them from the bondage of Kali. After all, they did perceive in Mahatma Gandhi an Avatara Purusha who had arrived amongst them even during this twentieth century of the West. Perhaps they are now waiting for the arrival of another Avatara, and are busy thinking about that future Avatara and preparing for his arrival. If so, the twentieth century of the West can have little meaning for them.

In any case, the twentieth century is not the century of India. It is the century of the West. To some extent, the Japanese may take this to be their century too. But basically it represents the epoch of Europe and America. Since we cannot completely sever our ties with Europe, America and Japan, we perhaps have to understand this century which is theirs. But this attempt at understanding their epoch does not mean that we start deluding ourselves of being among its active participants. In fact, our understanding of the twentieth century, for it to be of any use to us or to the West, shall have to be from the perspective of our own Kala. If according to the reckoning of the people of India the present is the Kala of the Kali Yuga, then we shall have to look at the present of the West through the categories of Kali Yuga. One understands others only from one's own perspective. Attempts to live and think like others, to transport oneself into the Chitta and Kala of others, lead merely to delusion.

It is possible that some amongst us believe that they have rid themselves completely of the constraints of their Indian consciousness and the Indian sense of time. They are convinced that, having transcended their Indian identity, they have fully integrated themselves with Western modernity, or perhaps with some kind of ideal humanity. If there happen to be any such transcendent Indians, then for them it is indeed possible to understand the Indian Kali Yuga from the perspective of Western modernity. Such Indians can perhaps meaningfully meditate on the ways of forcing the Indian present into the mould of the twentieth century.

But such transcendence is not granted to ordinary human beings. Even extraordinary souls find it impossible to fully transcend the limits of their own time and consciousness, their Chitta and Kala, and enter into the Kala of another people. A man like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, for instance, found it difficult to perform this feat successfully. Even he was not able to rid himself completely of his innate Indian-ness. He was not able to go beyond the strange irrationality, the irreducible nonsense which, as Mahatma Gandhi observed in his address to the Christian missionaries in 1916 at Madras, pervades India. India, Gandhiji said then, is a country of 'nonsense'. Pandit Nehru could not fully erase that 'nonsense' from his mind. What he could not do in this regard, other Indians have even less chance of accomplishing.

The elite of India have indeed adopted the external forms of the modern West. They may have also imbibed some Western attitudes and attributes. But it seems unlikely that at the level of the Chitta they would have been able to distance themselves much from Indian ways. Given the long history of our contacts with Western civilisation, it is probable that some fifty thousand Indians

might have in fact fully de-Indianised themselves. But these fifty thousand or even a somewhat larger number matter little in a country of eighty-five crores.

The few Indians, who have transcended the boundaries of Indian Chitta and Kala, may also wish to quit the physical boundaries of India. But when India begins to live according to her own ways, in consonance with the Chitta and Kāla of the vast majority of her people, then many of such lost sons and daughters of India will in all probability return to their innate Indian-ness; those who cannot shall find a living elsewhere. Having become part of an international consciousness, they can probably live almost anywhere in the world. They may go to Japan, or to Germany, if Germany wants them. Or perhaps to Russia if they find a pleasurable place there. To America they keep going even now. Some four lakhs of Indians have settled in the United States of America. And many of them are engineers, doctors, philosophers, scientists, scholars and other members of the literati.

Their desertion of India is no major tragedy. The problem of India is not of those who have transcended their Indian-ness and have left the shores of India. The problem is of the overwhelming majority who are living in India within the constraints of the Indian Chitta and Kala. If India is to be built with their efforts and cooperation, then we must try to have an insight into their mind and their sense of time, and understand modern times from their perspective. Knowing ourselves, and our Chitta and Kala, it shall also be possible to work out modes of healthy and equal interaction with the twentieth century of the West. But the questions regarding interactions with others can be addressed only after having achieved some level of clarity about ourselves.

## II

There are probably many paths to an understanding of the Chitta and Kāla of a civilisation. In studying eighteenth century Indian society and polity, I traversed one such path. But that path led only to a sketchy comprehension of merely the physical manifestations of the Indian mind. It gave some understanding of the way Indians preferred to organise their social, political and economic life, when they were free to do so according to their own genius and priorities. And their modes of organisation probably had something to do with the Chitta and Kala of India.

To learn about the people of India, to try to understand the way they live, the way they think, the way they talk, the way they cope with the varied problems of day-to-day living, the way they behave in various situations—and thus to

know in detail about the ways of Indians is perhaps another path to a comprehension of the Indian Chitta and Kala. But this is a difficult path. We are probably too far removed from the reality of Indian life to be able to perceive intelligently the ways in which the people of India live within this reality.

It may be relatively easier to comprehend the Indian mind through the ancient literature of Indian civilisation. In fact, the process of understanding the Indian Chitta and Kala cannot possibly begin without some understanding of the vast corpus of literature that has formed the basis of Indian civilisation and regulated the actions and thoughts of the people of India for millennia. We have to come to some understanding of what this literature—beginning with the Rig Veda, and running through the Upanishadas, the Puranas, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Bauddha and the Jaina canons—says about the Indian ways and preferences. Indian texts dealing with the problems of mundane living, like those of the Ayurveda, the Silpa sastra, and the Jyotisha sastra, etc., also have to be similarly understood.

We should probably begin by forming a quick overview of the totality of this literature. Such an overview should provide us with a preliminary picture of the Indian mind, and its various manifestations in the political, social, economic, and technological domains. This initial picture of Indian-ness shall get more and more refined, as we continue our explorations into the corpus of Indian literature, and supplement it with observations on the present as well as with investigations into the historical past. In the process of this refinement, we may find that the preliminary picture which we had formed was inadequate and perhaps even erroneous in many respects. But by then that preliminary picture would have served its purpose of setting us on our course in search for a comprehension of the Indian Chitta and Kala.

We have so far not been able to form such a preliminary picture of the Indian Chitta and Kala. It is not that no work is being done in India on Indian literature. We have a large number of institutes founded with the specific mandate of studying the various texts of Indian literature. Many great scholars have spent long years investigating various parts of the Indian corpus. But these institutes and scholars, it seems, have been looking at Indian literature from the perspective of modernity.

Indology, by its very definition, is the science of comprehending India from a non-Indian perspective, and practically all Indian scholars and Indian institutions engaged in the study of Indian literature fall within the discipline of Indology. They have thus been trying to make India comprehensible to the

world. But what we need to learn from Indian literature is how to make modernity comprehensible to us, in terms of our Chitta and Kala. We need to form a picture of the Indian Chitta and Kala, and to place the modern consciousness and modern times within that picture. Instead, our scholars have so far only been trying to place India, the Indian mind and Indian consciousness within the world-picture of modernity.

This exercise of exploring India from the perspective of Western modernity has been going on for a long time. The West has been studying various aspects of India for the last four to five centuries. Western scholars have tried to comprehend our polity, our customs, our religious and philosophical texts, and our sciences, arts and techniques, etc. Their attempts have obviously been guided by the interests and concerns of the West at various times. They read into Indian literature what suited and concerned them at any particular time.

Following the scholars of the West, and more or less under their inspiration, some modern Indian scholars also started getting interested in the study of Indian literature. Consequently, specialised institutions for such study began to be founded in India. A number of these institutions opened up in Maharashtra. Many similar institutions came up in Bengal. And some so-called universities for Sanskrit learning began to function in various parts of India. All these institutions, colleges and universities of Indian learning were conceived along the lines laid down by Western scholarship. Their organisation had no relation to the traditional organisation of learning in India. They were in fact structured on the pattern of corresponding Western institutions, especially those in London. And, their main objective was to find a place for Indian learning within the various streams of modern Western scholarship.

The Sanskrit University at Varanasi is one example of the institutions of Indian learning that came up in India. An institution known as the Queen's College had been functioning in Varanasi from the times of Warren Hastings. Later the same College was named the Sampurnananda Sanskrit University. Today this University is counted amongst the most important institutions of Indian learning in the country. Most of the other Indian institutions engaged in the study of Indian literature have similar antecedents and inspirations behind them. And more institutions of the same type are being established even today. These institutions, created in the image of their Western counterparts, are burdened from their very inception with all the prejudices of the West and the complete theoretical apparatus of Western scholarship on India. Like Western scholars, Indian indologists have been merely searching for occasional scraps

of contemporary relevance from the remains of a civilisation that for them is perhaps as dead and as alien as it is for the West.

The work of indologists is in fact akin to anthropology. Anthropology, as recognised by its practitioners, is a peculiar science of the West. The defeated, subjugated and fragmented societies of the non-Western world form the subject of this science. Anthropology thus is the science of the study of the conquered by the conquerors. Claude Levi-Strauss, an authentic spokesman and a major scholar of anthropology, defines his discipline more or less in these terms.<sup>1</sup> Indian indologists, anthropologists, and other academics may wish to disagree with such a definition, but within the community of practitioners of anthropology there is hardly any dispute on the issue.

It is true that not many scholars would like to state the objectives of anthropology quite as bluntly as Claude Levi-Strauss does. But then Levi-Strauss

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1. During his remarks at the bicentennial celebrations at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. on 17 November 1965, Claude Levi-Strauss explained the nature of anthropology in the following words (*Current Anthropology*, vol.7, No.2, April 1966, pp.126): “Anthropology is not a dispassionate science like astronomy, which springs from the contemplation of things at a distance. It is the outcome of a historical process which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other, and during which millions of innocent human beings have had their resources plundered and their institutions and beliefs destroyed, whilst they themselves were ruthlessly killed, thrown into bondage, and contaminated by diseases they were unable to resist. Anthropology is daughter to this era of violence: its capacity to assess more objectively the facts pertaining to the human condition reflects, on the epistemological level, a state of affairs in which one part of mankind treated the other as an object.

A situation of this kind cannot be soon forgotten, much less erased. It is not because of its mental endowments that only the Western world has given birth to Anthropology, but rather because exotic cultures, treated by us as mere things, could be studied accordingly, as things. We did not feel concerned by them whereas we cannot help their feeling concerned by us. Between our attitude toward them and their attitude toward us, there is and can be no parity. Therefore, if native cultures are ever to look at anthropology as a legitimate pursuit and not as a sequel to the colonial era or that of economic domination, it cannot suffice for the players simply to change camps while the anthropological game remains the same.

Anthropology itself must undergo a deep transformation in order to carry on its work among those cultures for whose study it was intended because they lack written record of their history. Instead of making up for this gap through the application of special methods, the new aim will be to fill it in. When it is practised by members of the culture which it endeavours to study, anthropology loses its specific nature and becomes rather akin to archaeology, history, and philology. For anthropology is the science of culture as seen from the outside and the first concern of people made aware of their independent existence and originality must be to claim the right to observe themselves, from the inside. Anthropology will survive in a changing world by allowing itself to perish in order to be born again under a new guise.”

is an incisive philosopher who does not care to hide the facts behind unnecessary verbiage. It is obvious that anthropological tools cannot be used for studying one's own society and civilisation. Nor is it possible for the scholars of the non-Western world to invert the logic of this science, and study the conquerors through the methods evolved for the study of the conquered. But Indian indologists are in fact trying to study India through anthropological categories. If Claude Levi-Strauss is to be trusted, they can achieve no comprehension of their own society through these efforts. They can at best collect data for Western anthropologists to comprehend us.

It is not that this supplementary anthropological work requires no great effort or scholarship. Indian indological scholars have in fact invested enormous labour and stupendous scholarship in the work they have been doing. A few years ago a critical edition of the Mahabharata was brought out in India. This edition must have involved hard effort of some forty or fifty years. Similar editions of the Ramayana, the Vedas and many other Indian texts have been produced in India.

There has also been a great deal of translation activity. Many texts, originally in Sanskrit, Pali, Tamil, and other Indian languages, have been translated into English, German and French. There have also been occasional translations into some other European languages. And, of course, there have been translations of ancient texts into modern Indian languages. The Gita Press of Gorakhpur has translated a large body of classical Indian literature into simple Hindi, and has managed to bring these translated texts within the reach of the ordinary Hindi-speaking Indian. A number of texts have also been translated into Gujarati. And perhaps there have been similar translations into many other Indian languages. All this amounts to a fairly large body of work. And this work has indeed been accomplished with great labour and painstaking scholarship.

These scholarly redactions, translations and commentaries have, however, all been carried out from a modern perspective, and according to the rules of the game of Indology laid down by Western scholars. When Indian scholars have managed to avoid Western biases and Western methodologies, as those associated with the Gita Press of Gorakhpur have done to a large extent, they have been carried away by a sense of uncomprehending devotion. This great effort has therefore contributed little towards a comprehension of the Indian Chitta and Kala. If anything, it has only helped in reading modern Western prejudices and concepts into Indian literature, and perhaps also in attributing these to the essential Indian consciousness. In fact, what has emerged from

the efforts of Indian indologists, when it is not entirely inane, reads like a queer commentary, a deviant Bhashya, by someone who has been completely swept off his feet by the currents of modernity.

To gauge how deeply modernity has insinuated itself into the work of Indian scholars, it is enough to have a look at Sri Sripad Damodar Satawalekar's translation of the Purusha Sukta, and his commentary on it. Sri Satawalekar reads the Purusha Sukta to mean that from the sacred effort, Tapas, of Brahman, there arose, at the beginning of the universe, a modern government with its varied departments. And he goes on to name some twenty departments which the Purusha Sukta supposedly defines. From Sri Satawalekar's commentary, it seems as if the content of the Purusha Sukta is merely a concise prescription for the establishment of a government on the pattern of modern departmental bureaucracy.

Sri Satawalekar was a great scholar. He is recognised and respected as a modern Rishi of India. His intellect, his commitment to Indian thought, and the intensity of his effort were indeed very high. But even he got so carried away by the unrelenting sweep of modernity that he began to see a prescience of the modern governmental organisation in the Purusha Sukta. Much of the work done by Indian scholars on Indian literature is similarly tainted by the touch of modernity. In essence, what these scholars assert is that the peculiar attributes and specific comprehensions of the world that the West displays today had been arrived at long ago in Indian literature. Ancient Indian literature, according to their understanding, records in its somewhat quaint language and phraseology essentially the same thoughts and apprehensions, and even the same organisational principles and techniques, that the West has arrived at only recently.

During the last twenty or thirty years there has been a fresh spurt in this kind of indological activity. But what use is all this scholarship? If we are concerned only about others' understanding of the world, and carry out our discourse on their terms and in their categories, then that can well be done without bringing ancient Indian literature into the picture. Why demean this ancient literature by imputing it with modernistic presentiments? Why drag in our ancient Rishis to stand witness to our blind validation of Western modernity? We may call upon our ancestors and their literature in testimony of a resurgence of the Indian spirit. But modernity hardly needs their testimony to assert itself.

Let us look at another example of the type of scholarly work on Indian literature being carried out in India. For a long time, perhaps for more than a hundred years, scholars of Indology have been trying to make a compilation of

the available catalogues and lists of known Indian manuscripts in various languages. After their long and tedious search, they have recently come to the conclusion that there exist probably two thousand catalogues of Indian manuscripts in Sanskrit, Pali, Tamil, Prakrit, etc. These two thousand catalogues are from perhaps seven or eight hundred different locations, and about one third of these locations may be outside India. Each of these catalogues lists a hundred or two hundred manuscripts. Scholars thus have a listing of two to four lakh Indian manuscripts.

This compilation of all available catalogues is indeed a task of great labour and scholarship. It could not have been easy to collect catalogues from seven to eight hundred different locations and compile them into a single comprehensive catalogue. But what purpose of ours will be served by this comprehensive catalogue compiled with so much labour and scholarship? It has taken more than a hundred years to complete this compilation. Numerous foreign and Indian scholars have contributed to this task. But we do not even have an idea of the state of the manuscripts listed in this grand compilation. We do not know how many of the manuscripts listed actually survive today, and of those which survive, how many are in a condition fit enough to be opened and read, or even microfilmed.

In a somewhat similar exercise of scholarly thoroughness, some eminent scholars of India keep mentioning that there are some fifty crore Indian manuscripts in various Indian languages which have survived until today. Again, nobody has any idea where and how these crores of manuscripts are to be found, and what is to be done with them. It is in a way astonishing that we are occupied with exploring and establishing the possible existence of lakhs and crores of manuscripts that will almost certainly remain unavailable and unreadable, while we are making no effort to understand and comprehend the literature that happens to be easily available to us.

It is true that there are scholars in all ages who prefer to engage themselves in esoteric exercises, the results of which are unlikely to be of any earthly use to anybody. The grand compilation of Indian manuscripts and the speculation about there being crores of manuscripts to be located and catalogued probably belong to a similar genre of scholarship. In functioning societies much of the scholarship is directed to specific social purposes, though some amount of this kind of esoteric activity also often takes place. When a society is moving on a well-defined course of its own, and the majority of scholars are purposefully engaged, then the few who are so inclined are allowed to indulge in their explorations into the unusable and the futile. And functioning societies, sooner

or later, are able to put the results of their esoteric investigations also to some use somewhere.

