

MARXISM AND THE SOCIAL BASIS
OF EARLY INDIAN CULTURE

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by

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ABSTRACT

Marx's concept of the 'Asiatic Mode of Production' was an attempt to explicate the apparent stagnation of Indian social and economic life prior to the advent of British imperialism.

In the present, discussions of this notion and its underlying historical content have tended to remain segregated. The application of the 'materialist conception of history' to recent researches on Indian development demonstrates many inadequacies in the original conception, and hence in much of the subsequent discussion.

It is evident that India developed a number of social contradictions similar to those which escalated European movement towards capitalism. Through a combination of external and internal factors, however, the self-sufficient village system gained predominance in the first half millenium AD. Hence a social formation similar to that which Marx attempted to describe can be accurately dated from this period.

The history of Indian materialist philosophy both parallels and informs the chronology of the social formation out of which it developed. In turn social history aids greatly in explaining significant lacunae in the historiography of the evolution of philosophy. The analysis of the total social formation is thus clarified and enhanced through this comparison.

RÉSUMÉ

Le concept marxiste d'un 'Mode de Production Asiatique' était une tentative d'expliquer la 'stagnation' remarquée par Marx dans ses études de l'histoire sociale et économique de l'Inde.

Presentement, les discussions du concept sont souvent séparées de son histoire actuelle. Quand ils sont réunies selon la 'conception matérialiste de l'histoire', les événements actuelles démontrent des erreurs dans l'idée générale, et en conséquence dans beaucoup des débats sur le 'M.P.A.'.

Il est cependant évident qu'en Inde quelques contradictions sociales se sont développées pas très différentes de celles caractéristiques de la base du développement Européen. Mais en conséquence de facteurs intérieurs et extérieurs, la société des communautés villageoises fut stabilisée dans les premiers cinq siècles après J.C.. Une formation sociale semblable à celle que Marx a décrit peut être daté avec précision de cette période.

L'histoire du matérialisme indien met en parallèle et informe sur la chronologie actuelle de la formation sociale. En même temps l'histoire sociale clarifie le développement des pensées philosophiques. L'analyse de la formation totale sociale est aussi éclairée et approfondie par cette comparaison.

"For if there be no mind
Debating good and ill,
And if religion send
No challenge to the will,
If only greed be there
For some material feast,
How draw a line between
The man-beast and the beast?"

(A question from Kaśmiri
folklore, c. 200 BC;
Arthur Ryder, Transl.
The Pañchatantra,
Chicago: University Press,
1972)

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INTRODUCTION

A. The Myth of India

Even in our own time, the vision produced by the name 'India' is in the west frequently that of an imaginative conjuror - or his more dull-witted apprentice. Ktesias, an early Greek narrator (fourth century BC), described a land whose population included beings (whole races) who "though they had but a single leg, could hop upon it with a wonderful agility." To the west, he continues, "lived men without a neck, and who had eyes placed in their shoulders."¹ In the present, equally wondrous superhuman abilities usually confined to science fantasy often still find acceptance in the popular understanding, especially among those who are most skeptical about the claims of 'science' and its rationalist presuppositions.

The 'rational kernel' in the attitude of fanatical admiration for Indian spiritualism lies in its implicit adherence to a doctrine of human improvement. In the recognition that we surely utilise only a bare minimum of our potential abilities, this view progresses beyond the complete denigration of human capacity, albeit usually in a thoroughly antisocial fashion. Analytically, a serious problem arises when an entire culture is presumed to entertain transcendentalism as a form of raison d'être, such that the practical needs of a nation remain ignored and misunderstood. In its greatest oversimplification, this myth is expressed in terms of the individual stereotypes of what John Steadman has called "the arbitrary juxtapos-

ition of the mystic and the entrepreneur": "The antithesis of the spiritualistic East and the materialistic West eliminates all voices except those of the bonze and Brahmin."²

Unmasking the many components of this way of thinking is an enormous task, of which the present work is but a small contribution. Our concern is not with the entirety of this legend, the implications of which are of enormous complexity. Two important aspects of its totality, rather, occupy a position of central emphasis here. The first is the recurrent analytical view that India 'stagnated' 'from time immemorial'; the second is the concomitant notion that spiritualism represents the sum of Indian philosophical achievements, and hence that all parts of the population have ever adhered to such beliefs.

Specifically, we will examine Marx's concept of the 'Asiatic Mode of Production', both in terms of its internal theoretical evolution (Chapter One), and in its substance through researches into early Indian history which have taken place since the time of Marx (Chapter Two). The third chapter is constituted as a philosophical history of selected aspects of the history of early Indian materialism, both in order to substantiate the arguments presented in the second chapter, and to add evidence to the view that the myth of Indian philosophy is to a large degree contingent upon the acceptance of the tacit assumptions of the historical fictions.

In these enquiries our interest remains as much with the present and future as with the reconstitution of the

past, for there never has been, nor could be, any severance in the relation of these measurements of time to each other. Indeed, at certain junctures we will try to demonstrate that the particular inflections and nuances of the expression of these myths are largely dictated by the ideological aspirations of various groups emerging from the conditions of a specific era. In assessing such influences the general concern is again with the circumstances of the contemporary world, for as E.H. Carr has written,

"The function of the historian is neither to love the past nor to emancipate himself from the past, but to master and understand it as the key to the understanding of the present." (3)

B. The Mythology of Marxism

Every important form of theoretical analysis has been enunciated at a period of significant societal change. The dominant forms of the old order, and their philosophical and ideological paradigms⁴, have then been most subject to severe stresses which primarily involve the introduction of new 'facts' into theories which were not designed to account for them. The sense of time manifested in the growth, maturity, and decay of paradigms hence is directly connected to the rapidity of social change generally. In this sense, the contemporary period presents perhaps the greatest of all possible challenges: change occurs so swiftly that paradigms proposing to elaborate the structure and content of movement can hardly maintain an equal pace. In turn the complexity added in the geometrical advancement of the sources of knowledge and the proliferation of disciplines makes reductionism inevitable and thus

further hinders genuine innovation in comprehension.

In the period since the advent of the industrial revolution, one crucial fact must be admitted: that the role of critical philosophy (as opposed to ideological apology) is a stronger one than in any previous era. Revolutions occur across the entire planet under the theoretical aegis of a unified, if diverse, trilogy of paradigms called Marxism.⁵ Not since the rise of Islam, perhaps, have ideas exerted such a profound historical influence. This tradition has already demonstrated that it is the most powerful theoretical position ever to grasp the 'facts' of any period of change. As with any similarly totalistic system, a dogmatic interpretation has also facilitated its conversion into the positivistic defense of a new order of exploitation. As the foremost representative of the conflicting aspirations presented in the twentieth century, Marxism simultaneously conveys and denies the values of science and technology, and in this it recalls all of the dreams and nightmares of its diverse ancestry.

In the course of the evolution of its doctrines and practices, Marxism has moved in many directions. Much of its theoretical expression groans and grows weary under the burden of the master's works, and yet their impact has not quite passed the boundaries between the sacred and the rational. Because of the hypothetical and historically provisional aspects of Marx's analytical method, no investigation claiming the inspiration or authority of this legacy (either 'scientific' or political) should be constrained by the parameters of textual dogmatism.

Exegesis should therefore serve the function and formal purpose of illustration, not as an activity which concerns itself with the choice of weapons from a polemical armoury. This allows the observer to assess independently the degree to which a given formulation serves as a vital structural support internal to the paradigm of Marx's analytic method, and thus the extent to which a given attempt at innovation threatens the necessary presuppositions of the paradigm.

This process is rendered completely necessary simply as a result of the tremendous latitude of potential interpretation inherent in even the least contradictory of texts. Exegesis does however also aid in seeking the anomalies in Marx's analytic method. Here it is necessary to seek either aspects of the method which are contradictory to its own theoretical presuppositions, or new 'facts' not adequately accounted for by the method or its theory, which however 'beg to be included'. Thus any paradigm either adapts itself, weakening or strengthening its own structure, or erupts amidst the contradictions of logic and reality, withering away gradually to the status of historical curiosity.

C. Methodology

Bearing these considerations in mind, we do not propose to utilise here a dogmatic or reductionist interpretation of the 'materialist conception of history'. Both unconsciously and by considered intention, as they later admitted, Marx and Engels overemphasised the influence of economic factors in historical development.⁶ Largely this was the effect of the circumstances surrounding their 'break' from

several earlier paradigms. In turn a reductionist attitude towards the history of philosophical development emerged, in the attempt to deny the status of theory if independently abstracted from its social milieu and historical genesis. Among subsequent Marxists this oversimplification usually results in two major problems: (1) an inadequate reading of the texts of Marx and Engels, and (2) a dogma of 'theoreticism', which is an attempt to innovate at the paradigmatic level while remaining inhibited in regard to subsequent empirical research and the theoretical consequences derived therefrom, and even claiming such research to be unimportant.

The seeds of such later methodological abuses are to be found in passages similar to the following, which is from The German Ideology:

"Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse alter - along with these - their real existence and their thinking and the products of their thinking." (7)

It is therefore imperative that we not treat, for example, the history of Indian materialism 'simply' as a struggle against the mode of reasoning and philosophic positions often termed 'idealism'. The two forms of thought are, however, in conflict at a number of levels, vis. epistemology, ontology, and usually politics, and we will argue that these rival contentions constitute a basis for the evaluation of the concomitant structure of the evolving social formations. The danger lies where, especially in

philosophical studies, this type of scholarship is used merely to exemplify the view that "The history of philosophy is a progression . . . to the ultimate truth that is Marxism", where the historian "merely awards marks for right and wrong conclusions."⁸

Such a methodology is not only dangerously overconfident (which encourages practical excesses of all types), but also tends to undermine its own humanitarian presuppositions. Through an extreme form of nomothetic ('law-seeking') zeal, Marxism often loses touch with its hermeneutical (seeking 'human meaning') origins. This is the gist of the conflict between the 'humanist' and 'motor force' wings of the movement, with its formal resemblance to (and much substantial affiliation with) the 'free will-determinism' debates of the medieval scholastics. While the debate rests upon some genuine disagreements as to the status and value of philosophy (among other issues), it suffers greatly from misunderstandings about the separation between, and relation of, normative and empirical theorising.