But we have neither the resources nor the time for such indulgence. If we are to comprehend our Chitta and Kala, and thus prepare a conceptual ground on which we may firmly stand and observe the world, then this directionless scholarship can be of little help. We need to form a picture of the Indian view of the world based on a quick overview of the totality of literature available to us, so that we have a framework within which the mainstream of Indian scholarship may operate. Once that mainstream is established and starts running strong and deep, there will also be time and opportunity for various scholarly deviations and indulgences.

Whenever I speak of the need to arrive at some such rough and ready outline of the Indian view of the world through a study of ancient Indian literature, my friends advise me to desist from this preoccupation. I am told that ordinary mortals like us can hardly understand this literature. As most of these texts are in Sanskrit, they insist that one must be a serious scholar of Sanskrit in order to have any comprehension of these texts of India. Approaching these texts through Hindi or English, it is said, can only lead to error and confusion. Therefore, if one were bent upon reading this literature, then one must first immerse oneself in a study of the Sanskrit language.

But how many in India today have any fluency in Sanskrit? Nowadays, one can even get a doctorate in Sanskrit without seriously learning the language. One can write a thesis in English and obtain a Ph.D. degree in Sanskrit literature from most Indian universities. It seems that scholars who are seriously interested in learning Sanskrit are now found only in Germany. Or, perhaps, some Japanese scholars may be learning this great Indian language. There may also be some fluent Sanskritists in Russia and America. But there are hardly any serious students of Sanskrit amongst modern scholars of India. There may be a thousand or so traditional Pandits who still retain a certain level of competence in the language. And among the families traditionally associated with Indian learning, there may still be four or five lakh individuals who can read and understand Sanskrit, though few would be fluent enough to converse in it. That is about all the talent we have in the language.

The All India Radio (Akashvani) has been broadcasting an early morning news-bulletin in Sanskrit for many years. But there are probably not many who listen to this bulletin. I once asked Sri Ranganatha Ramachandra Divakar whether there would be ten lakh listeners of the Sanskrit news-bulletin. Sri

Divakar had spent many decades in public life, and he was a venerable scholar in his own right. His understanding was that in India the number of listeners of the Sanskrit news-bulletin would not be that large.

South India has had a long tradition of Sanskrit learning. Some time ago, I happened to meet Sri Sivaraman, the scholarly former editor of the Tamil daily, Dinamani. I asked him about his estimate of the number of people in South India who might still be fluent in the language, and who might feel comfortable reading, writing and speaking in Sanskrit. His answer was that there was probably not a single such individual in South India. There might be, he later said, about a thousand scholars, definitely not anymore, who would have some level of competence in Sanskrit, but even they were unlikely to be fluent in the language.

If this is the state of Sanskrit learning in the country, if there are hardly any people left who can read, write and speak Sanskrit fluently, then there is no point in insisting that all Indian literature must be approached through Sanskrit. We have to accept the condition to which we have been reduced, and we must start building up from there. If, for the time being, Sanskrit has become inaccessible to us, then we must do without Sanskrit, and work with the languages that we are familiar with.

It is of course true that no high scholarly work on Indian literature can be done without knowing the language of that literature. But what is urgently needed is not high scholarship, but a rough and ready comprehension of ourselves and the world. We need a direction, a vision, a conceptual basis, that is in consonance with the Indian Chitta and Kala, and through which we can proceed to understand the modern world and modern times. Once such a way is found, there will be time enough to learn Sanskrit, or any other language that we may need, and to undertake detailed high scholarship in our own way not only on Indian literature but also perhaps on the literature of other civilisations of the world.

But detailed scholarship can wait. What cannot wait is the task of finding our direction and our way, of forming a quick vision of the Indian Chitta and Kala. This task has to be performed quickly, with whatever competence we have on hand, and with whatever languages we know at the present time.

### III

As we seem to have little comprehension of the Indian Chitta and Kala, we are often bewildered by the variety of questions that arise in ordinary social living. What is the relationship between the individual, the society and the state?

Which of them has primacy in which fields? What are the bases of healthy interaction between individuals? What is civilised behaviour in various situations? What are good manners? What is beautiful and what is ugly? What is education and what is learning?

In societies that retain their connection with their traditions, and which function according to the norms of their own Chitta and Kala, all such questions are answered in the normal course. Of course, the answers change from time to time, and context to context, but that too happens naturally, without conscious effort.

But since we have lost practically all contact with our tradition, and all comprehension of our Chitta and Kala, there are no standards and norms on the basis of which we may answer these questions, and consequently we do not even dare to raise these questions openly any more. Ordinary Indians perhaps still retain an innate understanding of the norms of right action and right thought, though signs of confusion on such issues are often seen even among them. But our elite society seems to have lost all touch with any stable norms of behaviour and thinking. All around, and in all situations, there prevails a sense of confusion and forgetfulness. It seems as if we are left with no standards of discrimination at all.

A few years ago, the then Governor of Andhra Pradesh visited the Sankaracharya of Sringeri. During their conversation, a reference to the Varna Vyavastha arose in some context, and the Sankaracharya started explaining different facets of this Vyavastha to the Governor. At this the Governor advised the Acharya that he should avoid talking about the Varna arrangement. And the Sringeri Acharya fell silent. Later, relating the incident to his junior Acharya, he regretted that India had reached a state in which the Acharyas could not even talk about Varna.

In a functioning society, such an incident would seem rather odd. The oddity is not related to the validity or otherwise of the Varna arrangement. There can, of course, be many different opinions about that. But a Governor asking a Sankaracharya to stop referring to the Varna Vyavastha is a different matter. In a society rooted in its traditions and aware of its civilisational moorings, this dialogue between a head of state and a religious leader would be hard to imagine. Saints are not asked to keep quiet by governors, except in societies that have completely lost their anchorage. Religious leaders are not supposed to be answerable to the heads of state. Their answerability is only to their tradition and to the community of their disciples. It is part of their calling to interpret the tradition, and to give voice to the Chitta and Kala of their society,

according to their understanding. No functioning societies can afford to curb them in their interpretations and articulations.

Numerous instances of a similar lack of discrimination in social and personal conduct on the part of the best of India's men and women can be recounted. Consider the example of Sri Purushottam Das Tandon adopting the habit of wearing rubber chappals because he wanted to avoid the violence involved in leather-working. Sri Tandon was one of the most erudite leaders of India. His contribution to the struggle for Swaraj was great. He had deep faith in the concept of Ahimsa. And, in pursuance of the practice of Ahimsa, he took to wearing rubber chappals bought from Bata, the multinational footwear chain, giving up the ordinary leather chappals made by the local shoemaker. There must have been many others who, like Sri Tandon, chose Bata chappals over the locally made leather footwear in their urge to practise the principle of Ahimsa.

It is, of course, creditable that important leaders of India had become so careful about their personal conduct and apparel, and took such pains to ensure that they did not participate in the killing of animals even indirectly. But Ahimsa does not merely imply non-killing. Ahimsa as understood in the Indian tradition and as elaborated by Mahatma Gandhi is a complete way of life. A major aspect of the Ahimsak way of life is to minimise one's needs and to fulfill these, as far as possible, from within one's immediate neighbourhood. This practice of relying preferentially on what is available in the immediate neighbourhood and locality is as important a part of the principle of Ahimsa as the doctrine of non-killing. That is why for Mahatma Gandhi Ahimsa and Swadesi were not two different principles. Looked at in this perspective, Sri Tandon's practice of ignoring the local cobbler and taking to the rubber footwear from Bata would have violated the aesthetic as well as the ethical sensibilities of the Ahimsak way of life.

Nowadays it is fashionable in the high society of India to use special ethnic goods which are often brought from thousands of miles away. And this is often done with the noble intention of encouraging Khadi and village industries, or Indian handicrafts. This, then, is another instance of our failure to discriminate between the essence of a principle, and its contextually and temporally limited applications.

Mahatma Gandhi laid stress upon Khadi and village industries as two specific applications of the principle of Swadesi. In the context and at the time of the freedom struggle these two were perhaps the most effective applications that he could choose, though, as he said in 1944, given a different context he would have probably chosen agriculture as the activity that most symbolised

Swadesi. In any case, none of these specific activities and applications could in themselves form the essence of Swadesi. The essence is in the frame of mind that seeks to fulfill all societal needs from the resources and capabilities of the immediate neighbourhood. Using ethnic goods imported from far-off places violates the essence, while conforming to the form, of Swadesi.

The instances we have mentioned are probably matters of mere personal etiquette. It can be said that too much should not be read into these personal idiosyncrasies. We, however, seem to be similarly befuddled on questions of much larger social relevance. For example, we seem to have so far failed to decide on the meaning of education for ourselves. Recently, there was a conference on education held at Saranath. A number of eminent scholars of India had gathered there. Amongst them were vice-chancellors of major universities, reputed professors of philosophy, and celebrated practitioners of high literature. They had come together at Saranath to deliberate on the question of education. They had chosen a beautiful venue for their meeting. In Saranath there is a major institute of Buddhist learning, the Tibetan Institute. The conference on education was being held in this institute. The director of the Tibetan Institute, Sri Samdhong Rinpoche, a high scholar himself—the highest Acharyas in Tibet, including the Dalai Lama, have the title of Rinpoche—sat through most of the deliberations of the conference.

At the beginning of this conference, I sought to know from the assembled scholars the meaning of education as understood by us. Is it merely the craft of reading and writing, or is it something else? There was no answer at that stage. But, on the fourth day of the conference, just before the conclusion of the deliberations, Sri Samdhong Rinpoche was asked to speak, and he took up the question of defining what we call education.

Sri Samdhong said that he had failed to grasp much of what had been said during the four days of the conference, because he did not know the meaning of the English word 'education'. In any case, he said, he did not know much English. But he knew what is meant by the term Siksha. And Siksha in his tradition, according to him, meant the acquisition of the knowledge of Prajna, Sila and Samadhi. In rough translation, these terms mean right intellect, right conduct and right meditation. According to Sri Samdhong, knowledge of these three was education. The learning of various arts, crafts, and various physical techniques and sciences did not come under the term Siksha. At least in the tradition to which he belonged, this learning, he said, was not called 'education'.

Now, if this is the Indian definition of education, then it needs serious consideration. If knowledge of Prajna, Sila and Samadhi is what is called

'education' in our tradition, then we have to understand this form of education. We also need to find out how many amongst us are educated in this sense of education. Perhaps there are not many Indians who may be called educated on this criterion. There may be only half a percent of Indians who are educated in the practice of Prajna, Sila and Samadhi. Or there may even be five percent, for all we know. But supposing there are only half a percent Indians who turn out to be educated in this sense of education, even that number may be five to ten times the number of people adept at Prajna, Sila and Samadhi throughout the world. According to our own definition of education, therefore, we may be the most educated people of the world.

It is possible that knowledge of Prajna, Sila and Samadhi is only one of the various kinds of education known in our tradition. Perhaps what is more commonly recognised as education is the knowledge of correct personal and social conduct, and the ability to earn a living for oneself and one's dependants. If this is our definition of 'education', then some 90 to 95 percent of the Indian people are indeed educated. Viewed from this perspective, some 5 to 7 percent of highly modernised Indians like us may seem rather uneducated, because most of us, who have gone through the modern systems of education and learning, have lost the knowledge of correct personal and social conduct within the Indian context, and have acquired no productive skills appropriate for making a living.

Or, perhaps, neither the knowledge of appropriate conduct in one's own social context and the ability to make a living, nor the knowledge of Prajna, Sila and Samadhi conform with our definition of 'education'. Perhaps by 'education' we only mean the capability of reading and writing. We define 'education' to be merely literacy, and on this criterion we find 60 to 80 percent of Indians to be uneducated. But even if we define education in this limited sense, we still have to come to some decision about the type of literacy we wish to impart through what we perceive to be education.

If somebody knows reading and writing in Bhojpuri, then do we take him to be educated or uneducated? Perhaps to us he will seem uneducated. We shall probably say that though he is familiar with letters, yet familiarity with Bhojpuri letters hardly constitutes literacy, and we may insist that to qualify as an educated person, he should know at least Nagari Hindi.

But then someone may object that knowledge of only Hindi is also not enough. To be called educated, a person must know at least Sanskrit. And then someone else will say that Sanskrit literacy is hardly education. An educated

person must know English, and that too of the Shakespearean variety. Or perhaps knowledge of the English that is taught at Oxford or spoken on the BBC broadcasts will alone meet our criterion of education. But at that point, someone may tell us that the days of British English are over. This English is of no use in the United States of America. Americans speak a new type of English, and it is American English that is current in the world today. Then we shall perhaps insist that for an Indian to be properly educated, he must know American English. If after a great deal of effort some Indians manage to learn good American English and thus get educated according to our current standards, we may find that by then America itself has lost its preeminence in the world. The future may turn out to be the age of the Germans, or of the Russians. It may even happen that one of the African nations starts dominating the world. Or the Arabs may take the lead. Then shall we insist that for an Indian to be educated, he must be literate in the language of whoever happens to look like the current masters of the world?

The attempt at imitating the world and following every passing fad can hardly lead us anywhere. We shall have no options in the world until we evolve a conceptual framework of our own, based on an understanding of our own Chitta and Kala. Such a framework will at least provide us with a basis for discriminating between right and wrong, and between what may be useful for us and what is futile. Such a framework will also provide us with some criterion for right conduct and thought. And it will allow us to define, though tentatively, our way of living and being. We shall thus have some sense of the direction along which we must proceed in order to bring India back into her own.

The conceptual framework we devise now may not last long. Within a few years, such a framework may start looking inadequate, or inappropriate, or even erroneous. We may have to revise or even completely recast it within, just five years. But any conceptual framework can only be a temporary guide to action. All such frameworks are, after all, human constructs. These are not meant to be unchangeable and indestructible.

Conceptual systems devised by man do get revised, changed and even thrown overboard. Basic axioms and laws of even physical sciences keep changing; fundamental principles of humanities and social sciences are of course revised every so often. There is nothing unchanging in any of this. And if there is something of the ultimate reality, of the absolute truth in the conceptual frameworks we devise, then that absolute in any case remains unaffected by the changes we make in our temporal devices. The business of the world runs on the basis of temporary and changeable conceptual frameworks, which provide nothing more than useful guidelines for immediate action. Some such temporary

but usable conceptual framework of our understanding of the Indian Chitta and Kala is what we need to create for ourselves.

We ourselves shall have to make the effort to construct this conceptual basis for Indian thought and action in modern times. Others can hardly help us in this. They cannot possibly devise for us a conceptual structure that will be in consonance with our Chitta and Kala. No outsiders could perform this task for us, even if they had wanted to. How can any outsider look into the Chitta and Kala of another people, and present them with a meaningful understanding of themselves?

The effort to construct a framework for Indian thought and action in the modern world and in the present times is not to be confused with the search for the ultimate, the Sanatana truth of India. That, of course, is a long and perhaps unending search. But it is not the ultimate truth that we need immediately. We only need some basis from which to start asking the appropriate questions. And when we start asking those questions, the answers will also begin to emerge. Or perhaps there will never be any final answers. But the fact of having raised the right questions would have provided us with some direction to the right path. At least the confusion that prevails regarding right conduct and thought, even in the ordinary day-to-day situations, will get cleared.

In a fascinating context of Valmiki Ramayana, Sita questions Sri Rama about the violent tendencies that she discerns arising in him.<sup>2</sup> As Sri Rama leaves Chitrakuta and proceeds deeper into the forest, he and Lakshmana start flaunting their weapons and their physical prowess in a rather conspicuous manner. Noticing this, Sita warns Sri Rama against the warlike inclinations that the possession of weapons invariably generates: “As contact with fireworks brings about changes in a piece of wood”, she says, “so the carrying of arms works alteration in the mind of him who carries them”. And then she goes on to question the propriety of their bearing arms in the forest, where they were supposed to be leading an ascetic life:

“The bearing of arms and retirement to the forest, practice of war and the exercise of asceticism are opposed to each other; let us therefore honour the moral code that pertains to the peace. Murderous thoughts, inspired by desire for gain, are born of the handling of weapons. When thou dost return to Ayodhya, thou will be able to take up the duties of a

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2 *Valmiki Ramayana, Aranya Kanda*, Chapter 9 & 10. The quotations are from *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, tr. Hari Prasad Shastri, Shanti Sadan, London, 1957, vol.II, pp.19–20.

warrior once more. The joy of my mother and father-in-law will be complete if, during the renunciation of thy kingdom, thou dost lead the life of an ascetic [...]”.

Sri Rama did reply to the questions Sita raised about his warlike demeanor in the forest. But it is the questioning that is important. Not so much the answers. What is important is to keep raising questions about human conduct in various situations, not necessarily to arrive at final prescriptions.

In the same vein of raising questions without insisting on any final answers, there is a dialogue between Bhrigu and Bharadvaja in the Santi Parva of the Mahabharata, which is also reproduced almost in the same form in the Narada Purana.<sup>3</sup> Bhrigu initiates the dialogue with his teaching that, after creating humans and other beings, Brahman classified the former into four different Varnas. Bharadvaja asks for the basis of this differentiation:

“(You say) that one Varna in the fourfold division of men is different from the other. What is the criterion thereof? Sweat, urine, faecal matter, phlegm, bile and blood circulate within everyone. Then on what basis is the Varna divided?”

Bhrigu answers that originally there was no distinction among the people. At the beginning, all were of the same Varna. But with the passing of time, they began to differentiate into different Varnas, according to their karmas. But Bharadvaja persists with his questioning. He wants to know how an individual becomes a Brahmana, a Kshatriya, a Vaisya or a Sudra. Bhrigu says that it is the karmas and the qualities of an individual that determine his Varna. And so the dialogue goes on.

Here, as in the Ramayana context above, there are no final answers that the text provides. Perhaps this way of continuous questioning is the Indian way. To keep asking questions about personal and social conduct, and about the appropriate modes of social organisation, to keep meditating about these issues, and to keep finding provisional answers in various contexts—this way of continuous awareness and continuous reflection is perhaps the essence of the Indian way of life. We have somehow lost this habit of constant questioning and the courage to question. If we only start raising those questions again, we may regain some anchorage in our Chitta and Kala.

3 *Mahabharata, Santi Parva*, Chapter 188, and *Narada Purana*, II.43.53-60. The quotations are from *The Narada Purana*, tr. Ganesha Vasudeo Tagare, Motilal Banarasi Dass, Delhi, 1981, pp.519.

## IV

To form a comprehension of the Chitta and Kala of India, we should probably begin with those aspects of ancient Indian literature which seem to form the basis for all the rest. For example, there is the story of the creation and unfolding of the universe, which is found with slight variation in most of the Puranas. This story seems to have a direct bearing on the Indian consciousness, and the Indian understanding of the universe and its unfolding in time.

The story of creation that the Puranas recount is extremely powerful in itself. In bare essentials, according to this story, the creation begins with the intense effort, the Tapas, and the determination, the Sankalpa, of Brahman. The universe once created passes through a number of cycles of growth and decay, and at the end is drawn back into Brahman. This cycle of the creation of the universe from Brahman and its disappearance into Him is repeated again and again according to the predefined flow of time. Within this large cycle, there are a number of shorter cycles, at the end of each of which the universe gets destroyed, and created again at the beginning of the next. Thus the universe keeps on passing through repeated cycles of creation and destruction, and there are series of cycles within cycles.

The terms 'creation' and 'destruction' are probably not wholly appropriate in this context. Because at the time of creation it is not something external to Him that Brahman creates. He only manifests Himself in the varied forms of the universe, and at the end He merely contracts those manifestations into Himself, and thus there is in reality nothing that gets created or destroyed. The universe, in a sense, is a mere play of Brahman, a cosmic game of repeated expansion and contraction of the ultimate essence of the universe. But it is a game that is played according to well-defined cycles of time. The universe is play, but the play is not arbitrary. Even Brahman is governed by Kala. He manifests and contracts according to a definite flow of time that even He cannot transcend.

Every Indian is probably aware of this Indian view of the universe as the play of Brahman. Every Indian is also aware of the supremacy of Kala in this play. Many Indians may not know the very detailed arithmetic of the various cycles of time that is given in the Puranas. But the thought that the universe is a play that had no beginning and will have no end, and that this play of Brahman proceeds according to the inexorable flow of Kala, is deeply etched on the Chitta of the people of India.

According to the Puranas, in these cycles of creation and decay of the universe, the basic unit is that of Chaturyuga. Every new cycle begins with Krita Yuga. This first Yuga of creation is the period of bliss. In the Krita, the

Jeeva, the being, is not yet much differentiated from Brahman. There is, of course, yet no differentiation at all between one being and another. Amongst human beings, there is only one Varna. In fact the concept of Varna has probably not yet arisen.

In the Krita, life is simple and easy. There is no complexity anywhere. Complicating phenomena, like Mada, Moha, Lobha and Ahankara—forgetfulness, attachment, greed and egotism, respectively, in rough translation—have not yet manifested themselves. There is no Kama, sexual desire, either. Procreation takes place merely through the wish, the Samkalpa. The needs of life are rather few. No special effort needs to be made for sustaining life. There is something called Madhu, which is abundantly available. Everyone lives on Madhu. And this Madhu is self-generated. Madhu is not the honey made through the efforts of the bees. No effort is involved in making or collecting it. In this simple blissful state of life, even knowledge is not required. Therefore, there is no Veda yet in the Krita Yuga.

This state of bliss lasts for a very long time. According to the calculations of the Puranas, the length of the Krita Yuga is 1,728,000 years. But with the passage of time, the universe starts getting more and more complex. The innate order starts getting disturbed. Dharma starts getting weakened. And towards the end of Krita, the creator has to take birth on earth in various forms to re-establish Dharma.

Several Avatars of Vishnu, the aspect of the Brahman charged with the maintenance of the universe, take place in the Krita, and the cycle of decay and re-establishment of Dharma, through the direct intervention of Vishnu, gets repeated several times already in the Krita. But at the end of every cycle of decay of Dharma and its re-establishment, the universe is left in a state of higher complexity. Dharma is restored by the Avatara, but the original innate simplicity of life does not return. The universe moves farther away from the original bliss. While the order of life is restored, life moves to a lower level. And through these cyclical movements, each leading to a somewhat lower level of existence, the Krita Yuga finally comes to an end.

At the beginning of the next Yuga, the Treta, the universe is no longer as simple and straightforward as it was in the Krita. According to the Puranas, Dharma, as symbolized by a bull, which stood on all its four feet to securely support the earth during the Krita, is left with only three feet in the Treta Yuga. In this state of relative instability, man requires knowledge and also some administrative authority, in order to sustain Dharma. That is why man is provided

with a Veda and a King at the beginning of the Treta Yuga. This is also the time when Mada, Moha, Lobha and Ahankara, etc. appear for the first time. But at the beginning of the Treta these frailties of the human mind are as yet only in their nascent state, and thus can be controlled relatively easily.

In the Treta the needs of life start multiplying. Life can now no longer be lived on mere Madhu. But there is no agriculture yet. Some cereals grow without any ploughing and sowing, etc. These cereals and the fruits of a few varieties of self-growing trees suffice for the maintenance of life. There are not many varieties of trees and vegetation yet. Differentiation has not yet gone that far.

In this Yuga of limited needs and requirements, man starts learning some skills and acquiring a few crafts and techniques. Some skills and techniques are required for the gathering of cereals and fruits, even if these grow on their own without any effort. At this stage, man also starts forming homes, Gramas and cities. For these human settlements, some more skills, crafts and techniques are called forth.

With increasing complexity of the universe, differentiation sets in. In the Treta man is divided into three Varnas. Brahmana, Kshatriya, and Vaisya Varnas are formed in the Treta. But there are no Sudras yet.

In spite of this differentiation and division, communication between various forms of life is not yet obstructed. Dialogue between man and other creatures is still possible. The events described in the Valmiki Ramayana happen towards the end of the Treta. In the Ramayana, Sri Rama is seen easily communicating with the birds of the forest, and with various animals. He calls upon the Vanaras and Bhalus, probably meaning monkeys and bears, etc., to help him in defeating the great scholar and warrior Ravana. The story of the Ramayana probably indicates that until the end of the Treta communication between man and other creatures had not ceased. There was differentiation between the various forms of life, but it was not so deep as to foreclose all possibilities of contact and dialogue.

The Treta Yuga also lasts a very long time. But the duration of the Treta is only three-fourths that of the Krita. According to some texts, the Treta ends with the departure of Sri Rama from earthly existence. And then the third Yuga, the Dvapara begins. What is known as history, according to Indian perception, also seems to begin with the Dvapara. In the Dvapara Yuga the universe has moved very far from the easy simplicity of the Krita. All living beings and all phenomena start getting sharply differentiated. The one Veda of the Treta now gets divided into four. And then even these four acquire many

branches. It is in this Yuga that various arts, skills and crafts start appearing. Knowledge gets divided and subdivided, and numerous sastras come into being.

In the complex universe of the Dvapara man needs a variety of skills and techniques in order to live. So a large number of technologies and sciences start evolving. Agriculture also does not remain simple any more. The growing of cereals now requires a number of complex operations and great skill. Perhaps it is to bear the multiplicity of newly evolving arts and crafts that the Sudra as a Varna comes into existence for the first time at the end of the Treta or the beginning of the Dvapara.<sup>4</sup> The Dvapara thus acquires the full complement of four Varnas.

The Dvapara Yuga in a sense is the Yuga of the kings. Some present-day scholars even reckon the beginning of the Dvapara from the time of the ascendance of Sri Rama to the throne of Ayodhya. The multitude of stories about the kings that is found in the Santi Parva of the Mahabharata, and in the other Puranas, seems to belong to the Dvapara Yuga. And the atmosphere that prevails in these stories of the kings is quite different from the atmosphere of the Ramayana. The Ramayana period is clearly the period of the dominance of Dharma. But the kings of the Dvapara seem to be always immersed in Kshatriya-like excitement and anger. There is said to be unbounded jealousy and greed in them. Unnecessary cruelty seems to be an integral part of their mental makeup. Perhaps that is why the Puranas believe that Dharma is left with only two feet in the Dvapara. Founded on that unstable basis, Dharmic life keeps on getting disrupted during the Dvapara Yuga, which is to last for half the duration of Krita.

In this atmosphere of the decay of Dharma, and jealousy, greed and cruelty of the Kshatriyas, Prithvi, the goddess earth, finally approaches Vishnu with the request that He should now relieve her of this unbearable burden of creation gone astray. Then Vishnu takes birth in the form of Sri Krishna and Sri Balarama. Other gods and goddesses also appear on earth in various forms. And after all this grand preparation, the Mahabharata war happens. It is commonly believed that in the war of the Mahabharata, Dharma won over a-Dharma. But in spite of this victory of Dharma, the coming of the Kali Yuga cannot be stopped.

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4 The narration relating to Sambuka in the Uttarakanda of the Valmiki Ramayana perhaps symbolises the origin of the first Sudra and his aspiration to enter Svarga, the heaven of the Devas, but along with his body, of which even a Brahmana was said to be incapable of. Hence, Sambuka is destroyed by Sri Rama. The dialogue between Bhrigu and Bharadvaja also seems to suggest some similar aspiration by those who, at about this stage or a little later, began to be termed Sudras. See *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, op. cit., vol.III, pp.582-583; and *Narada Purana*, op. cit., especially II. 43, 69 & 70, pp.521f.

Within a few years of the culmination of the Mahabharata war, Sri Krishna and the whole of his Yadava Vamsa come to their end. The event of the extermination of the Yadava Vamsa is taken to mark the beginning of the fourth Yuga, the Kali Yuga. Learning of the departure of Sri Krishna from the earth, the Pandavas also depart for the Himalaya, along with Draupadi, to end their lives. Thus all the protagonists of the Mahabharata war are gone. Only Parikshit, the grandson of the Pandavas, who miraculously survives the destruction wrought by the Mahabharata war, is left behind. After a short time he too dies of a snake-bite. Parikshit is said to be the first king of the Kali Yuga.

It is said that the Mahabharata war was fought 36 years before the beginning of the Kali Yuga. According to the commonly accepted modern scholarly calculations, the current year is the 5094th year of the Kali [A.D. 1991]. This is only the early phase of Kali Yuga. Like the other three Yugas, the Kali Yuga is also to last a long time, even though the duration of the Kali is only one-fourth that of the Krita. The total duration of the Kali is believed to be of 432,000 years.

The main characteristic of the Kali Yuga is that in this Yuga Dharma stands only on one foot. Dharma becomes rather unstable in the Dvapara itself. But in the Kali, the position of Dharma becomes precarious. In this Yuga of wavering Dharma, creation has gone much beyond the simple bliss of the Krita. Complexity, division and differentiation are the norm. Mere living becomes a difficult art. Life loses the natural ease and felicity of the earlier Yugas.

But in this difficult Yuga, the path of Dharma is made somewhat easier for man. The piety and virtue that accrue only through great Tapas in the earlier Yugas can be earned in the Kali Yuga by simple and ordinary acts of virtue. This is perhaps due to the compassion of the creator for those caught in the complexity of the Kali Yuga. This compassion generates a continuing process of balance between the state of man in the four Yugas, at least as regards his relationship with Brahman. This can perhaps also be seen as the process of continuous balancing between the sacred and mundane attitudes of man.

This, in short, is the Indian story of creation. Most Indians form their view of the universe and their place in it on the basis of this story. The details of this story and the style of narration vary from Purana to Purana. But the basic facts seem unvarying and are clearly etched in all renderings of this story. And according to this basic Indian understanding of creation and its unfolding, the universe after creation constantly moves towards lower and lower levels of existence and being. The various arts and crafts, sciences and technologies, and various kinds of knowledge arise at relatively later stages of the unfolding

of the universe. All these help to make life livable in a universe that has degraded to a high level of complexity. But none of these arts, crafts, sciences and technologies can change the downward direction of the universe.

The natural tendency of the universe to keep moving towards more and more complexity, more and more differentiation and division, and thus farther and farther away from the state of natural simplicity and bliss, cannot be halted even by the Avatars or the creator Himself. Such Avatars arrive again and again, but even they are able to restore only a degree of balance in the naturally disturbed state of the universe. They too cannot reverse the downward momentum. That is why in spite of all the efforts of Sri Krishna, and His massive and far-reaching intervention in the form of the Mahabharata war, the onset of the Kali Yuga can neither be stopped, nor delayed. But without the cleaning up of the burdens of the Dvapara that the great Mahabharata war achieved, the coming of the Kali might have been too much to bear for mere man.

The major lesson of the Indian story of creation is of the smallness of man and his efforts in the vast drama of the universe that has no beginning and no end. The cosmic play of creation unfolds on a very large scale, in time cycles of huge dimensions. In that large expanse of time and space, neither the man living in the simple bliss of the Krita, nor the man caught in the complexity of the Kali, has much significance. Simplicity and complexity, bliss and anxiety keep following each other. But the play goes on.

The cycle of Chaturyuga seems big to us. It takes 43,20,000 years for the universe to pass through this one cycle of Chaturyuga. But according to the Pauranic conception, a thousand such cycles, called a Kalpa, make merely one day of Brahma, the godhead representing Brahman as the creator. After a day lasting one Kalpa, Brahma rests for the night, which too is one Kalpa long. And then another Kalpa and another cycle of a thousand Chaturyuga cycles begins. Three hundred and sixty such days and nights, of a Kalpa each, make a year of Brahma. Brahma lives a life of a hundred years. And then another Brahma arrives and the play starts all over again. In these cosmic cycles of the inexorable Kala, what is the significance of mere man living his momentary life in some tiny corner of the universe?

## V

The peculiarly Indian awareness of the insignificance of man and his efforts in the unending flow of Kala is, however, not in consonance with modernity. The belief that in every new cycle the universe, from the moment of its creation, starts declining towards a lower and lower state is also incompatible

with modern consciousness. And to look upon various arts and crafts, and sciences and technologies, etc. merely as temporary human artifacts required to sustain life in a constantly decaying state of the universe goes completely counter to the modern view of sciences and technologies, and of human capabilities, in general. According to the world view of modernity, man, through his efforts, his sciences and technologies, his arts and crafts, and his various other capabilities, keeps on refining the world, lifting it higher and higher, making it better and better, and moulding it more and more into the image of heaven.

If the Indian understanding of the unfolding of the universe, and the place of man and his efforts in it, is so contrary to the concepts of modernity, then this contrariness has to be seriously pondered over. The structures that we wish to implant in India and the processes of development that we want to initiate can take root here, only if they seem compatible with the Indian view of the universe, with the Indian Chitta and Kala. Structures and processes that are contrary to the picture of the universe and its unfolding, etched on the Indian mind, are unlikely to find much response in India. At least, the people of India, those who are still basically anchored in their own Chitta and Kala, are unlikely to participate in any efforts that seem essentially alien to the Indian comprehension of the universe.

We must, therefore, work out what the thoughts and ideas ingrained in the Indian consciousness imply in practice. What structures and processes seem right from the perspective of the Indian Chitta and Kala? What sort of life seems worth living and what sort of efforts worth making from that perspective? Before meditating afresh on such temporal structures and models, however, we shall have to comprehend and come to terms with some of the major aspects of the Indian ways of organising the mundane day-to-day world of social and physical reality.