If this analytic paradigm is appropriately applied, however, it will find no conflict between 'hermeneutics' and 'social science', a duality frequently held to be mutually exclusive in the present. In the search for meaning in history, with reference to Marxism, adequate 'conclusions' themselves mean not merely the bruised egos and scattered applause which accompany the conflict of the printed word, but human lives saved and suffering avoided. Provided that domination and deprivation remain

the sole reference point and moral basis, there is both meaning in the discovery of similarities of human behavioral patterns, and validity in the exploration of the most diverse psychological aspects of intention in social interaction, in language, gestures, roles, etc. Without this basis, however, no action in the world has any but the most profoundly selfish meaning: the overcoming of suffering is the ultimate rationale for all investigation. When social policy adopts this understanding as its central emphasis, we will have begun at last to act as the special 'human' species we have often claimed ourselves to be.

In the Indian context, as elsewhere, it is necessary to assess the relative determinant strengths of a plurality of factors relating to social development, bearing in mind the fact that Marx as well was aware of the dangers of a monocausal understanding:

"Man himself is the basis of his material production, as of any other production that he carries on. All circumstances therefore, which affect man, the subject of production, more or less modify all his functions and activities as the creator of social wealth, of commodities. In this respect it can in fact be shown that all human relations and functions, however and in whatever form they may appear, influence material production and have a more or less decisive influence upon it." (9)

We are in general agreement with the view of Umberto Melotti, who among others holds that the concept of a mode of production is the most important among those of Marx's analytic method.¹⁰ Marx's object was not the 'social formation', as Friedman suggests, because Marx's incursions into the specifically unique aspects of the history of philosophy, ideology, the 'independent' role of the state, etc., are exceedingly rare.¹¹ All of these factors,

however, are involved in the complex description of a given social formation, which indicates the relationship of various modes of production to each other and to the rest of the social formation in its many expressions.¹²

Within this schema the term 'mode of production' has two designations. When capitalised here it indicates a social formation as described by its dominant mode of production, which lends a determinant influence to most aspects of the society. Hence capitalism is described as "the form of society in which capitalist production is predominant."¹³ An 'Asiatic society', if the label is even desirable, could correspondingly only be so designated if the 'Asiatic mode of production' were equally predominant. Thus the second designation (in small letters here) describes the mode of production itself, which in turn portrays the structured interaction between the forces of production (generally land, instruments, and techniques, but including people, eg. as slaves), and the relations of production, or the means by which economic roles are assigned and maintained, and the systematic expression thereof.

In distinguishing the central characteristics of varied social formations, the principal object of analysis is the relations of production, which establish a particular pattern of disposition over the results of the work process:

"The essential difference between the various economic forms of society, between, for instance, a society based on slave labour, and one based on wage-labour, lies only in the mode in which this surplus-labour is in each case extracted from the actual producer, the labourer." (14)

In Indian history it is thus necessary to pay particular attention to the evolution of the caste system, and to assess the extent to which the modern terminology of class is applicable to its formation. There is much controversy concerning the relation of exploitation under capitalism to that in earlier periods, in which especial importance is laid upon the relation between economic, political, and social control in the ancient world.

D. Focus of the Analysis

Each of the three chapters following examines a separate area of enquiry. As a whole the connection between Marx's method and the evolution of early Indian history is the unifying theme. The following, however, are the principal questions of importance with which individual chapters are concerned:

- (1) Chapter One: What did Marx mean by the category of the 'Asiatic Mode of Production'? What were the primary sources and influences upon which he drew in its formulation? How have his successors treated it, and what are the bases of the many disagreements concerning its utility?
- (2) Chapter Two: Is the 'AMP' theory applicable to the period of approximately 700 BC to 500 AD in Indian history? What is the character of class formations during this period? What is the role of the state, and to what extent does this vary? How do trade and commerce affect the overall evolution of the social formation? Are there contradictions in the social and economic structure and if so is their dialectical opposition an active one? To what extent are such conflicts transmuted, and through what factors?
- (3) Chapter Three: What are the social origins of Indian materialism? What is the relationship between this form of thought and other philosophical schools? What role does materialism play in political philosophy? Can the history of early materialism provide a guide to aspects of the evolution of the social formation as a whole?

FOOTNOTES

- 1) J.W. McCrindle, ed. Ancient India as Described by Ktesias the Knidian (London: Trübner and Co., 1882), p. 61.
- 2) John Steadman, The Myth of Asia (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p. 26.
- 3) E.H. Carr, What is History? (London: Penguin Press, 1962), p. 26.
- 4) The term 'paradigm' has gained prominence in contemporary usage largely through the work of Thomas Kuhn, specifically The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University Press, 1970), where the term is loosely defined as a set of ideas governing research activity in a particular field during the period of 'normal science'. The term is used here in a more specific sense, as describing a comprehensive approach to a particular problem, but not necessarily held by the majority of the community engaged in the discussion of similar problems, as Kuhn's usage generally indicates. This must be distinguished from what may be termed a 'paradigmatic formation', wherein several paradigms are integrated to form a system of thought presenting a world-view. Thus in Marx's paradigmatic formation there are three separate paradigms: the analytic method, in which the vision of the future is dependent upon the examination of historical movement, the theory and method of revolutionary activity, and the 'ontology', or underlying philosophy of man. Although Marx regarded the three subsystems as an integrated whole, they have since been presented in a variety of combinations as 'interpretations' of Marx's thought. Hence 'socialist humanism', for instance, tends to concentrate on the philosophy of man to the neglect of the analysis of history and the consideration of the agency of transformation. Soviet orthodoxy, on the other hand, ignores these problems and focusses almost exclusively upon the other two paradigms.
- 5) See Karl Korsch, Karl Marx (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1938), p. 12.
- 6) Engels acknowledged this most explicitly in a letter to J. Bloch of 21-22 September 1890:

"Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place, or the opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction."

This neglect is also portrayed as an emphasis of content over form, in a letter written by Engels to Mehring on July 14, 1893. See the Selected Correspondence (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), pp. 500, 540.

- 7) Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The German Ideology, in Collected Works (New York: International Publishers, 1975), Vol. 5, pp. 36-37.
- 8) See Eugene Kamenka, "Marxism and the History of Philosophy", History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History, Beiheft 5: 'The Historiography of the History of Philosophy', p. 92.
- 9) Karl Marx, Theories of Surplus-Value, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p. 288. Emphasis in the original.
- 10) Umberto Melotti, Marx and the Third World (London: MacMillan Press, 1977), p. 3.
- 11) Jonathan Friedman, System, Structure, and Contradiction in the Evolution of 'Asiatic' Social Formations (Columbia University Ph.D. Dissertation, 1972, p. 8; also published by Croom Helm, London, 1975).
- 12) See the discussion of Lucio Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society (London: New Left Books, 1972), p. 10.
- 13) Karl Marx, Theories of Surplus-Value, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 424.
- 14) Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), p. 217.

CHAPTER ONE

MARX'S CONCEPT OF THE 'ASIATIC MODE OF
PRODUCTION' IN RELATION TO EARLY INDIA

I. A Brief History of the Concept of 'Oriental Despotism'

Anthropologists have designated the term 'pseudospeciation' to describe a tribe which believes that only it is human, all others being a part of some lower realm. As Christianity demarcated its own purity through the degradation of the heathen barbarian, so the government, morals, and culture of Asia have since ancient times been stereotyped in contrast with the achievements of European countries. Aristotle's exhortation to Alexander of Macedon to treat non-Greeks as "animals or plants" demonstrates that this sense of contempt and animosity was thriving by the fourth century BC.¹

European knowledge of Asia from Herodotus onwards was however rarely a function of theoria, or knowledge exclusively derived from and remaining within the realm of philosophical speculation. It was rather inherently bound up with the politico-military praxis of European countries. These political ends required concomitant philosophical cum propagandistic supports, and thus - based upon elements of truth - was born the theory of Oriental Despotism. Its historical exposition often reveals more of the vicissitudes of European thought than it does any increasing knowledge of the concreteness of Asian reality.²

During the middle ages, crusading knights, children, and merchants aided in furthering the earlier caricatures. Muslim ('Saracen') armies came to epitomise the ostensible chaos and barbarity of Oriental life. Religious zeal helped to fuel the early conquests, it also substantially defined

the parameters of European understanding. As Maxime Rodinson has written, "The Crusades are a classical instance of political acts (wars) carried out with ideological motivations."³ These actions, it might be added, were not political in the Aristotelian sense of the term. They were rather seen as the natural treatment of would-be masters towards those whose condition could only be one of innate servitude. With few exceptions the earlier motivations and their respective rationalisations remained unchanged throughout the middle ages.

By the period spanning the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, the diversity of European interests in Asia begins to be reflected in the divergence of attitudes upon aspects of Asian societies. Under the influence of European absolutism, both Voltaire and Hobbes had, for different reasons, altered the traditional meaning of the term despoteai as it had been associated with the Orient. For Aristotle despoteai had symbolised both the rule of the master over the slave in the household, and the imputed corresponding arbitrariness of Oriental (mainly Persian) rulers towards their subjects. The term had thus primarily a political content (in the modern sense), although it also implied a number of social characteristics. Hobbes (1642) tried to remove the traditionally negative connotation attached to despotism, and therefore detracted from its status as an epithet of cultural abuse by describing it as the normal outcome of conquest in any area.⁴ Voltaire (1753) applied the notion of 'legal despotism' to Asia, reversing

the development of the term 'Oriental Despotism' from Aristotle to the seventeenth century, where it had meant a form of political tyranny characterised by an absence of law.⁵

Responses to changes in European property relations in the early eighteenth century led to the beginning of another important shift in emphasis in attitudes towards Asia. Montesquieu (1748) used 'Oriental Despotism' to denote both a lack of personal liberty and an absence of private property in land. The latter notion, whose content was principally social, had been derived from François Bernier, who had travelled to India in 1723-24. Although this view was seriously disputed as early as 1761 by Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, among others, it was highly influential even a century later.⁶

The new emphasis upon property relations became juxtaposed to the older political content in two ways. On the one hand, Asian kings were believed to derive their personal rulership from a landholding monopoly. Alternately, this monopoly was supposed to have been derived from the personal rule of the sovereign. Both views had been contained in the judgements of Sir Thomas Roe, English ambassador to the Mughal court in 1615. The first was elaborated by Bernier, and somewhat altered by Adam Smith before reaching Marx. The second was followed by Olearius, Spencer, and eventually Max Weber.⁷

Bernier and Badeau had concluded works on Asia with a decided comparative praise for European private property.