Differentiation between what is called the Para Vidya (knowledge of the sacred) and the Apra Vidya (knowledge of the mundane) is one such aspect of the Indian ways of organising physical and social reality which seems to be directly related to the fundamental Indian consciousness, to the Indian Chitta and Kala. At some early stage in the Indian tradition, knowledge must have split into these two streams. Knowledge that deals with the unchangeable Brahman beyond the continuously changing temporal world, knowledge that shows the path towards the realisation of Brahman and union with Him is Para Vidya. And that which deals with the day-to-day problems of temporal life and makes ordinary life in this complex world possible is Apra Vidya. In the Indian

tradition, it is believed that Para Vidya is higher than the Aparā Vidya. In fact, it is said that Para Vidya alone is real and the Aparā Vidya is merely an illusion.

When this division between Para and Aparā knowledge occurred in the Indian tradition cannot be said with any certainty. This could not have happened in the Krita Yuga. Because in that Yuga no knowledge at all was required. There was no Veda in the Krita. This division is unlikely to have occurred in the Treta, too, because there was only one undifferentiated Veda at that stage. This sharp differentiation may, however, have arisen sometime towards the end of the Treta and the beginning of Dvapara, when a variety of skills and crafts started appearing on the earth to help man live with the increasing complexity of the universe.

It is commonly believed that the four Vedas, along with their various branches and connected Brahmanas, Upanishadas, etc., form the repository of Para Vidya. And the Puranas and Itihasas, etc., as also the various canonical texts of different sciences and crafts, like the Ayurveda, Jyotisha, etc., deal with the Aparā Vidya. In reality, however, the canonical texts of various disciplines do not differentiate between Para Vidya and Aparā Vidya as sharply as is commonly believed.

It is probably true that the Upanishadas deal with nothing but Para Vidya. But the same can hardly be said about the Vedas. On the one hand, in a large number of contexts the Vedas seem to be dealing with such mundane subjects as would fall only under the category of Aparā Vidya. On the other hand, there are extensive discussions in the Puranas about the attributes of Brahman and about the possible modes of realising Him, which are the subject of Para Vidya. Then there are disciplines like Vyakarana, grammar, which of necessity belong to both Para and Aparā, because Vyakarana is needed for the proper communication of both kinds of knowledge. For the same reason, Jyotisha sastra, the science of the motion of stars and planets and the art of determining time and place, must also belong to both the Para and Aparā streams to some extent. But even in the texts of purely mundane disciplines, like those of Ayurveda, issues related to Para Vidya are discussed, and attempts are made, for example, to perceive the problem of maintenance of health within the context of man's relation with the universe and the Brahman.

In spite of the combined presence of both streams of knowledge in almost all canonical texts, the dividing line between Para Vidya and Aparā Vidya seems to be etched rather deeply in the minds of the Indian people. When having

recourse to the Puranas in routine conversation even with ordinary people, one is likely to be told that these tales and fables are not to be relied upon, and that the Vedas alone are true. It seems that the Indian mind has somehow come to believe that all that is connected with *Apara Vidya* is rather low, and that knowledge of the *Para* alone is true knowledge. This consciousness seems to have become an integral part of the Indian mind. And high scholars of Indian literature, who ought to know better, seem to believe even more than the others that the essential Indian concern is only with the *Para*, and that the great body of *Apara* knowledge found in the Indian tradition is of little relevance in understanding India.

This contempt for the *Apara Vidya* is probably not fundamental to Indian consciousness. Perhaps the original Indian understanding was not that the *Apara* is to be shunned. What was perhaps understood and emphasised at an early stage of the evolution of Indian thought was that while dealing with *Apara*, while living within the complexity of the world, one should not forget that there is a simple undifferentiated reality behind this seeming complexity, that there is the unchangeable Brahman beyond this ever-changing mundane world. What the Indians realised was the imperative need to keep the awareness of the *Para*, of the ultimate reality, intact while going through the complex routine of daily life. What they emphasised was the need to regulate the mundane in the light of the Indian understanding of the ultimate unity of the universe, to keep the *Apara Vidya* informed by the *Para*.

With the passage of time, this emphasis on regulating the *Apara Vidya* through our understanding of the *Para Vidya* turned into contempt for the *Apara*. How and when this happened is a question to which we need to give very serious thought. And indeed, we have to find some acceptable interpretation of the appropriate relationship between *Para Vidya* and *Apara Vidya* within the larger Indian understanding of the processes of the creation and the unfolding of the universe, and the inexorable movement of *Kala*.

There is evidently an imbalance in our attitudes towards *Para Vidya* and *Apara Vidya* which has somehow to be remedied. It is possible that this imbalance is not of recent creation. In the world of scholarship, this imbalance may have arisen rather early. It is the usual tendency of scholarship to emphasise the abstract and the formal over the concrete and the contextual reality of day-to-day living. This normal scholarly preoccupation with the abstract may have got incorporated in basic Indian literature over its long history. Or perhaps it was felt that the details of ordinary living could not form the subject-matter of

high literature.<sup>5</sup> Or, it may be that in our mentally and spiritually depressed state, we have been too obsessed with the Para knowledge of India, and consequently have failed to seriously search for the texts of Apara learning. Therefore, this seeming imbalance of Indian literature and Indian thought may merely be a consequence of our lopsided perspective.

Whatever may be the causes of the imbalance in our attitude towards Para Vidya and Apara Vidya, it cannot be denied that the available literature of Indian civilisation and the commonly agreed understanding of the Chitta and Kāla of India today seem abnormally skewed towards the Para. This imbalance has affected our thinking on numerous other subjects and issues. One instance in point is our understanding of the Varna Vyavastha. In interpreting this Vyavastha, we have somehow assumed that the Varnas connected with textual practices and rituals of the Para Vidya are higher, and those involved in the Apara are lower. The closeness of association with what are defined to be Para practices becomes the criterion for determining the status of a Varna and evolving a hierarchy between them. Thus the Brahmanas, associated with the recitation and study of the Vedas, become the highest, and the Sudras, engaged in the practice of the arts and crafts of ordinary living, become the lowest.

This hierarchy may not in reality be a fundamental aspect of classical Indian thought. There is some discussion on this subject in the Puranas. We have already referred to the dialogue in the Mahabharata and the Narada Purana, where Bharadvaja questions Bhrigu on the rationale of the Varna hierarchy. Mahatma Gandhi also believed that it was not right to place one Varna above

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5 For example, one of the Alankarsastra texts, Kavyadarsa, defines the permissible subjects of a Maha-Kavya, an epic, in the following words: "It [the Maha-Kavya] has its source in a story told in the Itihasas or other good (true) material. It deals with the fruit (or goal) of the four kinds (Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha). It has a great and generous person as the hero. It is embellished with descriptions of the cities, oceans, hills, the seasons, the moonrise, the sunrise, of sport in the garden and of sport in the waters, of drinking scenes, of festivals, of enjoyment (love), of separation (of lovers), of (their) marriage and (their) nuptials and birth of princes, likewise, of consultation with the ministers, of sending messengers or ambassadors, of journeys (royal progress), of war and the hero's victories; dealing with these at length and being full of Rasa (flavour) and Bhava (suggestion): with Sargas (chapters) which are not very lengthy and which are well-formed with verse measures pleasing to the ear; everywhere dealing with a variety of topics (in each case ending each chapter in a different metre). Such a poem being well-embellished will be pleasing to the world at large and will survive several epochs (Kalpas)." It is obvious that ordinary persons and their routine day-to-day occupations cannot be the subject of high literature that is so precisely defined and elaborately circumscribed. A similar view of literature seems to have been held in Europe also until recent times.

the other. Around 1920, Gandhiji wrote and spoke a great deal on this subject. But even his efforts were not sufficient to restore an appropriate balance in our current thinking on the Varna Vyavastha.

The issue of the hierarchy of the Varnas is not, however, a closed question in Indian tradition. During the last two thousand years, there have occurred numerous debates on this question within Indian tradition. And in practical social life such a formulation of high and low could not have survived anyway. The concepts of the irreconcilability of Para Vidya and Aparā Vidya, and the corresponding asymmetry between the Brahmana and the Sudra, could never have meant much in actual practice in any healthily functioning social organisation. The canonical and fundamental texts of Indian literature also do not show this degree of imbalance on the question of the relative status of Para and Aparā Vidya, and correspondingly that of the Brahmana and the Sudra. The imbalance seems to have arisen mainly as a result of interpretations of the canonical texts that have been made from time to time.

The Purusha Sukta indeed states that the Sudras appeared from the feet of Brahman, the Vaisyas from the thighs, the Kshatriyas from the arms and the Brahmanas from the head. But this does not necessarily define a hierarchy between the Varnas. The Sukta is a statement of the identity of the microcosm and the macrocosm. It presents the world as an extension of the body of Brahman. In its cryptic Vedic style, the Sukta informs us that the creation is a manifestation of Brahman. It is His extension, His play. The Sukta also probably recounts the variety of tasks that have to be performed in the world that Brahman creates. But nowhere in the Purusha Sukta is it said that some of these tasks, and consequently the performers of those tasks, are better than others. That the functions of the head are higher than those of the feet could only have been deduced by a somewhat literal interpretation that came later. At another time, such interpretations could even get reversed. After all, it is only on his feet that a man stands securely on earth. It is only when the feet are stable that the head and hands play their parts. When the feet are not securely placed on the earth, nothing else remains secure either.

Incidentally, the Purusha Sukta does not even imply that all four Varnas came into existence simultaneously at the beginning of creation. The Sukta does not give the story of creation and its unfolding—it only explains, through the analogy of the body of Brahman, an already manifest and differentiated universe. In fact, as we have seen earlier, the Pauranic texts seem to suggest that at the beginning there was only one Varna, and it was only later, as the need for newer and newer human capacities started arising, that the Varnas divided, first into two and then into three and four.

Like the hierarchy of Varnas, there is also the hierarchy of the Karmas, of actions, in our present-day Indian consciousness. And this hierarchy of Karmas also seems to have arisen from the ideas of the superiority of the Para over the Apara. Now the concept that every action has an unalterable consequence is a fundamental aspect of Indian consciousness. As we believe that everything that is created must come to an end, so we believe that every event that happens must have a cause in a previous action. Thus, from the Indian perspective, life and indeed the whole of creation seem like a long sequence of actions and their consequences, with the consequences leading to further consequences, and so on. And all that happens in the world takes place within this interconnected sequence of Karmas.

Yet this fundamental theory of Karma seems to have nothing to do with the commonly prevalent ideas about the hierarchy of Karmas: that some kinds of Karmas are superior and others are inferior. The idea that, for example, the recitation of the Vedas is a high Karma and weaving of cloth is low does not follow from the Karma theory. These ideas of high and low karmas seem to have arisen out of the imbalance in our perception of the Para Vidya and Apara Vidya.

This belief in a hierarchy of Karmas has, however, got so deeply ingrained in us that even our major scholars often explain away large-scale poverty and hunger as the consequences of the earlier lowly Karmas of the sufferers. Such interpretations of the Karma theory have become so mechanical that even as high a scholar as Sri Brahmananda Saraswati, Sankaracharya of Joshi Math, used to casually state that destitution and poverty are only the consequence of Karmas.

But this is hardly an appropriate interpretation of the Karma theory. In any case, the theory could not have implied that even the best of our men dismiss all thoughts of compassion for their fellow human beings, and give up all efforts to redress social imbalances.

The meaning of the Karma theory is perhaps something else. All Karmas, all actions, are after all the same in themselves. What probably differentiates one Karma from another is the mental attitude and the sense of concern with which it is performed. It is the mode of performing a Karma that makes it high or low. If recitation of the Vedas is done with concern and attention, then that recitation is a high Karma. By the same token, if someone cooks food with great attention and care, then that cooking too is a high Karma. In India, cooking was in fact one of the functions of the Brahmanas. There are Brahmana cooks even today. And, it seems that the recitation of the Vedas and the cooking of food are indeed not such different Karmas. A Brahmana is likely to acquire the

same burden of evil Karmas, whether he recites the Vedas without care and attention, with the attitude of somehow completing an uninteresting and thankless task that has been forced upon him, or whether he cooks food with the same attitude and similar lack of attention and care.

The same must hold for all other kinds of Karmas. There is nothing inherently evil or low in the Karma of sweeping the floor, or bringing up children, or washing clothes, or making pots, or shoes, or weaving cloth, or tending cattle, or ploughing and sowing the land. All these Karmas become high, if performed with care, attention and concern; and become low otherwise. They could not be high or low in themselves.

There is a Mahabharata story that seems highly instructive in this context. Once there was a Rishi. He sat motionless at one place, in deep meditation, for a countless number of years. One day his meditation was disturbed and he woke up with a start. He found that the excreta of a sparrow had fallen on his head. In great anger, he turned his eyes towards the sparrow, and the bird was at once burnt to ashes. Seeing this, the Rishi thought that his penance had been accomplished and he had achieved great powers. He got up from his meditation, and walked up to the nearby habitation. There he knocked on the door of the first dwelling he reached and asked for food. The lady of the house was probably busy with her household chores. It took her some time to open the door and answer the Rishi's call. This delay infuriated the Rishi. When the lady of the house finally opened her door, the Rishi looked at her with intense anger, just as he had looked at the sparrow. But nothing happened. And the lady said with great composure: "Maharaj, please do not unnecessarily trouble yourself. Give up your anger. After all, I am not that sparrow".

The Rishi was stunned. He could not understand how the powers he had acquired through such great penance proved so utterly futile against this ordinary woman. And how had she, sitting in her home, divined the incident of the sparrow? He wanted to know the secret of her powers. But she referred him to a seller of animal flesh. The Rishi was even more surprised. He went to the meat-seller, and the latter told him that the lady against whom he tried to use his powers was performing her household duties with great care and attention. Her housekeeping was in no way inferior to his meditation and penance. And in any case, the reward of his penance was fully exhausted when he looked at that poor sparrow with such anger. The meat-seller also told the Rishi that he himself was engaged in the selling of animal flesh, but he performed this task with great care and devotion. All tasks performed with such an attitude are equally great. What matters is to perform your task well, with concern and

care. It does not matter whether what you do is penance and meditation, or merely house-keeping, or even the selling of animal flesh.

This Mahabharata story presents one interpretation of the theory of Karma. There may be several other interpretations in Indian literature. Similarly, there would be numerous interpretations of Para Vidya and Apra Vidya, and also of the Varna Vyavastha. Comprehending and appreciating these various interpretations, and working out a new interpretation that falls within ancient tradition and is yet capable of being related to modern contexts, is perhaps the paramount task of Indian scholarship. This continuous reinterpretation and renewal of the tradition, continuous meditation on the ways of manifesting the Indian Chitta and Kala in practical day-to-day life, and the continuous exploration of the Indian way of life in different times and different contexts, is what the Rishis, Munis and other great scholars of India have been concerned with through the ages.

## VI

There is an episode in the Vishnu Purana concerning Maharshi Vyasa which seems to offer an interesting interpretation of our present Kali Yuga. It is said that once Vyasa was bathing in a river. At that time some Rishis came to visit him, and from a distance they saw that the great Vyasa, standing in the river, was clapping his hands and shouting, "Great is the Kali Yuga", "Great are the women of the earth", and "Great are the Sudras".

The Rishis were wonder-struck. Later they asked Vyasa the reason for his loud praise of the Kali Yuga, women and Sudras. Vyasa explained that what had been possible for men in the other three Yugas with great effort and penance was easily accessible to them in the Kali Yuga. In the Kali Yuga, said Vyasa, man could achieve realisation of the Brahman with merely a little devotion. And women and Sudras could obtain that realisation by merely performing their mundane day-to-day tasks well, with care and concern.

Vyasa is one of the great Rishis of India. It is said that in the Dvapara he divided the one Veda into four, and later he divided them into numerous branches. Later still, he composed the Mahabharata epic, especially for the edification of women and Sudras. In writing this epic, Ganesa himself acted as his scribe, because none else could have matched the pace and sophistication of Vyasa's composition. But reflecting on the state of the world after completing his great epic, Vyasa felt a pang of sadness in his heart. He noticed that women and Sudras had been deprived of the Vedas, and the epic that he had composed for them was full of pain and sorrow. It was a story that provided no solace to the mind, generated no enthusiasm for life, and gave no pleasure. Then the great

Vyasa, to make up for these deficiencies, and with compassion for mankind, composed the Puranas. Through the Puranas, he tried to make the path of devotion and faith in the creator easily available to all. Amongst the Puranas, Srimadbhagavata Purana seems the most steeped in the faith and devotion that Vyasa wished to propagate. Srimadbhagavata Purana, composed on the advice of Narada Muni, describes events in the life of Vasudeva Srikrishna. And this Purana is today probably the main source of the non-scholarly Indian Grihastha's acquaintance with ancient Indian literature.