It was this aspect of the Physiocratic problematic concerning land revenue that Adam Smith (1776) first fully addressed as an object of political economy. While the seventeenth century had largely seen explanations of the differences between Asia and Europe put forward in terms of such external characteristics as race and climate, Smith foreshadowed the sociological concerns of the nineteenth century in concentrating upon differences in forms of land ownership. Smith's analysis of the caste system as a hereditary form of the maintenance of the division of labour, and his establishment of a lack of distinction between land rent and tax in India, were both important ideas in the development of Marx's thought.⁸

It was Turgot's continuation of the distinction between political and civil despotism (1750), in combination with Voltaire's emphasis upon the domination of religion in India, that served as important foundations for the views of Hegel on Indian life. Although the Abbé Raynal had written at length on India in 1770, his work was largely speculative and ill-informed in its generalisations. Hegel was in many ways the first to attempt to systematically compare Asian with European history. This necessitated a fundamental break with the generalised abstraction of 'the Orient'. Hereafter the embryonic conception of India in particular unfolds as the crude stereotypes of past discourse give way, first to the notion of a geographic entity, thence to the more diverse and specialised research of the twentieth century.

Hegel characterised Indian society, as the worst form of despotism, in which the lack of a feeling of self had led to a political submissiveness which precluded thoughts of rebellion.⁹ In combination with an omission of moral feeling and a sense of history as deeds or events, the caste system had, as an extreme form of particularism, prevented the ethical development of the universality of state rule. This in turn helped to maintain the dominance of religious factors in Indian life. This thesis was later pursued by Weber.

If there was much psychological determinism in Hegel's analysis (ie. the effect of moral feeling upon the form of political rule), the articulation of the importance of economic factors, via an emphasis upon caste determination, represents an important analytic juncture. Richard Jones (1831) sought to develop the categories of Indian society from the perspective of classical political economy. Marx, to some extent, represents the fusion of aspects of Hegel and Jones in his views on India. The thesis of the unity of manufacturing and agriculture in village life, the emphasis upon waterworks and upon a form of natural communism, were all contributions of Jones to the development of Marx's theory of the Asiatic Mode of Production. In addition, Jones saw the unity of tax/rent as a past aspect of European history. This view was to have important repercussions in the later works of Marx and Engels.

James and John Stuart Mill are also important in apprehending the background to Marx's development. James Mill had emphasised, in his History of India (1821), the role of the

sovereign as landowner, following Bernier. His son drew attention to the stability of peasant life in India, the lack of important towns, and the role of artificial irrigation. In addition, J.S. Mill used India as a general model for 'Oriental Society', and tended, in contradistinction to his predecessors, to the description of despotism as seated in custom, rather than as derived specifically from land-ownership.¹⁰

This additional accentuation upon social habit, however, though it contributed to a more objective understanding of India, cannot be seen in isolation from Mill's intentions. The attitude of Aristotle, indeed, is again reflected in the view that

"Despotism is a legitimate mode of government when dealing with barbarians, provided that the end be their improvement and the means justified by actually effecting that end." (11)

The ambiguities sustained in this interpenetration of analytic activity with policy proposals are, as we will shortly see, another part of the legacy faced by Marx, and resulted equally in a similar, if far more self-conscious, ambivalence on his part towards these questions. Both authors sought 'improvement' as a human progression, but while Mill rested content in his high estimation of the acculturating effects of capitalism, Marx found imperial conquest to be a painful but necessary stage prior to genuine independence and self-management.

II. Marx and Engels 1835-57

Prior to 1853 there are few significant references to India in the works of Marx and Engels. Marx, more than his

lifelong associate, demonstrates a peripheral knowledge of the caste system, punning in 1842 that here "in the literal sense people are put into boxes" (Kasten).¹ In the context of The German Ideology, Marx noted less metaphorically that the caste system, as reflected in the Indian state and religion, resulted from the "crude form of the division of labour" in that country.² Several citations to the origin of caste in the division of labour also occur in The Poverty of Philosophy.³ Engels' acceptance of Hegel's view that India was to be classed among "countries which for thousands of years have made no progress" is also apparent in this period.⁴ The developmental teleology explicit in Marx's system is also demonstrated by allusions to the 'progress' made by the English in breaking down the structural supports of the old society in India.⁵

In 1852 Marx began to write as the London correspondent for the New York Daily Tribune; Engels had begun submitting articles the previous October. Although Marx commented that "purely scientific works are completely different" from "the continual newspaper muck"⁶, it was in fact within this context that his views on India became far more elaborate and sophisticated. The debates in Parliament in the summer of 1853 first gave Marx and Engels the occasion to seriously consider the role of India vis-à-vis the materialist conception of history. The discussion between the two authors began with the attempt to find economic and political bases for the rise of Islam. These reflections led Marx to ponder an oft-quoted problem: "Why does the history of the East appear as a history of religions?"⁷

Marx goes on to discuss Bernier's opinion that the "king is the one and only proprietor of the land", observing in the process that the "absence of private property in land . . . is the real key even to the Oriental heaven."⁸ Engels, in reply, asserted that the absence of private property was due to the effects of climate and the nature of the soil, which required artificial irrigation for agricultural production.⁹ This irrigation, Engels suggested, "was a matter either for the communes, the provinces, or the central government." Marx thereafter tended to concentrate upon the third of these possibilities, only returning to the question of voluntary local associations in Capital.¹⁰

In his letter to Engels of 14 June 1853, Marx adds another characteristic to explain the "stationary character of this part of Asia": the division of India into villages, "each of which possessed a completely separate organisation and formed a little world in itself."¹¹ Closely describing the twelve-part jajmani division of labour in the village, Marx quotes a parliamentary report to the effect that

"Under this simple form of municipal government, the inhabitants of the country have lived from time immemorial. The boundaries of the villages have been but seldom altered; and although the villages themselves have sometimes been injured, and even desolated, by war, famine, and disease, the same name, the same limits, the same interests, and even the same families have continued for ages. The inhabitants give themselves no trouble about the breaking up and division of kingdoms; while the village remains entire, they care not to what power it is transferred, or to what sovereign it devolves; its internal economy remains unchanged." (12)

Although Marx remarks upon "these idyllic republics" that "I do not think anyone could imagine a more solid foundation for stagnant Asiatic despotism"¹³, he questions the

view of Bernier concerning the complete lack of private property in land, suggesting instead that this might be predominantly a Muslim innovation. This is highly significant in terms of the complexification of the explanation, for the apparent 'stagnation' of Indian society.

In his articles of 25 June 1853, Marx notes that the continual political dismemberment of India is "anticipated in the ancient tradition of the religion of Hindustan", which is at once "a religion of sensualist exuberance, and a religion of self-torturing asceticism."¹⁴ It is by contrast to the penetration of the British into India that Marx elaborates upon the unchanging nature of Indian history: "the misery inflicted by the British on Hindostan is of an essentially different and infinitely more intensive kind than all Hindostan had to suffer before."¹⁵ All past invasions and disasters in India "did not go deeper than its surface. England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society."¹⁶

Marx goes on to repeat Engels' comments on the belief that "There have been in Asia, generally, from immemorial times, but three departments of government: that of Finance, or the plunder of the interior; that of War, or the plunder of the exterior; and finally, the department of Public Works." Bernier's views on artificial irrigation are somewhat more fully developed here as well. Marx now explains that irrigation as the form of public works became the function of centralised governments because the level of "civilisation was too low and the territorial extent too vast to call into life voluntary associations."¹⁷ The evolution of the village system Marx then explains in terms of this concentration of

public works, and the decentralised union of manufacturing and agriculture. It is then precisely the demise of this latter combination which brings forth "the only social revolution ever heard of in Asia."¹⁸

Marx then closes this particular article with a series of comments worth quoting at length, as they demonstrate a number of levels in his reflections on India:

"Now, sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness these myriads of industrious patriarchal and inoffensive social organisations disorganised and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilisation and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation for Oriental despotism, and that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. We must not forget the barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetuation of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed upon them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who deigned to notice it at all. We must not forget that this undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life, that this passive sort of existence, evoked on the other part, in contradistinction, wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction, and rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindostan. We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man to be the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalising worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow. England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about the revolution." (19)

The bulk of the remainder of Marx's researches into Indian society in this period are set forth in the article of August 8 1853, entitled "The Future Results of British Rule in India". Here Marx asserts that Indian society "was based on a sort of equilibrium, resulting from a general repulsion and mutual exclusiveness between all its members." This leads Marx to conclude that

"the whole of her past history, if it be anything, is the history of successive conquests she has undergone. Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society." (20)

These successive invaders, however, "soon became Hindooised, the barbarian conquerors being, by an eternal law of history, conquered themselves by the superior civilisation of their subjects."²¹

Marx thus sought, in this early period, to explain the apparently unchanging nature of Indian society via his materialist conception of history. In describing "that great and interesting country, whose gentle natives . . . represent the type of the ancient German in the Jat and of the ancient Greek in the Brahmin"²², three purposes are evident. The impact and significance of British capitalism in India allowed Marx to add this among other colonies to the role of Ireland in the maintenance of European class relations. In evolving a theory of imperialism, Marx's vision of postcapitalist interdependency unfolds. Secondly, Marx sought, in a comparative manner, to comprehend the shifting of centres of world economic growth and civilisation, which contributed both to the notion of uneven development, and to the growth in Marx's

work of the ethnological genesis of societies.

Finally, the explicit reconstruction of Indian social and economic history, in order to explain specifically Indian developments, was returned to most intensively in 1879-81. The period of 1859-79 was more generally devoted to the two prior intentions indicated above. Through his own and Engels' endeavors, Marx found a number of factors contributing to the explanation of Indian society. Among these determinations, which Marx assesses in a predominantly structural rather than an historic manner, the most important was found to be "the hereditary divisions of labour, upon which rest the Indian castes, those decisive impediments to Indian progress and Indian power."²³ It was to the origins of this division of labour, and its institutionalisation through village isolation, that Marx and Engels were later to devote considerable attention.

III. Marx and Engels 1857-59

We have so far seen that the concept of 'Oriental Despotism' evolved historically as what Lawrence Krader has called "an instrument to criticise and thereby regulate human affairs."¹ This was largely its internal function as a comparative tool for the evaluation of European societies; externally it served to separate, segregate, and define the European cultural entity by negation. In the period just examined, we have followed Marx's initial attempts to transform this category from an abstract (if frequently emotive) political epithet into an analytical term with some capability of historical explanation. Using Adam Smith and Richard Jones in particular, this now involved the metamorphosis

of 'Oriental society' into the 'Asiatic Mode of Production' proper.

The period of 1857-59 is extraordinarily rich in terms of references to India in Marx's work. Throughout the Grundrisse the term 'Oriental society', or one of its synonyms, remains Marx's major category in reference to India. As the culmination of the refinement of this conception, the term 'Asiatic Mode of Production' first appears in the 1859 Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, where Marx indicated his predominant concern with historical periodisation.