The great compassion of Vyasa, which propelled him to compose the Puranas, his feeling of concern and care for man—caught in the complexity of the universe and pulled farther and farther away from his creator by the flow of time—is transparently reflected in the above episode from the Vishnu Purana, where he proclaims the Kali Yuga to be the Yuga of women and Sudras. This interpretation of the Kali Yuga seems highly significant. It is possible that, as there is only one Varna in the Krita Yuga, so in the Kali Yuga too, only one Varna remains: that of the Sudras. Perhaps in the Kali Yuga, everyone turns into a Sudra. Or perhaps in this Yuga of the ascendance of the Apara Vidya, the role of women and Sudras, the major practitioners of the Apara Vidya, of the practical arts and crafts of sustaining life, becomes the most valuable. In our own times, Mahatma Gandhi expressed the same thought, when he insisted that in this Yuga everyone must become a Sudra.

There is, of course, no point in asking whether Vyasa's interpretation of the Kali Yuga is correct or not. All interpretations keep changing with time and context. What matters, perhaps, is not the accuracy of an interpretation, but the sense of compassion that the interpreter feels for his fellow beings. It is this compassion, the concern for the state of all beings and respect for their efforts, even if these seem insignificant on the cosmic canvas, which makes a particular interpretation valuable. Only in the light of such compassion and concern can we hope to make any meaningful new interpretations of the Indian Chitta and Kala. Contemporary interpretation, flowing from such transparent compassion and concern alone, can have any chance of forming a secure basis for the re-establishment of the Indian way of life today. Interpretations that lack compassion, like the one about poverty and destitution being the result of one's own earlier Karmas, are not going to be of much help in such an effort.

Along with the deep sense of compassion for fellow beings, there must also be an abiding faith in the inherent soundness and strength of the Indian tradition. There are many amongst us who believe that Indian civilisation was indeed great in some distant past, but that now its days are gone. Many of us sincerely believe that, with the rise of modernity, Indian Chitta and Kala and

Indian understanding of creation and the unfolding of the universe have lost all significance, and there is no point deliberating any further upon such matters. Even someone like Sri Jayendra Saraswati, Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, seems to suggest that there was a time when we were great, and that the memory of that time is valuable; but there is nothing that can be said with any assurance about the relevance and place of Indian consciousness in the present.

What is of significance, however, is always the present. If we wish to affirm the validity of Indian consciousness, of Indian Chitta and Kala, we can do so only by establishing the Indian way of life in the present-day world. And this re-assertion of India in the present context is the major task today which Indian scholarship, Indian politics, Indian sciences and technologies, Indian arts, crafts and other diverse skills must accomplish.

It is conceivable that some sections of the Indian people do not subscribe to the traditional understanding of creation and the unfolding of the universe; and probably some of them even believe that they have no relationship with the Indian Chitta and Kala. There may also be Indians, especially among Indian Muslims, Christians and Parsis, who do not believe that there are any such times as the Kali Yuga, or any cycles of Kala as the Chaturyuga and Kalpa, etc. Someone like Periyar Ramaswami Nayakar, and his followers, may even have denied the validity of these Kala cycles. In different parts of India, there may be many other people who do not believe in any of the concepts that seem to be fundamental to Indian consciousness. But the differences in the beliefs of all these people may not be as large as they are made out to be. And many of those who claim to have no faith in the Puranas often have their own Jati Puranas. The latter, in their essential conception, are not much different from the Puranas written by Vyasa.

This, at least, can be said about all Indians, even about the ordinary Christians of India: their Chitta and Kala have little in common with modern European civilisation. They are all equally alien to the world of European modernity. In fact, except for at the most half a percent of Indians, the rest of India has precious little to do with European modernity. Whatever else may be etched on the minds of these 99.5 percent of Indians, there is nothing there that even remotely resembles the consciousness of the modern West, or even that of ancient Greece or Rome.

But in the unbounded flow of modernity, almost every Indian seems to have lost the ability to express his innate consciousness even in small ways. Even his festivals, which in a way reminded him of his Kala, and gave him, until

recently, some little pleasure in his otherwise impoverished drab life, and even the most vital of his rituals, those of birth, marriage and death, that gave him a sense of belonging to the universe of his Chitta and Kala, have fallen by the wayside. Most Indians, of course, still perform these festivals and rituals; but these have been so reviled that there is little grace left in their mechanical and often unbelieving performance. Not surprisingly, the festivals give us little pleasure and the rituals provide no solace. We have lost our identity, our anchorage in our civilisation. And this loss of identity afflicts us all. This is a pain that practically all Indians, including Christians, Muslims and others, have to bear in common.

We have to find some way out of such a state of rootlessness. We have to somehow find an anchor again in our civilisational consciousness, in our innate Chitta and Kala. Some four or five years ago, the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust had organised an international gathering of scholars to deliberate on the fundamental questions of Indian identity. In that gathering—it is reported—a European scholar had suggested that the only way out for India was in her converting to Christianity in a big way.

This, of course, is not an entirely new thought. For at least the last two hundred years, the Christianisation of India has been seriously thought of as an option for taking India out of what had seemed to many, especially in Britain, as the morass of her civilisational memory, giving her a more easily understandable identity. There have also been large-scale governmental efforts to help in this direction. And the so-called Westernisation of India, which even the governments of independent India have been pursuing with such seeming vigour, is not very different from India's Christianisation.

If all these efforts had led to a thorough-going Westernisation of the Indian mind so that the people of India on their own could start associating themselves with the late twentieth and the twenty-first centuries of the West, then that perhaps would have been some sort of a solution to India's problems. If that change of Indian civilisational consciousness had taken place, then the ordinary Indian today would think and behave more or less like the ordinary man of Europe and America, and his priorities and seekings would have become similar.

Indians would then have also lost the peculiarly Indian belief, which even the most ordinary of the ordinary Indians harbours in his heart, that he is a part of the ultimate Brahman, and by virtue of this relationship with Brahman, he too is completely free and sovereign in himself. In place of this feeling of freedom and sovereignty, which so exasperates those who seek to administer or reform India, the Indian too would have then acquired Western man's innate sense of

total subordination to the prevailing system, a subordination of the mind that man in the West has always displayed, irrespective of the system's specific type of organisation at any particular Western phase: whether a despotic feudal oligarchy, a slave society like that of ancient Greece and Rome, a society of laissez-faire, or of Marxist communism, or the currently ascendant society of market forces.

Notwithstanding the prosperity and affluence that the West has gained during the last forty or fifty years, the innate consciousness of Western man seems to have remained one of total subordination to the given system. At the level of the mind, he is still very much the slave of the imaginary Republic of Plato, and the very real empire of Rome. The consciousness of the Indian people would have also been moulded into the same state of subordination as that of Western man, if the attempts of the last two hundred years to Westernise or Christianise India had succeeded. And even such slavery of the mind might have been a way out of the present Indian drift.

But perhaps such simple solutions to civilisational problems are well nigh impossible. It does not seem to be given to man to completely erase his civilisational consciousness and establish a new universe of the mind. Not even conquerors are able to so metamorphose the mind of the conquered. The only way such metamorphosis can be achieved is by completely destroying the conquered civilisation, eliminating every single individual, and starting afresh with an imported population. This is what occurred, more or less, in the Americas and Australia. India has so far been saved this denouement at the hands of Europe, though not for any lack of trying.

If the Westernisation of India is not possible, then we shall have to revert to our own civilisational moorings. We shall have to come back into our own Chitta and Kala. Ridding ourselves of Western ways of thought and action, we shall have to start understanding ourselves and the world from our own civilisational perspective. This effort to understand ourselves and our Kala will probably be similar to the way Vyasa, in his Mahabharata, surveys the complete story of Indian civilisation, explores its diverse seekings, its ways of thought and action, and then shows a path that is appropriate to the Kali Yuga. Or perhaps it will be like the way Srikrishna offers Arjuna a glimpse of the universe and on the basis of that view of the world, the Visvarupa Darsana, shows him the way out of his dilemma. In any case, we shall have to form a view of the world and the present time, from our own perspective, before we can find a path of our own.

This task of having a new Visvarupa Darsana for ourselves, and searching for a path of action in the light of that Darsana, has to be performed by all those

who are closely connected with the Indian tradition and have a deep sense of respect for it. It is, however, important that those involved in this exercise are motivated by compassion for their fellow beings. And for that to happen, the beliefs of the people of India and their ways of thought and action will have to be given priority over anything that is written in the texts.

To be tied mindlessly to the words of texts has never been the Indian way. The Indian Rishis never believed themselves to be bound by any text. It is true that the Rishis of India do not often negate or denigrate the text. Their preferred style is that of starting with the text and then interpreting it in newer and newer ways. That is how Vyasa could stand in the river and loudly proclaim the greatness of women and Sudras in the Kali Yuga.

The direction of a civilisation is determined by meditating on its innate consciousness and its sense of the creation and unfolding of the universe. And that probably is the task of the Rishis. But it is the ordinary Grihasthas who carry it forward in the determined direction. And Grihasthas are all those who are engaged in the mundane routine of life: those who are adept at scholarship, or are skilled in cooking, or are engaged in agriculture, or in various arts and crafts, or those who are familiar with modern sciences and technologies, or are running modern industry or trade, or those who have learnt the art of running the State, and its administrative and coercive apparatus. All Grihasthas are collectively charged with the duty of carrying the civilisation along its preferred direction and helping it realise its seekings and aspirations.

Even when the direction is lost and the seekings and aspirations become unclear, the routine of life continues; and therefore, the Grihasthas have to keep performing their assigned tasks even during such times of drift. They cannot escape or isolate themselves from the routine to start meditating on the overall direction that the civilisation may take. Therefore, it is ordinarily true that the politicians, the administrators and the managers, and even the scholars of a civilisation should concentrate on the day-to-day running of society, and not let themselves be distracted by fundamental doubts about the state of the civilisation.

But there are times when the direction that a civilisation is to take is so thoroughly lost and the drift is so acute that the daily routine of life itself becomes meaningless. It seems that today India has reached that situation. This is possibly the nether end of one of those cycles of decay of Dharma and its re-establishment that keep recurring, according to the Indian conception. At such times the Grihastha also must help with his skills and energies in finding a new direction and a new equilibrium for his civilisation. The present is a time of crisis for Indian civilisation. And we have to shepherd all our energies,

skills and capabilities towards making a single-minded effort for getting out of the crisis.

Once we seriously undertake this task, it may not turn out to be too difficult to find a new direction for Indian civilisation. To redefine our seekings and aspirations, our ways of thought and action, in a form that is appropriate and effective in today's world, may not be too hard a task after all. Such reassertions and redefinitions of civilisational thrust are not uncommon in world history. For every civilisation, there comes a time when the people of that civilisation have to remind themselves of their fundamental civilisational consciousness and their understanding of the Universe and of Time. From the basis of that recollection of the past, they then define the path for their future. Many civilisations of the world have undergone such self-appraisal and self-renewal at different times. In our long history, many times we must have engaged in this recollection and reassertion of the Chitta and Kala of India. We need to undertake such an exploration into ourselves once again.



8

Reconsidering Gandhiji,  
1915–1948 (1984)



## Reconsidering Gandhiji, 1915–1948 (1984)

As is explicit in Shri Dharampal's writings, Mahatma Gandhi was the lodestar for his research. Yet it was only in the 1980s, whilst being based in Sevagram, that he became immersed in an intense study of Gandhiji's phenomenal contribution. This essay is based on a talk delivered at a conference on *Hind Swaraj* held at Sevagram in September 1984. An edited version of this text, along with other important essays, was published in book-form entitled *Understanding Gandhi*, Other India Press, Mapusa 2003. A Tamil translation, by Janakipriyan, was published as *Gandhiyai aridal*, Kalachuvadu Pathippagam, Nagercoil 2010.



# Reconsidering Gandhiji, 1915–1948 (1984)

## I

Gandhiji returned from South Africa to India on January 9, 1915. Within a day or two of his return he told journalists in Bombay that “I propose to reside in India and serve the motherland for the rest of my life.”<sup>1</sup> And this is actually what happened, as from that day till the end of January 1948 he left India only once for four months to attend the second British-organised Round Table Conference on India in London in 1931. Out of this period of 33 years he spent about six years in British jails, a total of about 7 years in his Ashram at Sabarmati, and in all about 6 years in his Ashram at Sevagram and at Wardha.<sup>2</sup> The rest, i.e. about 14 years, he spent travelling around the country, whether it was, as in the first year, to properly acquaint himself with his country and his people, or to more or less single-handedly prepare for the Rowlatt Satyagraha, or for the cause of Khaddar and Swadeshi, or of Harijans, or Hindu-Muslim unity, or for hundreds of other things which over the years demanded his presence or attention. The more prominent places which he visited during these 33 years numbered over 2,000.<sup>3</sup>

Within days of his return to India, people in many places insisted on drawing the vehicle in which he was carried in procession themselves; this first happened in Rajkot on January 17 and again on February 1, in Calcutta on March 12, in Rangoon on March 17, and in Madras on April 17, 1915.<sup>4</sup> At several other places he refused to be so driven and started walking until the people were persuaded. After Gokhale’s death in February 1915, he took a vow to walk barefoot for one year,<sup>5</sup> and just after three months in India, he took a vow “while in India, not to eat more than five things during 24 hours; no meal after sunset; water not included among five; but cardamom and the like was included;

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1 D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, 1960, vol.1, p.193.

2 C.B. Dalal, *Gandhi 1915–1948: A Detailed Chronology*, 1971.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid. According to J. B. Kripalani, *Gandhi: His Life and Thought*, 1970, p.60, those who had come to receive Gandhiji when he first went to Champaran in April 1917, without Gandhiji’s knowledge after unhorsing the carriage, had drawn it themselves. Kripalani adds there, “In those days, honoured leaders’ carriages were pulled by their admirers.” It would be useful to know from contemporary newspaper accounts, which other leaders before 1915 had their carriages so pulled by their admirers. It is true that Bal Gangadhar Tilak’s carriage was so pulled in Lucknow and a few days later in Kanpur. But that was at the end of 1916. (T.V. Parvate, *B.G. Tilak*, 1958, pp.350, 355; S.L. Karandikar, *Lokmanya B.G. Tilak*, 1957, pp.433-434; D.V. Tahmankar, *Lokmanya Tilak*, 1956, p.242).

5 Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, 1973, p.216.

nut and its oil treated as one article.” This was at Haridwar on April 10, 1915.<sup>6</sup> Some of his public meetings in Kathiawar, during the very first month after his return, were chaired by the prime ministers (Diwans) of the respective states; some of the Kathiawar rulers whom he visited paid him return visits; the ruler of Gondal embraced Gandhiji while he was being carried in procession there on January 24, and his wife, Kasturbai, was presented an address at a public meeting presided over by the Rani of Gondal.<sup>7</sup> A printed address in Gujarati at Jetpur (Kathiawar) on January 21, 1915 addressed him as ‘Shriman Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi’<sup>8</sup> and according to another report he was addressed as ‘Jagat Vandaneeya Mahatma’ at Gondal on January 27.<sup>9</sup> He was once again addressed as ‘Mahatma’ at Gurukul Kangri on April 10.<sup>10</sup> Though he may not have been so addressed in print until 1917 or 1918, it seems that within a year of his return he was looked upon and addressed as ‘Mahatma’ generally.

The distinctiveness of Gandhiji when he returned to India was symbolised, firstly, by the theory and practice of Satyagraha which he had developed in South Africa in the previous 20 years, and secondly, by his views as given in *Hind Swaraj*, first published in December 1909. Perhaps a far more potent element which made innumerable people treat him with great affection and deference, and insist, for instance, on personally drawing the vehicles in which he was carried in procession, or instantaneously calling him ‘Mahatma’, lay in his simplicity, in living as well as in manner and idiom, and the attributes of his saintliness. His method of resistance against injustice, a method with which Indian society had traditionally been familiar even though Indians had forgotten its public use,<sup>11</sup> and its success against a modern, powerful and oppressive government, as the Government of South Africa was, must also have made him appear as an illustrious hero. However, while his simplicity and saintliness and his Satyagraha successes were public knowledge much before he himself returned to India, little was known of his book *Hind Swaraj* until many years later. It was only from April 1919 onwards that *Hind Swaraj* was publicly available in India; until then it had been an unlawful commodity.

6 Dalal, *Gandhi Chronology*, op. cit., April 10, 1915.

7 Ibid.

8 Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, vol.I, p.195; photograph of printed Gujarati address between pp.216–217.

9 D. Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi*, p.212.

10 Ibid, p.218.

11 *Hind Swaraj*, chapter XVII. Here Gandhiji had stated, “The fact is that, in India, the nation at large has generally used passive resistance in all departments of life. We cease to cooperate with our rulers when they displease us.” Numerous instances of such resistance can be found in the history of India, even in the late 17th to the early 19th century.