"In broad outline the Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as progressive epochs of the socio-economic order." (2)

This formulation exhibits a two-fold intention in Marx's thought. Firstly, the movement from a broad social type to an economic classification indicates Marx's confidence in the basic veracity of his researches on Asia. Secondly, the concern with historical progression establishes the unity of Marx's method. In the Indian context this is reflected in a fundamental concern with the mechanisms of primitive accumulation, whose linkages with contemporary capitalism could then be expounded at a number of levels.

Marx carries forward a number of his previous deliberations in Grundrisse, altering some and embellishing others in the process. The causal connection between the sovereign and property is resolved in a historic manner:

"Oriental despotism therefore appears to lead to a legal absence of property. In fact, however, its foundation is tribal or common property, in most cases created by a combination of manufacturing and agriculture within the small community." (3)

This raises, however, the consequential question as to the historical precedence of the unity of village production versus that of common property, to which we will later return.

Bernier's view on the role of cities is still found acceptable at this point: "Asian history is a kind of undifferentiated unity between town and country."⁴ This is set out in contradistinction to the interdetermined roles of cities and private property in Greece and Rome; Asia for Marx knows only communal property in land, although private possession exists. Such possession, however, does not crucially alter what Marx terms 'the fundamental principle' upon which the Asiatic form of property is based: that the individual does not become independent of the community because of the self-sustaining unity of production.⁵ "In all these forms", Marx comments

"the basis of evolution is the reproduction of relations between individual and community assumed as given . . . Such evolution is therefore from the outset limited, but once the limits are transcended, decay and disintegration ensue." (6)

The stubborn fixity of tradition in the Asiatic form does not therefore allow the undermining of the community, and its economic premises.

It should be noted that Marx's reference point here has greatly changed from that of his 1853 writings. The initial explorations into Indian society had been largely in the context of British penetration there. Marx's investigations here, however, dwell upon modes of transition out of the stage of tribal society and the form of communal ownership. This accent at least minimally led Marx to ponder the principles underlying the origins of Asiatic property relations. Warfare

as the genetic basis of slavery and serfdom is among the more important of these premises, as it leads to a propertyless condition on the part of the subjugated groups. The new and modified form of property which results, however, has less of an effect on Asiatic property forms than elsewhere. This is because (1) landed property and agriculture do not predominate after the European fashion, and (2) the individual is already the "slave of that which embodies the unity of the community", such that enslavement via conquest does not alter the basic prior economic relationship.⁷

Whereas individual property ownership in Greece and Rome gave rise to the double relationship of citizen and proprietor, wherein the loss of property implies a significant change in economic status, Marx held that this was not the case in Asia. Here, rather, the coalescence of manufacturing and agriculture, town and country, means that no radical change in economic relations is likely as a result of individual deprivation. For similar reasons, neither exchange nor indebtedness have the capacity to significantly alter this specific mode of production. Marx terms this unalterable relations of the producer to the community, after a fashion, the "general slavery of the orient", noting however that this is "so considered only from the European point of view."⁸

The historical development of new forms of production via their contradiction with traditional property relations is one of the basic theses of the materialist conception of history. Although not specifically mentioned in reference to Asia, Marx discusses a number of possible avenues of dis-

solution of precapitalist modes of production, which we will later have occasion to consider. For our purposes, the most important aspects include the roles of usury, State treasuries, temples, and guilds, in the processes of circulation, credit, exchange, and capital formation.⁹ Marx does not however schematise the interrelationships in the structure of society very specifically. In one reference to the dialectic of the 'economic premise' of Asiatic communities, he notes only generally that 'pauperisation, etc' might have as an effect of this dialectic led to a change in the Asiatic form.¹⁰

Marx's uncertainty as to the exact nature of land tenure in India is reflected in his Tribune article of June 7 1858. Here two views of government ownership versus mere proprietorship over what is basically private property are drawn out, though mainly with the intention of examining the material interests of those espousing both doctrines.¹¹ It can be argued that this discussion is once again historically rooted in the debates over British rule in India, with reference therefore to relatively recent property relations, which, in Marx's eyes, did not necessarily hold 'from time immemorial'. On the other hand it is quite possible that Marx felt that his observations were equally relevant to the ancient period.

In essence the discussion of Asian society in Grundrisse functions as an extremely important aspect of Marx's attempts at historical periodisation at this time. The comparative generalisations evoked by his study of India then led Marx to the articulation of the broad evolutionary perspective

outlined in the 1859 preface. The net effect of the 1857-59 researches on India was the further shift in Marx's theoretical object, from 'Asiatic Society' to the 'Asiatic Mode of Production', reflecting an increasing concern with specifically Asian relations of production as the basis of the theory. In the latter years of his life, to the extent that Marx wrote on India, these relations provided the particular focus of his interest.

IV. Marx and Engels 1861-84

In the final decades of his life, Marx was primarily occupied with the exposition of capitalist production through the dual method of the critique of the categories of political economy and the representation of empirical evidence in support of his own conceptual schematic. Within this context, India served as the most ancient grounding for Marx's views on the overall evolution of human societies, and provided in many ways a geographical and historical basis for the method of historical anthropology. The principal emphasis on capitalism per se in this period altered somewhat Marx's notions of the economic structures of early societies. His later anthropological explorations tended to deepen these considerations, adding as well a dimension of historical movement. The result of these two influences was an important series of modifications in his views on the nature of Indian society.

In the notebooks later entitled 'Theories of Surplus-Value', written between 1861-63, Marx again carries forward Bernier's view of Indian cities as little more than army camps, explaining that "This is due to the form of landed

property which exists in India."¹ There is however a relationship of contradiction implicit in the view that land rent (the general form of surplus-value in Asia²) helps to pay the labour costs of city manufactures in Asia.³ This is likely a reference to contemporary history, and while a few manufacturers were able to reap great profits as a result of their monopoly positions, Marx believed that the majority of revenue accrued to "landlords and princes."⁴ The use of the term 'landlord' is clearly an allusion to the late eighteenth century zemindari system of increasingly private ownership of land, and not to the 'original unity' prior to the British entry into India.⁵ We will later argue that only the original sense of the term 'landlord', meaning one whose claim is primarily political rather than based upon economic ownership, is analytically viable in the early period.

The prehistory of capitalist accumulation is an enduring concern to Marx at this time. Here the distinction between hoarding and accumulation was an important one in describing the role of money in the early Indian economy:

"Capital is value which produces surplus-value, whereas in the building up of a hoard the crystallised form of exchange-value as such is the aim." (6)

This may have been a partial response to Jones' view that the backwardness of Asia was due to the lack of circulation of money.⁷ In addition to this supposition, Marx explained that

"If too large a part of surplus-labour is embodied directly in luxuries, then clearly, accumulation and the rate of reproduction will stagnate." (8)

The production of luxury goods is, in turn, determinate upon the evolution of the division of labour:

"The dearer the material (eg. gold), the less are machinery and the division of labour required for transforming it into articles of luxury." (9)

Such production thus hinders the separation of the worker from the conditions of labour, which for Marx is the 'real' basis of primitive accumulation.¹⁰

Marx adduces several other arguments relating to the general retardation of the Indian economy. These include the easy availability of land¹¹, the limited requirements of the population (related to climate)¹², overconsumption by the rich on art, religion, and public works,¹³ and the diminished importance of usury, so vital in the separation of European producers from their conditions of production.¹⁴

The method of analysis utilised by Marx here is one which comprehends precapitalist modes of production through the anatomical (structural) dissection of capitalist production. Historically this leads to the opinion that the transformation of the product into a commodity forms the starting-point of capital.¹⁵ Marx's most precise point of emphasis vis-à-vis Indian economics was to follow from his resulting generalisation of forms of exchange:

"It is precisely these forms that are alone of importance when the question is the specific character of a mode of social production." (16)

Capital continues this trend of innovation upon previous themes, wherein India is largely evaluated explicitly in terms of its relationship to the development of the European economic system. We will consider Marx's excerpts again in the order in which they were written, rather than that in which they appeared.¹⁷ Continuing his previous emphasis upon forms of exchange, Marx presents the deduction that

the transformation of products into commodities results from exchange between, not within, the primitive communities.¹⁸ Subsequent to this, but without their mutual consideration, Marx notes the development of a 'trading spirit' and mercantile capital among nomadic peoples, adding however that commerce "leaves the groundwork of Asiatic production untouched."¹⁹ Earlier views carried forward here include the basic form of Asiatic production as the unity of manufactures and small-scale agriculture, in combination with the village community built upon common ownership of land, and ruled by a "ruthless and despotic" state extracting rent/tax as both landlord and sovereign.²⁰

In the first volume of Capital, probably Marx's most carefully prepared manuscript, we find an extensive elaboration of his views on India. The reciprocal determinations of exchange and commodity production now occupy the central position in Marx's thoughts on the subject. Firstly the commodity relationship is explicitly defined:

"Whoever directly satisfies his wants with the produce of his own labour creates, indeed, use-values, but not commodities. To become a commodity a product must be transferred to another, whom it will serve as a use-value, by means of exchange." (21)

Throughout this text Marx attempts to apply this principle to the historical development of Indian production. It is necessary to consider several passages together in order to exemplify Marx's intentions most clearly:

"In the primitive Indian community there is social division of labour, without the production of commodities." (22)

"In the ancient Asiatic and other modes of production, we find that the conversion of products into commodities and therefore the conversion of men into producers

of commodities, holds a subordinate place, which, however, increases in importance as the primitive communities approach nearer and nearer to their dissolution." (23)

"(In) those small and extremely ancient Indian communities . . . the chief part of the products is destined for direct use by the community itself, and does not take the form of a commodity. Hence, production here is independent of that division of labour brought about, in Indian society as a whole, by means of the exchange of commodities. It is the surplus alone that becomes a commodity, and a portion of even that, not until it has reached the hands of the state, into whose hands from time immemorial a certain quantity of these products has found its way in the shape of rent in kind." (24)

Several tentative conclusions may be inferred here about the nature of Marx's beliefs at this time. (1) Little if any commodity production takes place within the villages, although with no historical periodisation on Marx's part we cannot be sure whether he meant that in ancient times there was almost no commodity production at all, or that more recently this was largely confined to the cities. (2) The second quotation above would lead us to introduce a historical element here: commodity production in India increases as we approach the present. If it occurred in ancient periods, it took place in the towns, not in the villages. (3) Exchange between urban centres seems evident, mainly though not necessarily exclusively based on the extraction of surplus by the state from the villages. The division of labour in the villages (the twelve-part jajmani system), and that between regions and/or cities, are radically dissimilar as a result. This implies a greater facility of communication between the cities than in general between the villages and particular cities.