## II

In his preface to the first Gujarati printing of *Hind Swaraj* (December 1909) Gandhiji said, “These views are mine, and yet not mine. They are mine because I hope to act according to them. They are almost a part of my being [...]. [They] are, needless to say, held by many Indians not touched by what is known as civilization, but I ask the reader to believe me when I tell him that they are also held by thousands of Europeans.”<sup>12</sup> A few months later, in March 1910, in the preface to the first English translation, he stated that the modern civilization, as represented by the British Government in India, represented the kingdom of Satan, while the ancient civilization of India, as he conceived it, represented the kingdom of God. The British represented the God of War, while the ancient Indian the God of Love. And he added, “My countrymen impute the evils of modern civilization to the English people and, therefore, believe that the English people are bad, and not the civilization they represent. My countrymen, therefore, believe that they should adopt modern civilization and modern methods of violence to drive out the English. *Hind Swaraj* has been written in order to show that they are following a suicidal policy, and that, if they would but revert to their own glorious civilization, either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianised or find their occupation in India gone.”<sup>13</sup>

While the possession of *Hind Swaraj* was unlawful in India, it was, however, available to, and read by many outside India. Its reading seems to have made an impression that it created hatred for the British. This led Gandhiji to write another preface to the second Gujarati edition published in May 1914. In this, while stating,

“For myself, I am an uncompromising enemy of the present-day civilization of Europe”, he added, “I have gathered an impression that, though *Hind Swaraj* does not advocate the use of physical force at any time and in any circumstances, and advocates always the use of soul-force to win the desired end, the result of its teaching has been to create hatred for the British and to suggest that they should be expelled through armed fighting or use of violence otherwise. I was unhappy to know this. Such was by no means my object in writing *Hind Swaraj*, and I can only say that those who have drawn from it the foregoing conclusion have totally failed to understand the book. I, for one, bear no ill-will against the British or against any people or individuals. All living creatures are of the

12 CWMG, vol.10, p.7, preface to *Hind Swaraj*, 22.11.1909.

13 CWMG, vol.10, pp.188–90, from *Indian Opinion*, 2.4.1910.

same substance as all drops of water in the ocean are the same in substance.”<sup>14</sup>

Being an intensely practical person, and not merely a powerful ideologue, while staying constant in his vision, Gandhiji appears, more so in his functioning, to contradict himself time and again. Thus, in the new preface for the 4th Indian 1921 edition of *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhiji said,

“I would warn the reader against thinking that I am today aiming at the Swaraj described therein. I know that India is not ripe for it. It may seem an impertinence to say so, but such is my conviction. I am individually working for the self-rule pictured therein. But today my corporate activity is undoubtedly devoted to the attainment of parliamentary Swaraj in accordance with the wishes of the people of India [evidently as reflected in the views of the then Indian national political leadership]. I am not aiming at destroying railways or hospitals, though I would certainly welcome their natural destruction. [...] Nor am I aiming at a permanent destruction of law courts, much as I regard it as a ‘consummation devoutly to be wished for’. Still less am I trying to destroy all machinery and mills. It requires a higher simplicity and renunciation than the people are today prepared for.”<sup>15</sup>

How Gandhiji viewed this issue of apparent contradiction is best illustrated by his 1939 article “The Unbridgeable Gulf”. In a previous article in *Harijan* “Is India a military country?” he had ended the article thus:

“Nor do I contemplate without uneasiness the prospect of Indian soldiers, trained after the modern manner, taking the motor spirit to their homes. Speed is not the end of life. Man sees more and lives more truly by walking to his duty.”

(On the train to Simla, September 25, 1939)<sup>16</sup>

This brought a rejoinder from a reader who thought that the ending “on the *train* to Simla” pointed the finger of ridicule to the foregoing “Man sees more and lives more truly by *walking* to his duty.” In reply Gandhiji said,

“I must deprive the ridicule of its sting by informing my friend that I was in my senses when I wrote the note referred to. I might easily have avoided the exact place where it was penned [i.e. “on the train to Simla”].

14 CWMG, vol.12, pp.411–2, from *Indian Opinion*, 29.4.1914.

15 CWMG, vol.19, pp.277–8, from *Young India*, 26.1.1921.

16 CWMG, vol.70, pp.201–2.

But I wanted to add point to my remark and to discover to the reader the vast gulf that separates me from my ideal. [...] If I am to make an ever increasing approach to my ideal, I must let the world see my weaknesses and failures so that I may be saved from hypocrisy and so that even for very shame I would try my utmost to realise the ideal. The contradiction pointed out by the friend also shows that between the ideal and practice there always must be an unbridgeable gulf. The ideal will cease to be one if it becomes possible to realize it. The pleasure lies in making the effort, not in its fulfillment. For, in our progress towards the goal we ever see more and more enchanting scenery.”<sup>17</sup>

Gandhiji further added:

“Coming, however, to the friend’s gibe let me tell him and the reader that I could pen those lines because it is never a pleasure to me to travel by motor or rail or even a cart. It is always a pleasure to walk. Nor should I mind in the least if every rail was removed and men, except the sick and the maimed, had to walk to their businesses. I can not only imagine but am working for a civilization in which possession of a car will be considered no merit and railways will find no place. It would not be for me an unhappy event if the world became once more as large as it used to be at one time. *Hind Swaraj* was written in 1909. Since then it has undergone many editions and has been translated in many languages of the world. I was asked last year by Shrimati Sophia Wadia to write a foreword for the edition that she was bringing out. I had the pleasure, therefore, of having to re-read it carefully. The reader may know that I would not revise a single idea. I had no desire to revise the language. It is a fair translation of the original in Gujarati. The key to understand that incredibly simple (so simple as to be regarded foolish) booklet is to realise that it is not an attempt to go back to the so-called ignorant, dark ages. But it is an attempt to see beauty in voluntary simplicity, poverty and slowness. I have pictured that as my ideal. I shall never reach it myself and hence cannot expect the nation to do so. But the modern rage for variety, for flying through the air, for multiplicity of wants, etc., have no fascination for me. They deaden the inner being in us. The giddy heights which man’s ingenuity is attempting take us away from our Maker who is nearer to us than the nails are to the flesh which they cover. Therefore even whilst I am travelling at the rate of 40 miles per hour, I am conscious that it is a necessary evil, and that my best work is to be done in little

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17 CWMG, vol.70, pp.241–3, from *Harijan*, 14.10.1939.

Segaon [i.e. Sevagram] containing 700 souls, and in the neighbouring villages to which I can walk. But being a highly practical man I do not avoid railway travelling or motoring for the mere sake of looking foolishly consistent.”<sup>18</sup>

From the correspondence between Gandhiji and Jawahar Lal Nehru during October and November 1945 on the shape of the emerging India, and which showed the gulf which divided them,<sup>19</sup> it is clear that Mahatma Gandhi held to this 1939 exposition until the very end.

### III

Despite his calling himself ‘an uncompromising enemy of the civilization of Europe’, Gandhiji started his Indian period with the utmost friendliness towards the British administration and more so towards its British officers. This friendliness was by and large reciprocated by the British from the Viceroy down to the British sub-divisional officer but occasionally in a patronising or haughty manner. This patronising attitude was much more pronounced on the part of Willingdon, Governor of Bombay (and later Governor of Madras, and in 1931-36 the British Viceroy of India) and on the part of some of the British Divisional Commissioners, etc. Still, though it got rather lukewarm as time passed, the friendliness continued well into 1919. It must have been this lingering friendliness, and perhaps also a sort of impishness in him, which made Gandhiji ask the Governor of Bombay if he would sign the Swadeshi pledge in April 1919,<sup>20</sup> and a few days later suggested the same, “what a great thing it would be if the Viceroy would take the vow”, to Viceroy Chelmsford.<sup>21</sup> Another illustration of this continuing friendliness and its reciprocation by some of the British is provided by the attendance of the wife of the British Collector of Godhra in August 1919, at a women’s meeting on Swadeshi addressed by Gandhiji. At the conclusion of the meeting she observed that “she always was in favour of home industries”.<sup>22</sup> The same evening the Collector himself chaired another meeting on Swadeshi addressed by Gandhiji and the Collector is reported to have “exhorted the audience to support home industries.”<sup>23</sup> It can, perhaps, also be said that the relatively speedy solution of

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18 Ibid.

19 CWMG, vol.81, pp.319–21, Gandhiji to Nehru, 5.10.1945; J.L. Nehru: *Selected Works*, vol.14, pp.554–7, J.L. Nehru to Gandhiji, 4.10.1945.

20 CWMG, vol.15, pp.262, letter to private Secretary to Bombay Governor, 30.4.1919.

21 CWMG, vol.15. pp.274–5, letter to private Secretary to Viceroy, 5.5.1919.

22 CWMG, vol.16, pp.28–9, report of meeting, *Young India*, 20.8.1919.

23 CWMG, vol.16, pp.29–31, report of meeting, *Young India*, 20.8.1919

the Champaran and the Kheda peasant movements became possible to a considerable extent because of this relationship of friendliness, especially at the viceregal level.<sup>24</sup>

However, it seems that the more Gandhiji came into contact with the working of the British administration, and with the British officers who manned it, the greater was his disillusionment. Believing as he did that the British system was satanic in its nature, he must have realised at the very beginning that such friendly relations might in all probability be only of a temporary nature. But as he also believed in the basic goodness of man and in man's potential to transform himself, he, perhaps, did conceive that friendliness and openness on his part might lead the British, at least in certain matters, to see the error of their ways. Even if this did not happen in any appreciable degree, it, in his view, did no harm and in any case helped him to understand them.

As his friendliness and persuasion seemed to him to be of little avail, Gandhiji was on the verge of giving the British a needed jolt in January 1918. On January 20, he wrote to one of his close associates at Sabarmati, "I am likely to have a battle royal over Mohammed Ali. If India carries out my plan, the Government of India will be properly humbled." As this battle royal did not happen, it is difficult to know what Gandhiji actually had in mind then. But he did assume that such a battle would imply his going "through an ordeal" himself, and that, "A power which has till now brooked opposition from no Indian is sure to fight as if for its very life when defied by a handful of Indians. Its fury then will be almost unbearable." But he added, "But I am resolved to face it all." The stakes indeed were high because he felt that in the process of this battle royal, "Hindus and Muslims, never united, will become so, mother cow will be safe and we shall hear the triumph of non-violence proclaimed all over the world."<sup>25</sup> However, the expected battle between him and the British did not come then, and instead, a few months later Gandhiji devoted himself body and soul to the recruitment of soldiers to help the British empire in winning the

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24 The friendliness between Gandhiji and the Government at Delhi at that time and the latter's rather favourable attitude to Gandhiji's campaigns in Champaran and Kheda perhaps to some extent is comparable with the relative friendliness and favour with which the local and regional protests of today's environmentalists are occasionally treated by the Union Government in Delhi, while the state and local administrations are much more hostile to them. This does not mean that Viceroy Chelmsford was more concerned with the well-being of the people of Champaran or Kheda than the Governments of Bihar and Bombay, but rather that he had to see matters in a larger perspective and in that Gandhiji's support in other matters appeared of more value to him than the planter or governmental interests in these places. The same reasoning is perhaps equally applicable to such matters today.

25 CWMG, vol.14, pp.160-61, letter to Maganlal Gandhi, 20.1.1918.

1914–18 war. But even the recruitment of soldiers was to serve a much larger purpose.

His experiences in India, especially in Champaran and Kheda, made him feel that the Indians by and large had been badly maimed, physically as well as morally and spiritually. Saints like Swaminarayan and Vallabhacharya seemed to him to have further robbed Indian men of their manliness.<sup>26</sup> He, therefore, felt that before he could make the maimed Indian man “feel the virtue of not killing”, he must “restore to him the arm he has lost”, i.e. restore to him his manliness.<sup>27</sup> As he wrote in July 1918,

“This discovery was forced on him repeatedly in Kheda. The people here, being comparatively freer, talked to me without reserve, and told me plainly that they took up my remedy [i.e. Satyagraha] because they were not strong enough to take up the other, which they undoubtedly held to be far more manly than mine. I fear that the people whether in Champaran or in Kheda would not fearlessly walk to the gallows, or stand a shower of bullets and yet say, in one case, ‘we will not pay the revenue’ and in the other, ‘we will not work for you.’ They have it not in them. And I contend that they will not regain the fearless spirit until they have received the training to defend themselves. Ahimsa was preached to man when he was in full vigour of life and able to look at his adversaries straight in the face. It seems to me that full development of body-force is a *sine qua non* of full appreciation and assimilation of Ahimsa.”<sup>28</sup>

And, therefore, as Gandhiji wrote a few days later, “I have come to see, what I did not so clearly before, that there is non-violence in violence.” He did not consider that he had changed his ideals. Only “the old idea has developed into something purer.”<sup>29</sup>

It is worth noting here that conventional wisdom was not something which Gandhiji much cherished as such. Writing in April 1919, he observed,

“I confess that I am dense. I am not joking. So many friends have told me that I am incapable of profiting by other people’s experiences and that in every case I want to go through the fire myself and learn only after bitter experience. There is exaggeration in this charge, but there is also a substance of truth in it. This denseness in me is at once a weakness

26 CWMG, vol.14, pp.504–5, letter to Maganlal Gandhi, 25.7.1918.

27 CWMG, vol.14, pp.462–3, letter to Esther Paering, 30.6.1918.

28 CWMG, vol.14, pp.474–8, letter to Charlie Andrews, 6.7.1918.

29 CWMG, vol.14, pp.504–5, letter to Maganlal Gandhi, 25.7.1918.

and strength. I could not have remained a Satyagrahi had I not cultivated the quality of stubborn resistance and such resistance can only come from experience and not inference. Pursuit of truth is any day a dangerous occupation.”<sup>30</sup>

According to him, “Even if we find in thousands of instances that water is made up of two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen, it cannot be said finally that this is its composition. The conclusion is only an inference. If, however, I take two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen and combine them to produce water, that would be knowledge. It is knowledge verified in experience.”<sup>31</sup>

He felt that in matters of moment, inference was not adequate and instead direct experience was of supreme worth. And hence Gandhiji’s feeling in 1918 was that those who were weak and frightened required a training in violence before they could adopt non-violence as a way of life.

Another reason which seems to have led Gandhiji to assist in the recruitment of soldiers was that if a large number of young men (he several times mentioned five lakhs) voluntarily and consciously came forward, it would imply not only the conscious mobilization of those who so volunteered but of another fifty lakhs of their relations, neighbours, and friends whom they would have consulted before making such a decision.<sup>32</sup> As he said in August 1918,

“I implicitly believed that if we were to devote our attention exclusively to recruiting, we should gain full responsible government in a year’s time, if not sooner. And instead of allowing our utterly ignorant countrymen to enlist *nolens volens*, we should get an army of Home Rulers who would be willing soldiers in the knowledge that they will be soldiering for the country.”<sup>33</sup>

But as he admitted a few days earlier, “The task is most difficult. It is the toughest job I have yet handled in my life.”<sup>34</sup>

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30 CWMG, vol.15, pp.238-40, letter to Swami Shraddhanand, 17.1.1919.

31 CWMG, vol.14, pp.448-9, letter to Devadas Gandhi, 23.6.1918.

32 CWMG, vol.14, pp.498f. Appeal for Enlistment, Leaflet No 2, “In preparing five lakhs of men who would be willing to fight to death, we shall have made fifty lakhs familiar with ‘war’, ‘swaraj’, etc. We want to train five lakhs of free men. They will be going with open eyes, of their own free will.”

33 CWMG, vol.15, pp.14f., letter to Surendranath Banerjee, 10.3.1918.

34 CWMG, vol.14, p.473, letter to V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, 5.7.1918.

During the two months, June–August 1918, which Gandhiji completely devoted to the task of recruitment, the response from the people of Kheda, etc., whom he approached was indeed poor. Many of his esteemed friends who otherwise agreed with him on this question of helping voluntary recruitment had already told him to expect such a result.<sup>35</sup> While the peasants of Kheda and other places had been relatively enthusiastic about the no-rent campaign, in matters of recruitment he found them indifferent, if not actually cold or even hostile. Before Gandhiji could arrive at any conclusive results, either by way of a large number of young men offering themselves for recruitment, or being persuaded by the lack of response to abandon the recruiting task, the strain of the hectic life he had been leading and the meagre and curious food which he took then (peanut butter and lemons) made him seriously ill. During the next six months he was critically ill and it was only after he was persuaded in January 1919 to start taking goat's milk that his health was on the mend. By this time, the 1914–18 war was over and there was no further need for any new soldiers for the British army.

#### IV

It may be useful here to indicate what Gandhiji had been doing during the years 1915-18. He had spent the year 1915 critically observing his countrymen and acquainting himself with his country, and also establishing the Ashram at Sabarmati. His February 1916 address emphasised (i) cleanliness and order, (ii) the imperativeness of the use of Indian languages for education and communication, (iii) the need for simplicity, even austerity, (iv) his deploring the British distrust of Indians. Delivered at the foundation ceremony of the Benares Hindu University, the address heralded his arrival on the Indian social and political scene. He spent the next three years, 1916-18, publicly spelling out his ideas on the concerns of the period, the chief ones being Swadeshi,<sup>36</sup> Hindi as a language of communication between different parts of India,<sup>37</sup> the various Indian languages serving similarly in their respective region and education being imparted in them,<sup>38</sup> the blot of untouchability,<sup>39</sup> Hindu-Muslim amity,<sup>40</sup> and the imperativeness of a new system of education.<sup>41</sup> All these ideas and programmes no doubt had

35 CWMG, vol.14, pp.434f., speech at Nadiad, 17.6.1918.

36 CWMG, vol. 13, pp.219–25, speech on Swadeshi, Madras, 14.2.1916.

37 CWMG, vol.13, p.324, interview at Lucknow, National Language, 29/31.12.1916.

38 CWMG, vol.13, p.242, speech on vernaculars and education, Madras, 17.2.1916.

39 CWMG, vol.13, pp.225–35, speech on Ashram Vows at YMCA Madras, (untouchability, pp.232–3), 16.2.1916.

40 CWMG, vol.13, pp.197, speech at Mohammedan Association, Surat, 3.1.1916.

41 CWMG, vol.13, pp.297–300, The Present System of Education, October 1916.

previously been advocated from various platforms. Even the value of conscious self-suffering, non-cooperation, and non-violent resistance in national regeneration had been discussed and variously been admitted before 1915, especially by Bal Gangadhar Tilak.<sup>42</sup> Gandhiji, however, extended these concepts and gave them newer and wider meaning. Alongwith these he had also been attending to various other issues. He corresponded with the railway authorities about the hardships of the railway passengers, etc.,<sup>43</sup> interested himself in the civic problems in Gujarat, and far more importantly guided the organisation and structuring of the Sabarmati Ashram. The peasant campaigns in Champaran (1917-18) and Kheda (1918), the Ahmedabad textile strike (early 1918), and perhaps even his efforts at army recruitment for the British empire gave him not only an opportunity to apply his ideas of conscious self-suffering, non-cooperation, etc., in solving these issues, but equally an opportunity to experiment and test his theories, and learn how far he could go, or expect ordinary people to voluntarily suffer and non-cooperate in the then given Indian situation. Having worked out a model of the 'desirable society' as well as being in love with experiments (whether with food, or on problems of the soul, or of society, or of politics), any opportunity of interacting with others in cooperation or confrontation was evidently greatly welcome to Gandhiji.

An occasion for a major confrontation arose in February 1919 when Gandhiji was recovering from his six-month-old illness. In place of the war-time restrictions on civil liberties which were to lapse, the Government of India was proceeding with the enactment of new legislation, titled the Criminal Law Amendment Bill and the Criminal Law Emergency Powers Bill, commonly known as the Rowlatt Bills. The Bills were meant to further curtail whatever civil liberties the Indian people then had. The first protest meeting on the Bills, held in Bombay under the chairmanship of Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, was on February 2, 1919. As Gandhiji could not go he sent a letter instead saying, "It was their duty to educate public opinion to oppose the Bills with patience and

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42 Tilak advocated the need of a common national language and a common script at a speech at Benares at the Nagari Pracharni Sabha conference in December 1905. In it, referring to the question of the Roman script serving this purpose, he said that "the suggestion appears to me to be utterly ridiculous". While speaking on "Tenets of the New Party" at Calcutta on 2.1.1907, Tilak referred to the "power of self-denial and self abstinence in such a way as not to assist this foreign Government to rule" over Indians, and added, "We shall not give them assistance to collect revenue and keep peace. We shall not assist them in fighting beyond the frontiers or outside India. [...] We shall not assist them in carrying on the administration of justice. We shall have our own courts, and when time comes we shall not pay taxes. Can you do that by your united efforts? If you can, you are free from tomorrow." (*Bal Gangadhar Tilak, His Writings and Speeches*, Ganesh & Co, Madras, Feb 1919, pp.31, 65ff.)

43 CWMG, vol.13, 114-5, 284, 476-8, 547-51 relate to railway matters which are dealt with in many earlier and later volumes also.

firm determination”, and added that, “If he were not ill, he would surely have done his share in the agitation against the Bills.”<sup>44</sup>

The Bills, however, seem to have made Gandhiji come alive again. On February 8, he wrote to Pandit Malviya, who was also one of the members of the Viceroy’s Council, that, “I at any rate hope that all the Indian members will leave the Select Committee or, if necessary, even the Council, and launch a countrywide agitation.” He further wrote, “You and other members have said that if the Rowlatt Bills are passed, a massive agitation would be launched the like of which has not been seen in India,” and added, “I am not yet fully decided but I feel that when the Government bring in an obnoxious law the people will be entitled to defy their other laws as well.”<sup>45</sup> The next day, February 9, he wrote to V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, who was also a member of the Viceroy’s council, that the speeches of the Viceroy and other British officers “have stirred me to the very depths; and though I have not left my bed still, I feel I can no longer watch the progress of the Bills lying in bed.” Further,

“If the Bills were but a stray example of loss of righteousness and justice, I should not mind them but when they are clearly evidence of a determined policy of repression, civil disobedience seems to be a duty imposed upon every lover of personal and public liberty”, and “for myself if the Bills were to be proceeded with, I feel I can no longer render peaceful obedience to the laws of a power that is capable of such a piece of devilish legislation as these two Bills, and I would not hesitate to invite those who think with me to join me in the struggle.”<sup>46</sup>

The same day Gandhiji wrote to someone who had been a fellow satyagrahi with him in South Africa, “The Rowlatt Bills have agitated me very much. It seems I shall have to fight the greatest battle of my life. I have been discussing things. I shall be able to come to a decision in two or three days.”<sup>47</sup> On February 12 he wrote to the Government of India enquiring about the decision on the Ali Brothers, who had long been under detention; and on February 16 he informed the counsel for the Ali Brothers that, “I am, however, trying to speed recovery and I still hope that by the time I receive the reply from Delhi I shall be ready for work.”<sup>48</sup> On February 20 he wrote to the private secretary of the Viceroy telling him that “I am not still out of the wood regarding my health”,

44 CWMG, vol.15, p.83, letter to Shankarlal Banker, before 2.2.1919.

45 CWMG, vol.15, p.66, letter to Madan Mohan Malaviya, 8.2.1919.

46 CWMG, vol.15, pp.87–8, letter to V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, 9.2.1919.

47 CWMG, vol.15, p.88, letter to Pragji Desai, 9.2.1919.

48 CWMG, vol.15, p.90, letter to O.S. Ghate, 16.2.1919.

hinted about his feelings on the Rowlatt Bills, and devoted the rest of the long letter to the subject of the detention of the Ali Brothers, and concluded, “I shall anxiously await your reply.”<sup>49</sup> On February 23 he wrote to his former private secretary in South Africa, “Passive resistance is on the topics regarding certain legislation that the Government of India are passing through the Council. The war council meets tomorrow at the Ashram.”<sup>50</sup> Still retaining his humour, he wrote to his youngest son the same day, “a meeting of Satyagraha warriors is to take place in the Ashram on Monday. The final decision will be reached after considering what weapons each has and how much of ammunition. If you have read Shamal Bhatt’s description of Ravan’s war council, Mahadevbhai will not have to recount Monday’s history.”<sup>51</sup>

The next day, February 24, he drafted the Satyagraha pledge and signed it along with his colleagues,<sup>52</sup> and on the same day sent a 250-word long telegram to the Viceroy informing him of the pledge, making an appeal and inviting an early reply.<sup>53</sup> The moment about which Gandhiji had written a year earlier, “if India carries out my plan, the Government of India will be properly humbled; Hindus and Muslims, never united, will become so [...] and we shall hear the triumph of non-violence proclaimed all over the world”,<sup>54</sup> had arrived fairly fast.

During the next few days Gandhiji was engaged in various preparations for the impending Satyagraha. On March 1, he arrived in Bombay, on March 4 in Delhi where he also met the Viceroy who “advised against Satyagraha”,<sup>55</sup> then visited Lucknow and Allahabad, returned to Bombay on March 13, and left on March 16 for Madras. From Madras he visited Tanjore, Trichnapally, Madurai where he also visited the Meenakshi temple, Tuticorin, Nagapatnam, and Vijayawada. During this one month, large public meetings were held wherever he went but as he was too weak to stand or to speak, his written speeches were read for him to the respective audiences. On March 19 he decided that the Satyagraha should begin on Sunday April 6, 1919 as a day of fast, prayer and *hartal*. Delhi, somehow, observed this day a week earlier on March 30. The people of Delhi had organised an impressive and complete *hartal* and Swami Shraddhanand addressed a huge public meeting from the footsteps of the Delhi Jama Masjid. The preparations during the previous four

49 CWMG, vol.15, pp.94–5, letter to PS to Viceroy, 20.2.1919.

50 CWMG, vol.15, pp.96–8, letter to Sonja Schlesin, South Africa, 23.2.1919.

51 CWMG, vol.15, pp.98–100, letter to Devadas Gandhi, 23.2.1919.

52 CWMG, vol.15, pp.101–2, The Satyagraha Pledge, 24.2.1919.

53 CWMG, vol.15, pp.102–3, telegram to private Secretary to Viceroy, 24.2.1919.

54 CWMG, vol.14, pp.160–61, letter to Maganlal Gandhi, 20.1.1918.

55 Dalal, *Gandhi Chronology*, op. cit. 5.3.1919.

to five weeks, the enthusiastic response which Gandhiji's call had received and the stir which had been created made the British central authority of India panic. The police and the military, called out in Delhi, shot at assembled people, killing many. Retrospectively, given their outlook, the British had little option. If they had compromised, they would have lost face and so, more or less predictably, they overreacted, the result being the massacre at Jalliwala Bagh, and similar killings in many other places. Whether the protest was so meant or not, the Rowlatt Satyagraha became a trap for the British into which they fell with open eyes.

## V

The years 1920-1942 in a general sense may be taken to constitute several replays of the years 1916-19. True, the issues changed from period to period, and so also their solutions and remedies but essentially most of what happened in the later years is comparable to that which had gone before during 1916-19. Undoubtedly, with the passing of time there was a vast extension and multiplication of activities as well as institutions. But basically the model of these was the Satyagraha Sabha of March 1919,<sup>56</sup> the Ashram at Sabarmati established in March 1915,<sup>57</sup> and of course the National Congress after 1919 to which Gandhiji had given an elaborate constitution in 1920.<sup>58</sup>

The period beginning from 1944 could have been another replay though at a much more complex level. As it happened matters did not work out as Gandhiji would have wished. What Gandhiji had deplored in his preface to *Hind Swaraj* in 1910 came to pass; while the Englishmen retired, the British system gained the upper hand. Additionally, the country was divided; there was a widening gulf between Hindus and Muslims, and great bloodshed.

Believing as he did that one single individual who had risen above his passions could all alone move the world,<sup>59</sup> Gandhiji considered that because things did not move as planned and intended by him, it must have been due to his own imperfection. This led him to a much greater and intensified testing of himself to find out where his imperfection lay. This state of self-doubt and the mode of the tests, especially as they did not appear to mend matters in any appreciable degree, not only led to unhappiness and doubts about his godliness

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56 CWMG, vol.15, pp.132-3, Satyagraha Sabha Rules, *Young India*, 12.3.1919.

57 CWMG, vol.13. pp.91-8, Constitution of Sabarmati Ashram, May 1915.

58 CWMG, vol.19, pp.190-98, Congress Constitution adopted at Nagpur, December 1920.

59 Brahmacharya, June 1938, unpublished note.

amongst those who had for decades been close to him in his various endeavours, but eroded his standing further and perhaps made him appear to some as someone who had lost his saintliness and so his path of virtue. His loss of confidence in himself and the pain resulting from it as also the fact that he felt unhappy, cornered and seemingly helpless also became an opportunity to many, who for long years had felt as if they were on a tight leash and had stayed thus for lack of other options, to break free, now that they had other options, and return to their former moorings.

The 1946–48 grief and anguish of Gandhiji must, however, be seen in the perspective of the time. While there was a certain sadness resulting from the fact that he had not been able to achieve all that he had set out to achieve, the anguish and grief were largely circumstantial. To the extent it was demanded of him by the situation as well as by people surrounding him, he expressed his grief and anguish almost daily. He perhaps also hoped that by doing so he might be better able to pacify the passions and anxieties of those days and bring some courage and comfort to those who heeded his words. But his grief and anguish, because of the volume of words devoted to it and also because of the Indian horror of bloodshed and chaos, has been allowed to overshadow everything else. Though it was very disturbing when it actually came, such a situation had been visualised by Gandhiji, albeit theoretically, as far back as 1931. In a long interview to a British correspondent he had then stated,

“Very possibly there will be some serious communal strife when we have got Swaraj, but only for a little while. If you help us to stop it in the way I suggest, then it may perhaps end itself in the exhaustion or destruction of the one community by the other. There may be jealousies and disputes between factions, interests and (if you insist on the point) even whole provinces. [...] But it is not consistent with the self-respect of a country or a race that it should give *carte blanche* to the power of another nation or another race or individual members of it to say ‘These people cannot manage their own affairs so they gave us a free hand to do it for them’.”<sup>60</sup>

The fact that the terrible strife occurred in the presence of British power and Indians counted upon its intervention, seemingly giving the British *carte blanche* and all that it implied, was perhaps the major cause of his anguish and any despair he might have felt, reflecting on the people who had been with him for nearly three decades.

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60 CWMG, vol.45, pp.374–7, interview to *the Statesman*; also IOR: MSS Eur C 359: typescript of interview given to Patrick Lacey by Mahatma Gandhi and revised in his hand, Karachi, 1.4.1931.

The way Gandhiji objectively felt about what was happening may be inferred from one of his published writings in May 1947. In it he observed:

“What is happening is this. With the end of slavery and the dawn of freedom, all the weaknesses of society are bound to come to the surface. I see no reason to be unnecessarily upset about it. If we keep our balance at such a time, every tangle will be solved.”<sup>61</sup>

On May 28, 1947, while referring to the senseless bloodshed, he told the Chinese Ambassador to India, “But I feel it is just an indication that as we are throwing off the foreign yoke all the dirt and froth is coming to the surface. When the Ganges is in flood, the water is turbid. The dirt comes to the surface. When the flood subsides, you see the clear blue water which soothes the eye.”<sup>62</sup> On June 6 Gandhiji observed in a letter,

“You are gravely mistaken in assuming that as soon as Swaraj comes prosperity will flood the country. If, before assuming that, you had used your imagination a bit to see that after 150 years of slavery, we would need at least half that much time to cleanse our body-politic of the virus that has infiltrated every cell and pore of our being during our subjection, you would not have found it necessary to ask me. I am sure you will understand what I mean, namely, that far greater sacrifices will be needed after the attainment of self-government to establish good government and raise the people than were required for the attainment of freedom by means of Satyagraha.”<sup>63</sup>

Three weeks before the formal transfer of power he said to a foreign questioner, “When such a mighty power is dislodged a country’s condition becomes even worse. We shall see this if we examine the history of the world. Compared to that, nothing has happened in India.” But he added,

“That does not mean that an inhuman conduct is justified. It is really shameful. I am pained because we have sullied the noble method by which without shedding a drop of blood we made a great power leave in friendship. I also say that our countrymen are very simple at heart and that the British have taken advantage of that. We are so stupid.”<sup>64</sup>

61 CWMG, vol.88, p.2, Question Box, *Harijan*, 1.6.1947.

62 CWMG, vol.88, pp.26–7, interview to Dr. Le Chi Luen, 28.5.1947.

63 CWMG, vol.88, pp.86–7, A Letter, 6.6.1947.

64 CWMG, vol.88, p.433, talk with Kelly, 26.7.1947.

In November 1947 he told a Chinese delegation, “Peace in Asia depends on India and China. These two countries are large. And if they build their edifices on the foundation of Ahimsa they will become known among the great countries of the world.”<sup>65</sup> The next day in a message to Malaysia he said, “The attainment of freedom by India has a unique importance in the annals of world history. Let Asia benefit from it.”<sup>66</sup>

From the above and numerous other statements and observations of the years 1946-48, it is evident that it is not despair which Gandhiji was suffering from. Largely it was grief at what he termed the senseless killings, and anguish at the breakdown of a certain discipline and sense of order which he believed that he had been able to impart to the people of India. Alas there was evidently sadness at the clear reversal of direction, though perhaps imperceptible to begin with, on which his colleagues and followers had launched themselves. In another period he perhaps would have immediately wholly disapproved of such a reversal. However, in view of the criticality of the period, the British still held the upper hand, and realising that some of his prominent colleagues had had enough of suffering and could not any more withstand not knowing what was in store for them next, he made a surrender to seeming inevitability, especially as he always believed in moving by stages. So, even a mere transfer of political power was not to be dismissed. To a person like him one could still keep striving for the rest.

## VI

The published material on Gandhiji is fairly large. His own recorded sayings and writings are now available in 90 volumes of 500–600 pages each. Besides, from about 1906–48, he more or less continuously published one or more weekly papers. In addition there is his 1909 booklet “so simple as to be regarded foolish”, of which he would not even thirty years later “revise a single idea”. But what does all this add up to?