That a division of labour was articulated in the society

as a whole would seem to indicate, that Marx deduced a dynamic relationship between town and country, which would in his model constitute the groundwork for the development of other social contradictions:

"The foundation of every division of labour that is well-developed and brought about by the exchange of commodities, is the separation of town and country. It may be said, that the whole economic history of society is summed up in the movement of this antithesis."

(25)

The omission of a village emulation of this larger social division of labour Marx explains by the unchanging market in the villages, as well as the impossibility of more than several individuals combining to work on a single task.

The position and function of castes in this social formation are also given more extensive treatment in Capital. Marx associate two historical stages with the formation of both castes and guilds, explaining that hereditary trades tended to 'petrify' into castes,

" . . . or whenever definite historical conditions beget in the individual a tendency to vary in a manner incompatible with the nature of caste, to ossify them into guilds. Castes and guilds arise from the action of the same natural law, that regulates the differentiation of plants and animals into species and varieties, except that, when a certain degree of development has been reached, the heredity of castes and the exclusiveness of guilds are ordained as a law of society." (26)

Marx fails here to provide any further distinguishing characteristics for the elaboration of modes of transition into guilds, versus those appropriate for castes, other than the fact that their nature is clearly different. It is evident, however, that guilds also had an inhibiting effect on European economic development, as they both resisted the encroachment of merchant capital, and excluded the further growth of the division of labour within the workshop.²⁷

Caste itself Marx tends to view as representative of the power of the community over the individual, in turn a function of the power of nature over human development:

"The Hindu peasant will perish with hunger beside a fat bullock. The prescriptions of superstition, which appear cruel to the individual, are conservative for the community; and the preservation of labouring cattle secures the power of cultivation and the sources of future life and wealth." (28)

Engels' *Anti-Dühring*, written between 1876-78, dwelt at some length on Indian conditions, particularly with regard to the question of the original universality of "common ownership of land among all civilised peoples."²⁹ Following Marx, Engels holds to the notion that external exchange through commodity production was the factor most tending to undermine the ancient communes, through the creation of inequalities of property where none, presumably, had existed before to any meaningful extent. Engels is at this point undecided as to whether the communities or the state are the owners of the land³⁰; he mentions, however, the unity of individual rulers into a ruling class in the context of the 'Oriental despot', and maintains the thesis of the responsibility of the ruler for irrigation.³¹ Marx had relegated this phenomenon to a relatively minor position in *Capital*, noting merely that

"One of the material bases of the power of the State over the small disconnected producing organisms in India, was the regulation of water supply." (32)

Marx's concurrent studies of Maxim Kovalevsky and Indian legal history allowed him to generate a loose framework for the periodisation of the dissolution of the early forms of common property. Kovalevsky had outlined a series

of stages for the decomposition of what he called the 'kin communities'. From its original wholly common status, the soil became alienated into family communal parcels, whence unequal inheritance and the claims of de facto possession (especially by political leaders) begin the process of the separation of communal into individual holdings.³³

The law codes of Manu, Yajñavalkya, and Nārada successively encompass approximately five hundred years of Indian history, from 100 to 600 AD, although Manu may be several centuries older. In the progression from Manu to Nārada, Marx noted the evolution of two phenomena: the gradual individualisation of wealth, and the surrender of administrative functions and powers from the communal to the state organisations. The latter process was exemplified in the transmutation of kin wergild into a fine paid to the state.³⁴ In the case of property, an increasing recognition of private ownership/occupation, and the concomitantly greater ease of disposition of lands, indicated for Marx the trend towards greater individualisation.

The negation of the kinship principle explicitly signified by this procedure was as well linked to the existence of the Brahmin caste. Kovalevsky had not dwelt on the antithesis of caste and commune per se. This view Marx was to largely apprehend in Morgan's work. The intermediary role of the family, between communal and individual stages, had attracted Kovalevsky's attention. But the study of the later law codes provided Marx with the view that land gifts to priests "are the oldest kinds of disposition of family property."³⁵ Kovalevsky as well suggested additional possible

causes for the dissolution of the rural communes, including the organisation of the religious caste and that of the tribal political leadership, as well as the course of emigration to the towns, all of which tended to undermine the primordial kinship bonds. But Marx had no occasion to do more than to annotate these assertions. The most important contribution of Kovalevsky was his alignment in theory of the position of the caste system with the genesis of individual property, which led Marx to exclaim that "The priestly pack thus plays the chief role in the process of individualisation of family property."³⁶

It was perhaps these initial forays into Indian legal history that led Marx to mention in a letter to Vera Zasulich that "The history of the decadence of the primitive communities still remains to be done . . . Up to now only meager outlines have been provided."³⁷ In this same correspondence (of which Marx wrote several drafts), the term 'archaic formation' is used, divided into 'communities of the more archaic type' and 'agricultural or rural communes'. The latter stage here represents for Marx the transition from common to private property, the same form, in other words, as had been previously subsumed under the Asiatic mode of production category. This letter has led Hal Draper to speculate as to whether Marx in fact intended to displace the 'Asiatic' concept with the more analytic 'archaic mode'. We will return shortly to this proposal.

In the years 1881-83 Marx undertook to explore both the structure and history of the Indian village community. To this end he excerpted the works of Lewis Henry Morgan,

John Budd Phear, Henry Sumner Maine, and a number of authors of lesser renown.³⁸ These notes are now available as The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx. Engels drew very heavily upon the notes on Morgan made by Marx in the Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State (1884). The increasing concretisation of Marx's views on India, however, provided for several significant changes in his prior perspective.³⁹

Maine, Morgan, and Phear all indicated to Marx new means of comprehending the origin and growth of caste. Morgan suggested that the 'civilised' Brahmins, at the time of their invasion of India, reflected their contradiction with the indigenous peoples at the level of marriage systems, restricting therefore entry into their own elite.⁴⁰ Morgan's idea of the gens as the original tribal grouping provided for the establishment of the belief that the hierarchy of caste was directly opposed to the primitive communities with their basis of common ownership.⁴¹

This latter notion has several implications for our discussion of the evolution of Marx's views. Morgan explained that the idea of caste arose when men could no longer marry within the same gens, but sought to marry others of similar rank in other gens. This presupposes already some inequalities of property and social status. Marx noted in fact that "The property classes subserved the useful purpose of breaking up the gentes . . ."⁴² If the gens represented the original unity of the Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin-speaking peoples, as Morgan asserted, then caste became the institutionalised Indian variant of the mode of dissolution of this formation, and was itself based on the initial development of a lack

of equilibrium in property use and/or possession.

Both Phear and Maine lent weight to the thesis of the Brahmanical origins of the philosophy of caste. Noting Phear's belief in the contemporary nineteenth century non-existence of the Ksatriya caste, Marx explicitly underscores Phear's conclusion: "Probably the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra (were) mere Utopian class distinctions of a pre-historic More."⁴³ In his notes on Maine, Marx in turn pays close attention to the view that

"Really only one of these castes really survives in India, that of the Brahmins, and it is strongly suspected that the whole literary theory of caste, which is of Brahmin origin, is based on the existence of the Brahmin caste alone." (44)

An historical dimension, however, can be attached to this notion through the understanding that all trades and professions ("now popularly called castes", notes Marx) were and are hereditary, such that the division of the entire population by occupation may have been thought quite ancient by Marx.⁴⁵

Lawrence Krader has noted that the most important divergence here from the views of caste in Capital is to be seen in Morgan's assertion of the purely social origins of the caste system, in distinction to Marx's largely organic metaphor of evolutionary description. There is no way of knowing, of course, the extent to which Marx might have altered his views in this regard. What seems somewhat more vivid, however, is that Marx now tended more to follow Maine's notion of the role of the Oriental monarch, who was asserted to have done little more than collect taxes, with a scant ability to determine or alter local customs, and with thus

only an extremely limited, 'despotic' ability.⁴⁶ Historically the most notable agent of the mutation of convention was for Maine the Brahmins as a caste:

"The truth is that the one solvent of local and domestic usage . . has not been the command of the Sovereign but the supposed command of the deity. In India the influence of the Brahmanical treatises on mixed law and religion in sapping the old customary law of the country has always been great." (47)

However such views might have led Marx to modify his earlier positions (which lies largely within the realm of conjecture), it does seem evident that he accepted the opposition of caste as a political relation to the antecedent primitive communitarian relations. This does not, however, explain the origins of the state in India, nor the relation of this political form to caste, whose conventions are more social than political. Marx decidedly held to the view that private property evolved out of tribal property; his correction of Maine's contrary assertion demonstrates this incontrovertibly.⁴⁸ How an Indian state might have progressed through mainly private possession of property Marx was unable to speculate. Appropriation based upon primarily political rather than economic relations was somewhat anomalous to his method. A similar problem is evident in the case of the relations of property and political power in the Soviet Union.

Marx thought that the most significant and enduring form of caste lay in the institutionalised form of the jajmani division of labour. The conservative character of this system was obvious to Marx; what he lacked were the historical materials enabling him to relate this to the division

of labour in the society as a whole, and thus to assess the relation between both of these and the rise and status of political control.

We can therefore agree with Krader that in the articulation of dissimilar forms of the division of labour in the villages and in the country as a whole, Marx implicitly acknowledges the vital contradiction between town and country. This exists in addition to the fact that the jajmani system to some degree discloses the existence of class oppositions within the village.⁴⁹ Formally the same modes of social negation therefore exist for Marx in India, as are the basis of other class societies. This understanding constitutes the crux of the renovations in Marx's later views on India. Krader's assertion that Marx now believed that public (and especially water) works "played no important role in the political economy of traditional India" remains more problematical, since Marx seems to concur with Phear's emphasis on the central importance of water supply, while noting as well Maine's view of the sovereign as a disinterested tax collector.⁵⁰ Evidently, then, we are left with Marx posing a question for which the historical research of his own period could provide only the most nebulous of responses: why does the 'unprogressive character' of village life appear to be sub specie aeternitatis, wherein the germination of embryonic antagonisms is brought about neither by social nor metabolic, natural, processes?

Engels' later works provide no specific answer to this enquiry. Although a position has often been found for India in the general evolutionary scheme offered in the Origin of

the Family, Private Property, and the State; there is no specific mention of an 'Asiatic mode of production' here. This significant lacuna has led some scholars to believe that Marx and/or Engels intended to abandon the category of the 'AMP', in favor perhaps of a more historically sophisticated and geographically specific analytical subdivision based on the new evidence which both had assimilated. Engels even (tangentially) considers the nature of possible modes of dissolution of the condition of 'original common ownership of land' in his Dialectics of Nature (1873-86), asserting that a depletion in surplus land led to a decline in communal ownership.⁵¹

But if the category of the 'AMP' is not expressly brought forward by Engels, neither is it explicitly rejected. It is worth bearing in mind that Engels in fact primarily elaborated upon Morgan's ideas in a theoretical manner, adding little of empirical significance and usually following the emphasis provided in Marx's notes on Ancient Society.

We can conclude our considerations to this point by rendering unambiguously what has been alluded to above: if only rarely does the notion of the 'Asiatic Mode of Production' share a similar conceptual status as that of the ancient, feudal, and capitalist modes of production, is this adequate evidence for its inclusion as the major category for a consideration of early Indian political economy using Marx's method of analysis? Most later adherents of Marx have answered this question in the affirmative, although many have fallaciously rejected the formal designation of the nomenclature but retained much of its content.

It is clear that the only valid criterion for the maintenance of any analytic category is that of explanation and elucidation. Our intention here is not to hold Marx 'responsible' for the errors of those who take inspiration from his work, nor indeed specifically to determine whether or not he was 'right' or 'wrong' in all aspects of his theory. -We have already seen that the paucity of historical evidence available to Marx and Engels would make this a futile and meaningless castigation through the use of the enormous advantage of hindsight.

Such criticisms are only of substantial value when they are directed towards continuing errors in modern analysis, carried into the present out of a reverential sense of textual dogmatism. Hence much of the problem with contemporary Marxist examinations of this area lies not in the use of historical scholarship, but in the abuse of the theoretical paradigm guiding the historical investigation. If the genuine heuristic capability of the 'AMP' category is to be revealed, this can only occur through more elaborate historical examination. We will now examine the extent to which this attitude has gained favourability in recent years.

V. The Concept of the 'Asiatic Mode of Production' since Marx

In briefly situating their research on India within the larger context of Marx' and Engels' lifetime of historical scholarship, we can immediately perceive the tentative and embryonic character of their assertions and 'conclusions' in this area. Until very late in their lives, neither author seriously intended to examine the means of internal transformation of any (feudalism is a partial exception) of the

precapitalist modes of production. This was because their earliest interest was in the impact of imperial capitalism upon less-developed economies. To analyse this required mainly a structural knowledge of the earlier formations, largely as they existed at the time of the impact of capitalism, since the latter immediately began to radically alter the traditional lines of development. Equally, the exemplification of the historicity of capitalism formed part of the purpose for the exploration of older civilisations, in countering the dominant ideological notions of the epoch. These intentions can thus be best understood in terms of both the structure of contemporary debates, and the internal development of Marx's analytic paradigm, itself an outgrowth of the intellectual milieu of the nineteenth century.

While the further elaboration of the historical identity of the capitalist mode of production remains - in new forms - a vital activity in the present, this has been increasingly dissociated from the examination of earlier societies and forms of production. Nonetheless, the past century has still gradually seen a concretisation of the relationship between Marxist theory and empirical studies of nonwestern societies.

This intellectual accretion, however, has been very often negated by the severe reification of many of Marx's 'weakest' categories, often taking the form of an "endless reconstruction of hypothetical precapitalist formations."¹ This process represents a frequent devolution to theoretical positions anterior to Marx, thus reproducing the earlier problematics (in varying degrees of disguise) already encompassed and at least partially surpassed in Marx's work. It is to

the course of this development that we must now turn.

Plekhanov, in his 1908 work entitled Fundamental Problems of Marxism, was among the first to assert that Marx's reading of Morgan had led him to reject his 1859 position, where the 'AMP' was held to be both temporally, and logically the foundation for the slave/ancient mode of production. Implying that Marx later conceived both types as emanating into distinctive forms based upon their geographical differences, Plekhanov emphasised that both were forms derived from the earlier clan form of organisation.² Although this does not constitute a specific rejection of the 'AMP' category³, Plekhanov underlines the provisional character of the application of Marx's categories to early historical periods, while retaining the view that Marx's general ideas "embrace the entire cultural history of humanity."⁴ Karl Kautsky in 1887 even returns to the earlier terminology in referring to "the ruling aristocracy of the Oriental despotism."⁵ This position is most akin to that of Marx in the early 1850's.

The location of the world's first nominally socialist revolution in Russia strongly incited new debates on the nature of the Asiatic mode. No longer mediated by distance and analytic curiosity, but propelled by powerful new forces and conditions, the discussions in the USSR between 1920-32 (initiated by Hungarian Marxists in the review Kommunist) were more often tactical and directly politically rather than historically motivated. Whatever conclusions that might have been drawn from this intercourse were also subverted in an equally practical manner. Demonstrating his

characteristic lack of discrimination, Stalin had the majority of the participants on both sides of the debate shot or destroyed in forced-labour camps. A rigidly mechanical five-stage evolutionary schema was the sacrosanct response of dogma to the theoretical aspects of the 1928 and 1931 Tiflis and Leningrad conferences. The PC-S-F-C-S formula held, for clearly political as opposed to analytical reasons, no place for the 'Asiatic mode', and for the twenty years following the publication of Dialectical and Historical Materialism (1936)⁶, this concept has maintained a largely illicit status among Marxist scholars.⁷

Ironically, it was one of those participants of the 1931 Leningrad conference whose views had been rejected - Karl Wittfogel - who chose to use the terms of the debate itself to attack the entire tradition that had any concern with the application of the paradigm in question. Wittfogel initiated a critique of Marx which clearly hypostasises the 1853 writings on India.⁸ The political goals of Oriental Despotism (1957) are fairly obvious: the elaboration of Lenin's 1907 warning that an 'Asiatic restoration' was possible in the USSR.⁹ Theoretically this was accomplished through a regression to the perspectives of Montesquieu, despite Wittfogel's attempt to incorporate historical scholarship on Asia since Marx.¹⁰ While the initial effect of this work (besides securing its author a position among cold-warrior American academics) was only to further confuse the indecisiveness of Soviet writers as to whether Asian societies were based on slavery or feudalism, the debate itself began to blossom in new forms, stimulated by revolutionary struggles throughout the Third World after

1945, and the further destalinisation of Marxist philosophy.

Wittfogel strongly asserts the analytic validity of three categories which we find to be either merely provisional or clearly rejected by Marx:

- (1) the determinant role of water control ('hydraulic society') in Asian development generally
- (2) the development of both the division(s) of labour and the state from this phenomenon; and
- (3) the 'permanent' existence of a managerial state 'stronger than society', occasioning the development of only two classes, the rulers and the ruled. (11)

The latter view would appear to indicate an overly serious acceptance of Marx's metaphorical 'generalised slavery' in the Orient. Wittfogel's own specialisation in the history of China in turn aided his propensity to universalise the first two positions, since politically water control (to prevent flooding and to exact a tax upon goods in circulation) was of much greater importance there than in India. To be sure, Wittfogel later altered his description of Asian governments to 'agro-managerial' or 'agro-despotic' after frequent criticism, but he argues that his earlier and later concepts are interchangeable with the general 'Oriental despotism' hypothesis of Marx' and Engels' early formulations.¹²

Such dubious and hesitant theorising would seem to indicate that Wittfogel himself may have echoed the intention of the 'official' position in the 1931 discussions, which proclaimed that what was "really important was to unmask it (the Asiatic theory -G.C) politically and not to establish the 'pure truth' as to whether the 'Asiatic mode of production' existed or not."¹³ For Wittfogel, however, theoretical rearmament in the polemical arena involved a return to an

earlier ideological mask, now in the guise of a new demystification. This severe tendency to allow political considerations to determine theoretical deployments continues to the present, evidence at least of the perceived vitality of the issues involved.

In the past twenty years this debate within Marxism has complexified to a considerable degree, such that a schematic portrayal of the various 'wings' of interpretation may prove useful at this point. The cataloguing of views given in Figure One is intended neither to be exhaustive nor even internally comprehensive, and should serve rather to indicate the general direction and emphasis of recent research. The category of the 'AMP' has itself fared rather poorly in later discussion, nor has 'feudalism' enjoyed any considerable success in analytically displacing the 'AMP' label. Both politically (as a result of its ostracisation within the tradition) and empirically (given the impact of subsequent historical research), 'Asiatic' as a descriptive term for the mode of production associated with the social formation built upon the Indian village commune, has been increasingly rejected.

Various reasons have been specifically asserted for this dismissal. The majority of these revolve around its 'unscientific' (or correlatively, 'ideological') character. The validity of the label 'Asiatic' remains largely outside of our present concerns. It was applied by Marx to the Indian variant of the system of self-sustaining village production because he believed that it first appeared, and was most enduring, in that geographical region.

FIGURE ONE

Schematic Outline of the Analytic Emphasis of EuropeanThebrists in the 'Asiatic Mode' debate over India, 1960-78

I. <u>Accept 'AMP' category</u>	II. <u>Reject 'AMP' category</u>
a) largely using 1853 analysis, eg. irrigation, despotic state power, 'stagnation' V-Dh-S-Ma-G(1970)	a) following Engels: gens/tribe Te-V/T-G(1965)
b) with Engels' interpolations G(1970)	b) rejecting Engels W-Me-Ba-Ro
c) with major new categories T	c) new categories Te-Ba-H/H-Dr-Me-Ro- A-C-R-M-Ru-B-W
d) historical emphasis D-T-Ma	d) historical emphasis A-Te-Me-B-W-Ro
e) reject 'successive forms' G-Dh-Ma	e) reject 'successive forms' Ba-Ro
f) emphasise 'transitional form' T-G	f) historical materialism not applicable Ba-Me
g) 'feudal variant', but not central characteristic G-Ma	g) emphasise 'transitional character' Te-Me-Dr-H/H
	h) retain 'Asiatic social formation' M-Dr

Key to Authors:

A=Anderson
B=Banu
Ba=Baudrillard
C=Chesneaux
D=Dambuyant
Dh=Dhoquois
Dr=Draper

G=Godelier
H/H=Hindess/Hirst
M=Melekechvili
Ma=Mandel
Me=Meillassoux
R='Rinascita'
Ro=Rodinson

Ru=Ruben
S=Struve
T=Tokei
Te=Terray
V/T=Vitkin/Terakopian
V=Vidal-Naquet
W=Wittfogel

If the criteria concerning the validity of such categories can only be heuristic, three major areas must be implicated within such a concept: (1) structure, the habitual or relatively long-lasting; (2) process, the general patterns of social change; and (3) the causal relations linking the first two phenomena, for particular periods and where historical generalisation is warranted. History is the principal category of Marx's analysis generally; it is the 'reading' of the ceaseless flux of human events. It also represents freedom for Marx, in contrast to the natural determination ('necessita') of man's fate.¹⁴ Neglect of history in the overemphasis of structure invites the reification of both the analytic categories and specific historical periods. Despite this historical foundation in Marxism, inhibition has been frequent in the acceptance of new conditions which alter all of Marx's paradigms (the human ontology¹⁵, the mode of analysis, and the theory of proletarian revolution). It is a vulgar and apologetic Marxism which places political considerations ahead of the wish to doubt and to preserve intellectual integrity. Some of this confusion results from a lack of clear demarcation between the various paradigms, especially in epistemologically reducing the second and third paradigms above to allow a given end to justify any means.