Perhaps the first thing which one has to realise is that Gandhiji was an incomparable patriot, but one who did not feel that there was any conflict between his patriotism and universalism as he understood it. According to him, only such a person who was true to himself could be true to his family, neighbour, friends and the world at large. Secondly, he believed that the civilization of India, removed of its later blemishes, disorganisations, etc., was far superior to the civilization of at least the modern West. If he had been really questioned and also properly informed about other civilizations in history, it is quite probable

65 CWMG, vol.89, p.492, interview to Chinese delegation, 6.11.1947.

66 CWMG, vol.89, p.494, Message to Malaya, 7.11.1947.

that he would have placed them at about the same level as the ancient civilization of India as he himself conceived it. He considered the civilization of the West to be based on self-indulgence, and that of India on self-control. According to him, "If we [i.e. the regenerated India] commit violence, it will be as a last resort and with a view to Lok Sangraha. The West will indulge in violence in self-will."<sup>67</sup> Though he stated this in 1918, it does not seem that Gandhiji, however much he deplored the senseless violence of 1946–47, would have said anything very different on this point even at the end of 1947, or at any point of time in between.

## VII

*Hind Swaraj* evidently was a product of Gandhiji's intense patriotism reinforced by his admiration for the civilization of India as understood by him and by innumerable Indians of his time. Undoubtedly he also drew support for what he wrote in *Hind Swaraj* from whatever knowledge and understanding he had acquired of other civilizations, from his own intuition and foresight and the intellectual and spiritual confirmation which he received from the late 19th and early 20th century Western exponents of the simple, back to nature, life.

Besides its rather breath-taking demolition of modern Western civilization, what *Hind Swaraj* essentially provides is a vision of the 'desirable society' and the rules and self-discipline which bind it together. Any striving towards this society, however, can be undertaken only when one has been able to spell out and demonstrate the process which leads to it, or at least to the intermediate stages on its way. Gandhiji's own life, what he did, and, much more importantly, the manner and the process of his striving, whether it was in one sphere or another, seem to be the only guide and hand-book, undoubtedly very voluminous and bulky, which can be of some help to the aspirants. It is quite probable that a relative comprehension of this process may induce the aspirants to frame the goal somewhat differently, or to alter the process, or abandon the striving altogether, concluding that the goal was wholly unapproachable or not worth the effort.

Gandhiji's constant emphasis on truth and non-violence makes one forget, or not see, his other attributes. He not only had a vision of the 'desirable society' but was also a great 'law-giver' and an incomparable general. Those whom he moved to great deeds certainly had no known military armaments. They were

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67 CWMG, vol.14, pp.504-5, letter to Maganlal Gandhi, 25.7.1918. The papers started and published by Gandhiji were: *Indian Opinion* (1906- ), *Young India* (1919-1931), *Navajivan* (1919-1931), *Harijan* (1933- ), *Harijan Bandhu* (1933- )

soldiers nonetheless. To the extent they had adequate courage, discipline, and self-control, were they successful in the task they undertook. Those who joined him in his Ashrams (whether in 1915, or later, at Sevagram, or in its innumerable prototypes in various parts of India) were trained through the practice of the Ashram vows, which were founded on the ancient Yama-Niyama-Vratas of India. This inevitably meant a life of austerity and hard work, and the imbibing of a spirit of brotherhood in common endeavours with others.

The task before Gandhiji was not only to generate courage and confidence but also toughness and tenacity (in the latter two, perhaps he succeeded much more!) in those who came to him or listened to him at all. His own exemplary conduct, the esteem he commanded, the self-denial and discipline which the people at large adopted at his persuasion, and the benefits and experience gained by the people in various battles which they joined under his command or with his approval, helped train, toughen and discipline the larger populace. To the extent this self-denial, training and toughening was deficient, they failed in their aim. Whether with the most perfect self-denial, training, etc., they would have always succeeded in what they set out to do, is debatable. But as Gandhiji would have said, in such an eventuality they would have willingly perished to the last man and that, according to him, would have been success enough.

A curious point needs to be noted: Most people (indeed practically everyone in actual life) take up extreme positions to begin with and by stages move on to more moderate positions. With Gandhiji the reverse seems to have been true. Having publicly announced his goal in *Hind Swaraj* and having stated that the goal was more of an aspiration he started moving in the most cautious manner. What he demanded at any one point, though it had a very wide import, was yet in itself most moderate and reasonable. Whether it was so intended or not, the probability is that his every move and its apparent reasonableness seems to have eroded the moral basis of his adversary.

The issues which Gandhiji undertook to advocate and strive for seem to have served the same central purpose. For him Swaraj was like the Vata-vriksha, whose branches struck root in the earth all around it; feeding any particular branch was like feeding the whole tree, the better feeding being to periodically change the branch which was being fed. This analogy seems to apply both to the issues he advocated as well as to his central purpose. If a battle was to be fought regarding any issue, whether with the alien government or with his own countrymen, as on the eradication of untouchability, or Hindu-Muslim amity, the battle was seldom over in one strike. In fact it appears that before Gandhiji finally decided on a battle he did much experimenting and testing

of all that he could put in the battle. Even after the start of the battle, he often retreated, and the retreats, while being blamed as Himalayan errors, seem to have resulted much more from his grand strategy. It may be true that if the Himalayan errors had not existed the battles would have brought far larger results. But it was not so much the physical violence to the adversary, unfortunate as it was, which decided the retreat, but rather the breakdown of order and discipline which was crucial to success. Further, such retreats seem to have often been planned as such and the advance was intended as merely a probe into the adversary's defenses, as well as a testing of his own strength. This strategy did not merely apply to an external adversary. Gandhiji seems to have applied it to his own self or to those near him, as is evident from his fast and his experiments in Brahmacharya.

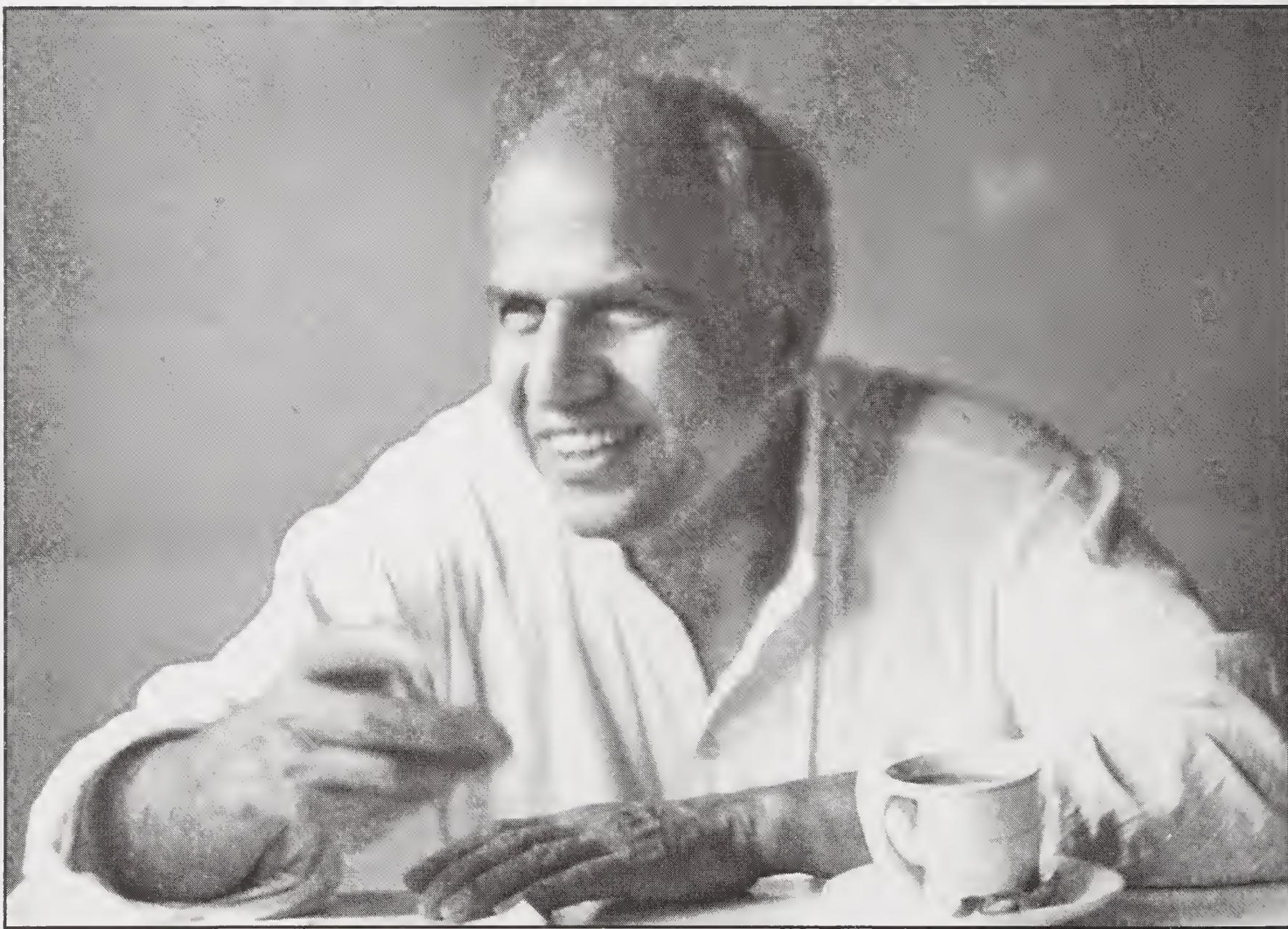
To comprehend someone like Mahatma Gandhi, one perhaps needs to structure a theory of man and society constructed on the basis of the data relating to Gandhiji and his times.

Sevagram, September, 1984.

Dharampal's Life and Work:  
A Chronology







# Dharampal's Life and Work: A Chronology

- 1922** February 19, born in Kandhala, Muzaffarnagar, western Uttar Pradesh; moved to Lahore in the late 1920s
- 1929** December, attended the Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress
- 1938** Completed secondary education at the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School, started B.Sc. in Physics at Fergusson College, Lahore
- 1940** Transferred to Meerut College
- 1940** October, abandoned his studies to join the Freedom Movement
- 1942** August 8, attended the Quit India meeting of the All India Congress Committee (AICC), at Gowalia Tank Maidan, Mumbai; overwhelmed by Mahatma Gandhi's powerful speech; became involved in underground activities of the AICC directorate, came in contact with Sucheta Kripalani, Girdhari Kripalani and Swami Anand, among others
- 1943** April-June, detained in a police lock-up in Kotwali, Delhi, along with Sadiq Ali
- 1944** October, joined Mirabehn at Kisan Ashram, midway between Roorkee and Haridwar; active in village development until August 1947
- 1947** August onwards, in charge of the Congress Socialist Party centre for the rehabilitation of refugees; set up a co-operative rehabilitation camp in Kurukshetra for 400 families from Jhang, Pakistan; in close contact with Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, L.C. Jain, etc.
- 1948** February, co-founder of the Indian Cooperative Union (ICU)
- 1948** November, departed for Israel via Britain; worked in Devonshire in an agricultural reconstruction programme; enrolled as occasional student at the London School of Economics
- 1949** September 3, married Phyllis Ellen Ford; returned with her to India via Europe, Israel, stayed for a few weeks in the kibbutz Degania Alef
- 1950** January, rejoined Mirabehn; established, near Rishikesh on land belonging to the Pashulok Trust, a cooperative village called Bapugram
- 1950** November 24, birth of son, Pradeep

- 1952** November 7, birth of daughter, Gita
- 1954** February, left Bapugram, disillusioned by the futility of the idealistic experiment in village development; in December joined his family in London; stayed for 3 years, worked for *Peace News*
- 1957** September, returned to India, via Sri Lanka, visiting Dhanushkodi and Rameswaram; reached Delhi in November
- 1958–1964** Elected General Secretary of the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD), founded by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, from 1959 with Jayaprakash Narayan as President; regular contributions to the *AVARD Newsletter*
- 1962** April, publication of *Panchayat Raj as the Basis of Indian Polity: An Exploration into the Proceedings of the Constituent Assembly*
- 1962** November 21, wrote an open letter (co-signed by N.N. Datta and Roop Narain) to all MPs criticising PM Nehru's weak response to the Chinese invasion; led to the arrest of the 3 co-signatories, imprisoned in Tihar jail for 2 months; sparked off a public debate, with controversial articles published in the press
- 1963** July 31, birth of daughter, Anjali
- 1963–1965** Director of Study and Research of the All India Panchayat Parishad; detailed examination of the Madras Panchayat system, research in the Tamil Nadu State Archives (TNSA); preliminary note completed in July 1965
- 1965** September, left for London due to serious road accident of his son; began extensive research in the British colonial archives
- 1971** Publication of *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century* and of *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition*; in November, Seminar in Delhi on "Science, Technology and Society in 18th century India"
- 1972** Publication of *The Madras Panchayat System*, vol.II
- 1972–1973** Appointed Fellow of the A.N. Sinha Institute, Patna
- 1975–1977** During the Emergency, based in London, launched the "Save J.P. Campaign"
- 1977** May, returned to India, spent several months in Patna, Bihar, in close contact with the CM Karpuri Thakur

- 1978** Delivered a series of 3 lectures on “The Clash between India and Europe since the Eighteenth Century”, sponsored by *Dinman* and the *Gandhi Peace Foundation*
- 1979** Short period of archival research in London, alongside caring for his sick wife
- 1980** Research in Chennai, TNSA
- 1981** Started living in Sevagram; intensive research, writing and lectures on Mahatma Gandhi
- 1982–2004** Lectures delivered in Pune, Bangalore, Kolkata, Bikaner, Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, etc.; articles published in the press and various journals
- 1983** Publication of *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century*
- 1984** Research in the TNSA on the Chengalpet district records
- 1985** Elected President of the Patriotic and People-Oriented Science and Technology (PPST) Foundation
- 1986** Publication of a series of 3 lectures on “Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity and their Relevance to the Present”, *New Quest*, vols.56–58
- 1986** March 29, death of wife, Phyllis
- 1987** Appointed Member of the Indian Council of Historical Research, re-appointed in **1991**, and again in **1999–2001**
- 1990–2006** Distinguished Fellow (Emeritus Fellow since 2000) of the Centre for Policy Studies, Chennai
- 1991** Published *Bharatiya Chitta Manas va Kaal* (in Hindi); English translation by Jatinder Bajaj, published in **1993**
- 1992** April, participated in the European Research Foundation conference, Lisbon, paper on *India's Polity, its Characteristics and Current Problems* (published in 1996)
- 1993** Insightful statements made in the context of the Ayodhya controversy, cf. his talk “Undamming the Flow”, in J.K. Bajaj (ed.): *Ayodhya and the Future India*, Chennai 1993, pp.213–238
- 1999** Publication of *Despoilation and Defaming of India*
- 2001** Appointed Chairman of National Commission on Cattle set up by the Government of India

- 2002** Publication with T.M Mukundan of *The British Origin of Cow-Slaughter in India*
- 2002** December, Infinity Foundation Award
- 2003** Publication of *Understanding Gandhi & Rediscovering India: Collection of Essays and Speeches (1956–1998)*
- 2006** October 24, passed away in Sevagram

# Dharampal's Bibliography



# Dharampal's Bibliography

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(\* based on list made by J.K. Bajaj in 1991)

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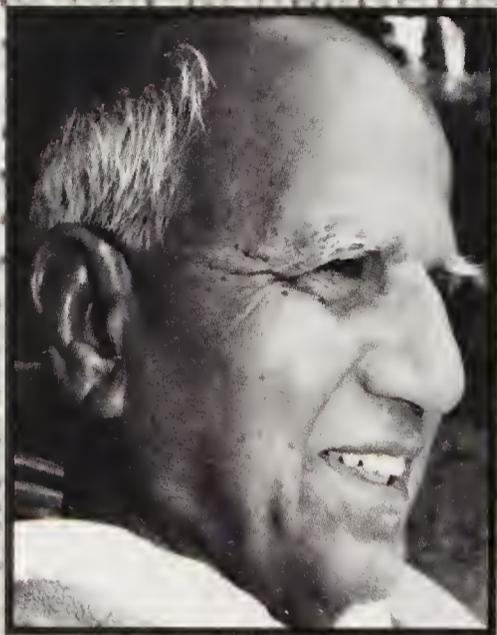
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Dharampal (1922–2006) was an Indian thinker, historian and political philosopher. He was deeply inspired by Mahatma Gandhi whom he actively supported during the movement for national independence. Dharampal conducted intensive archival research over several decades in India and the UK, and published some seminal works, including *The Beautiful Tree* (1983), *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century* (1971) and *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition* (1971). Furthermore, his pioneering scholarship and critical interventions have been influential in various ways towards formulating a programme for the regeneration of Indian society and the restoration of a decentralized socio-cultural, political and economic organization.

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