At the other pole is the theoreticist extremism of those like Hindess and Hirst, and others inspired by Louis Althusser's Reading Capital. The linguistic fetishism ('structure', 'determinant', 'dominant', etc.) prevalent here is the result of the rejection of history.¹⁶ The deductive logic based

upon prior texts is in turn largely the source of this general attitude.¹⁷

What analytic evolution that has taken place in this debate has moved in several directions. Among these, attempts at historical periodisation have been, for the reasons outlined above, the least well-explored. Partial responsibility for this immense lacuna must be attributed to Marx. We agree here with Mandel that the category of the 'AMP' was intended to describe India both in ancient times and at the advent of capitalist production.¹⁸ This is indeed one of its most serious deficiencies. Three basic positions have developed from this interpretation:

- (1) the 'Asiatic mode' was one of several forms of the primitive community.(19)
- (2) the 'Asiatic mode' was a 'transitional form', either between class and preclass societies, or primitive communal/slave modes of production.
(20)
- (3) the 'Asiatic mode' developed out of the primitive commune, but retains as a concept the status of a separate and independent mode of production. (21)

Most of the theorising of this issue has not been historically informed, and constitutes mainly an analytic reconstruction of Marx's categories. This represents a reversal (to a large extent) of Marx's method, which rigorously sought historical 'data' which, treated skeptically, then provided the grounds for theoretical reformulations. Such misreadings of Marx are perhaps more prevalent in the 'AMP' debate than in any other single area of Marxist interpretation. There have been, however, some interesting attempts to identify the role and skeletal outline of a dialectic of society for this mode of production.

Conceptually the dialectic functions as a mode of

analysis of historical movement, although the term is often used empirically to describe a particular form of social contradiction, situated specifically in the disjunction between modes of production and their respective social relations. In this thesis we will explore this relationship through an elaboration of philosophical specificity in combination with a more rigorous periodisation of early Indian history than has been usually provided.

Epistemological considerations of this nature (the clarification of the categories by which historical 'data' are ordered) obviously do involve the anterior theorisation of the categories upon which we hope to build, or which may be altered or rejected in the face of recent historical evidence. This remains a separate activity from the 'testing' of analytic models with historical 'facts' (themselves interpretive theoretical objects as soon as they enter the realm of discourse) in only one sense. The internal consistency/coherence of the theory can be isolated and discussed at the epistemological level. We might for instance choose to examine the relationship between forces and relations of production, in the general model termed the 'materialist conception of history'. The gravest errors result, however, when this is confused with the activity of judging the application of a theory, which can only occur at the historical level of investigation. This separation has often been collapsed, through remaining within the limited discourse of Marx when discussing the 'AMP', rather than treating Marx's perspective as historically relative. As a result it is difficult to illuminate many of the aspects

of the modern debate prior to the historical and philosophical enquiries shortly to be elaborated. Some theorisation of the 'topography' of the dialectic is however possible, bearing these problems in mind.

Firstly, many authors situate the principal activity of the dialectic (what should therefore be our main object of historical study) at the level of relations of production.²² This is in basic agreement with the general direction of Marx's later research: the analysis of the structure and historical development of the caste system. The articulation of classes in the 'AMP' was the greatest lacuna in Marx's work on India. This is the gist of Wittfogel's substantive criticisms, and remains a central problem. Marx isolates two sets of the division of labour in India, not merely one.²³ The most enduring is the jajmani type within the villages, juxtaposed to that prevalent in India as a whole, given the influence of both regional variance and urban production.

Within the village the individual fails to become independent of the commune, accounting for the tenacity of this form of social organisation.²⁴ Membership in the clan defines property, and vice-versa, much as citizenship and property were two inseparable logical poles in the Greek city-states.²⁵ Thus 'production', 'exchange', etc., were inherently tied to the kinship system in its caste form, and within this milieu are theoretically (because practically) inseparable. This is however, we will argue, no rationale for the rejection of such terms as 'mode of production' or 'relations of production', in analysing this period.

Such a position tends to confuse class consciousness with objective class relations, the activity itself with ancient conceptualisations about it. The vital question raised here, however, is the nature of the interrelationship of class activities and those which are rooted in preclass (ie. tribal) social relations.²⁶

Exchange acts as the principal agent of transformation for this internal division of labour²⁷, because the "reproduction of presupposed relations" comes to be altered by production for exchange value (not to be confused with the exchange of products taken as surplus but produced as use-values), but supported by production for use.²⁸ Conquest, impoverishment, and the growth of population (which is itself contingent on production) may alter the communal relationship, but 'in the last instance' production for exchange is for Marx determinant. Exchange gives rise eventually to a merchant class, but the ability of mercantile capital to enter into the realm of production in India is hindered by both the rural caste and urban caste and guild forms of restrictions upon the division of labour.²⁹

On the basis of the centrality of the unity 'exchange/commodity production' in the dissolution of earlier modes of production and their relations, an elucidation of the factors inhibiting this process is crucial. Neither usury nor commerce for Marx in and of themselves alter the productive structure of the villages³⁰; Bernier's views on the merely parasitic character of Indian towns apparently precluded the exploration on Marx's part of the effects of commerce, usury, commodity production, etc., upon class and

capital formations there. Thus the role of towns in the uprooting of village life (central in Europe³¹) remained unassessed in relation to Asian development. In turn this is reflected in Marx's confusion as to the role of the state: if interventionist, it must play some role in the organisation of production. If merely 'tributary', on the other hand, a primarily political relationship between court and country would predominate.³²

It is clear that Marx felt that there were many different forms of primitive communal property (Roumanian, Slavonic, Indian, etc.)³³. Abstraction from the common characteristics of these gives us the category of a 'primitive-communal mode of production'. Otherwise we may speak only of concrete social formations or particular types of production. In the Indian variant, the villages coexist with the state, which is why Marx discusses the 'Asiatic' rather than the 'primitive-communal' mode of production. From village production "it is the surplus alone that becomes a commodity."³⁴ The main impetus for the 'primitive accumulation of capital' - the divorce of the producer from the means of production - only becomes possible if the village communities break down, giving rise to peasant day-labour or organised urban production.³⁵

Private property in land and goods was for Marx another principal dissolvent of the communal way of life. This process might occur as part of the 'natural' growth of gens into separate families, as Morgan had suggested. Integration of slavery into the economy, or the forcible acquisition of goods by an aristocracy might also hasten this development.

All of these potential modes of dissolution require further exploration in the Indian context. Especially important here is the relation between changes in communal forms of property and the process of exchange.

The state in India for Marx reinforces the communal relations, both by metaphorically reproducing the communal unity 'at a higher level' (and encouraging the real unity as the basis of its own revenue), and through this myth by creating the theory of state ownership of land on the basis of de facto political possession of the land. To these specific circumstances we must add Marx's general thoughts on the determination of the form of the state:

"The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers determines the relationship of rulers to ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and in turn acts upon it as a determinant. But on it is based the entire formation of the economic community growing out of the productive relations themselves, and therewith its specific political form likewise. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers - a relationship whose actual form always naturally corresponds to a definite stage of development in the ways and means of labour and hence its social productive power - which holds the innermost secret, the hidden foundation of the entire social structure and hence also of the political form of the sovereignty-dependency relationship, in short, of the specific form of the state in each case. (36)

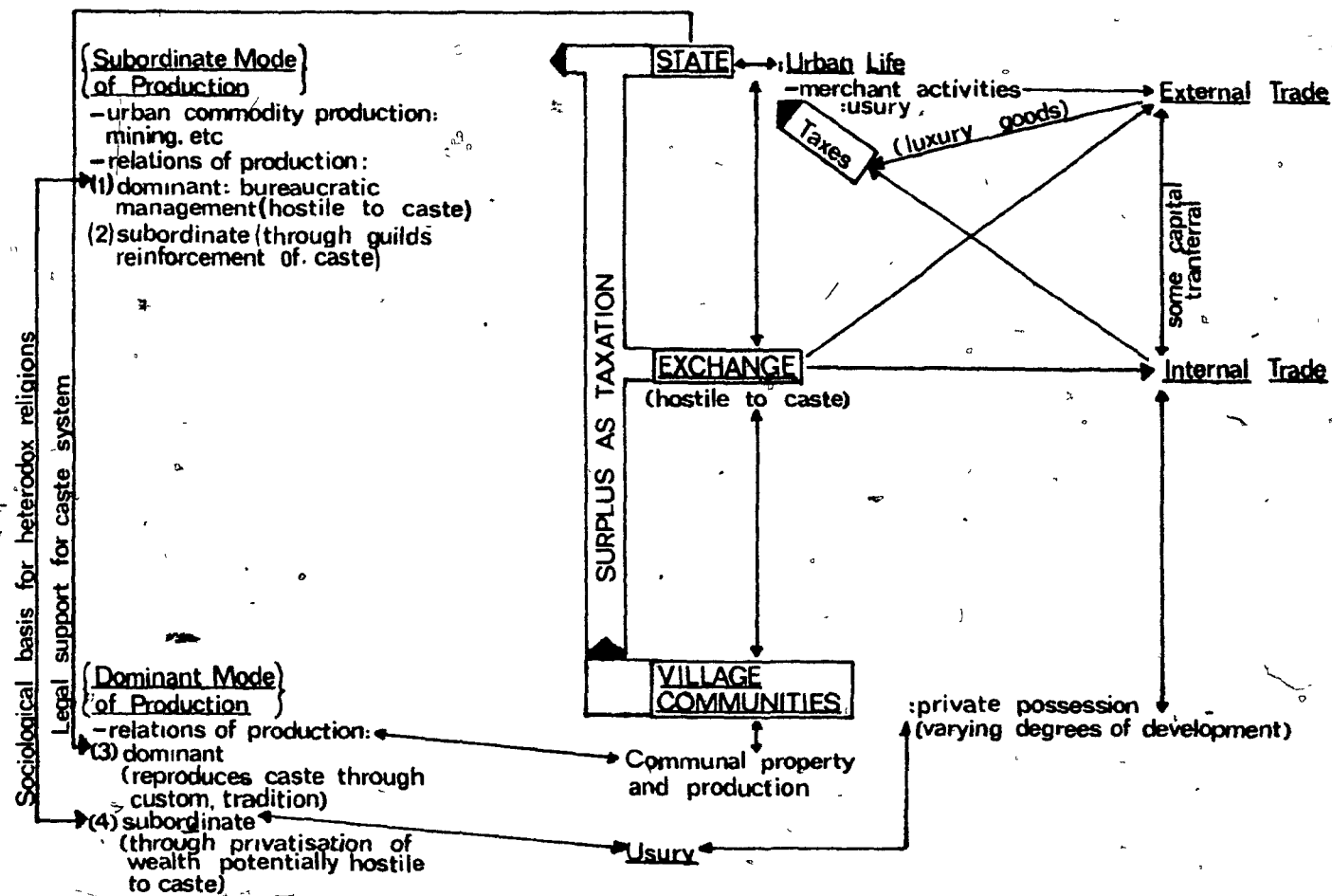
Here the tributary character of the Indian state ostensibly acts doubly in reproducing the productive relations which underly its origins, as well as the attitude of the state towards those relations themselves, and thus towards any factors which might tend to undermine them.

But is this the case? Certainly, not all relations of production were supportive of the caste tradition, and we must indeed determine how this process evolved. In fact

we will argue that the institution of caste grows out of a particular configuration of circumstances. In this process we will demonstrate that a strong state was in many senses antithetical to the maintenance of the caste division of labour, although in some of its policies it was directly supportive of the system. Figure Two provides a working model of productive relations during a period of strong centralised state power, for example the Mauryan epoch, which will be examined in much greater detail. We will specifically utilise Mauryan conditions in order to speculate as to the possible avenues of development of this formation. It is however a conditio sine qua non to recognise that the Indian state was never again to play a similar role in ancient Indian life as it did in this period. This is a major error in, for example, Wittfogel's analysis.

India varies to a great degree historically in the reproduction of what we have termed the 'dominant' and 'sub-ordinate' modes of production, and it is this phenomenon which most requires further illumination. Caste as a system of productive relations has been primarily reproduced through the longevity of its bastion, the village community. If tradition is predominant in the evolution of such societies³⁷ (and this phrase itself requires much explanation), then the theoretical evolution of caste is the probable site for evaluating the potential movement of the Indian dialectic. In other words, if caste plays a major role in the overall underdevelopment of Indian society, then indications of alternate potential directions of movement in the system may allow us to assess the degree to which such a growth was invariably necessary, and what circumstances might have

FIGURE TWO: Schematic Exploration of the Early Mauryan Social Formation



EXPLANATION OF FIGURE TWO

Figure Two has as its central problematic an attempt to explain how caste relations are reproduced, and correspondingly what forces were operant in undermining this.

Following Marx, commodity-exchange per se is assumed to be a major force in rationalising caste relations to those of class. Accumulation through trade as well as both rural and urban usury are assumed to lead to private possession of wealth, which is in contradiction to caste when the benefits flow disproportionately to castes of a lower status, ie. Vaiśyas as merchants.

Two modes of production are posited for the Mauryan period. Agriculture remains the dominant pursuit of the majority of the population. Mauryan support for varnaśrāmadharma (the laws of caste and life-stage), as well as the deliberate caste/class policy in the foundation of new settlements, leads to the supposition that the dominant relations of production here were supportive of the overall system. In the case of individual appropriation through landlordship, however, this is only true for upper-caste lords.

State intervention through commodity exchange and bureaucratic administration is held to constitute a subordinate mode of production, in which the rationalising tendencies of the bureaucracy are in themselves antithetical to caste relations. If the hierarchy of administration, however, coincided closely with that of caste, this would not be the case. Guild exclusivity is presumed to be supportive of caste. When the state is less active this aspect becomes dominant; later guilds are even more orthodox.

altered it. Thus the relations which reproduce caste and those which are antithetical (largely seen in terms of religion, politics, and production) are the consideration which must serve as our starting point.

Fundamental to this approach is an appreciation of the unique specificity of the varna/jāti relationships, which dictate Indian social behavior in so many diverse ways. The institutionalised caste system peculiar to India has had other historical precedents, but none so deep, pervasive, and influential in their effects as that which developed Hinduism as its structural cornerstone. Given its epochal character, it seems somewhat odd that the 'AMP' has so often been emphasised as a 'transitional' form, with implications that are either patronising, indicate a merely temporary historical condition, or both. Marx felt that caste was an intermediary stage between tribal and class societies, but this does not necessarily mean that either the 'Mode of Production' in the generic sense, or the mode of production dominant there in the specific sense, can be termed 'transitional'. Surely in this case almost every form is transitional, since continual flux is the basis of movement in history.

Furthermore, if the 'AMP' is not even a 'base' category, as Ferenc ~~Turkei~~ has asserted, then Marx's method of social analysis must surely succumb under the impact of such an enduring form remaining inexplicable in terms of its key categories.³⁸ Here, clearly, only historical examination can provide any resolution to much of the substance of the modern debate.

FOOTNOTES

- I. A Brief History of the Concept of 'Oriental Despotism'
- 1) Werner Jaeger, Aristotle (Oxford: University Press, 1967), p. 259 n.2 (frg.658); see also the Politics, 1313b-1315b.
- 2) Cf. Lawrence Krader, The Asiatic Mode of Production (Assen: Van Gorcum and Comp. BV., 1972), pp. 6, 21-23, sqq. While our emphases and conclusions may often diverge from those of Krader, his work remains the best available of the literature on Marx's views on this subject.
- 3) Maxime Rodinson, Islam and Capitalism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), p. 206.
- 4) Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (London: A.Crooke, 1651)
- 5) François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, Essai sur les Moeurs et l'esprit des Nations (1753-54) (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1963). See also the comments of Franco Venturi, "Oriental Despotism", Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. XXIV (1963), p. 135; also R. Koebner, "Despot and Despotism: Vicissitudes of a Political Term", Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, Vol. XIV (1951), p. 288.
- 6) Venturi, loc. cit., p. 137. Marx later recognised Duperron's role vis-à-vis Bernier. See Krader, op. cit., p. 384.
- 7) Krader, op. cit., p. 24.
- 8) Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations, ed. by E. Canaan (New York, 1937), pp. 647, 688, 789.
- 9) Georg W.F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, #270. (T.M. Knox, ed. and transl., Oxford: University Press, 1973), pp. 164-74. See also the Philosophy of History, Section Two, Part One ('The Oriental World'), (New York: Dover Books, 1955, pp. 139-72). Most of Marx's general views concerning India are here set forth in the writings of his chief mentor, including political despotism, 'generalised slavery', the abstract unity of the community, 'stagnation', the predominance of natural determination of custom, and the indifferent effects of political revolutions on the general life of the people.
- 10) The views of John Stuart Mill and Marx are very close:

"The greater part of the world has, properly speaking, no history, because the despotism of custom is complete. This is the case over the whole East. Custom is there, in all things, the final appeal; justice and right mean conformity to custom; the argument of custom no one, unless some tyrant intoxicated with power, thinks of resisting. And we see the result. Those nations must have once had originality; they did not start out on

the ground populous, lettered, and versed in many of the arts of life; they made themselves all this, and were then the greatest and most powerful nations in the world . . . A people, it appears, may be progressive for a certain length of time, and then stop: when does it stop? When it ceases to possess individuality."

(On Liberty, in The Utilitarians; New York: Anchor Books, 1961, p. 547).

11) On Liberty, op. cit., p. 484.

II. Marx and Engels 1835-57

- 1) Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Collected Works (New York: International Publishers, 1974), Vol. 1, p. 230. (=Rheinische Zeitung #298, 1842); hereafter cited as MECW.
- 2) MECW, Vol. 5, p. 55. (=The German Ideology).
- 3) MECW, Vol. 6, pp. 179, 184.
- 4) op. cit., p. 345. (=Principles of Communism).
- 5) op. cit., eg. pp. 399, 410, 628. This is not, however, an historicist teleology: no form of transition is 'inevitable' for Marx, despite his hortatory use of this term. Both Marx and Engels generally saw the future as a choice between 'socialism or barbarism'; capitalist production in its own movement reinforces both tendencies. Engels has been frequently castigated of late for a 'mechanistic interpretation' of Marx's doctrines. At least in this particular regard his views are clear:

"By characterising the process (of capitalism's self-negation -GC) as the negation of the negation, Marx does not intend to prove that the process was historically necessary. On the contrary: only after he has proved from history that in fact the process has partially already occurred, and partially must occur in the future, he in addition characterises it as a process which develops in accordance with a definite dialectical law. That is all."

(Anti-Dühring, p. 161. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975).

- 6) Marx-Engels Werke, Vol. 28, p. 592; quoted in David McLellan, Karl Marx: His Life and Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 284.
- 7) Shlomo Avineri, ed. Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernisation (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 450. (=Marx to Engels, 2 June 1853).
- 8) op. cit., pp. 450-51.

- 9) op. cit., p. 452. (=Engels to Marx, 6 June 1853).
- 10) See Krader, op. cit., p. 89.
- 11) Avineri, op. cit., p. 455. (=Marx to Engels, 14 June 1853).
- 12) op. cit., p. 456.
- 13) op. cit.
- 14) op. cit., p. 88. ("The British Rule in India"); see G.W.F. Hegel, Philosophy of History, op. cit., p. 157.
- 15) op. cit., p. 89.
- 16) op. cit., pp. 89-90.
- 17) op. cit.
- 18) op. cit., p. 93. See also the comments on England's 'double mission in India', op. cit., p. 132. ("Future Results of British Rule in India"), and those to the effect that "The bourgeois period of history has to create the material basis of the new world." (pp. 138-39).
- 19) op. cit., pp. 93-94.
- 20) op. cit., p. 132.
- 21) op. cit., p. 133. Engels repeats this in a more generalised form in Anti-Dühring, op. cit., p. 219.
- 22) op. cit., p. 137.
- 23) op. cit., with emphasis added.

III. Marx and Engels 1857-59

- 1) Krader, op. cit., p. 118.
- 2) Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976). In the original this oft-abused statement reads:

"In grossen Umrissen können asiatische, antike, feudale und modern bürgerliche Produktionsweise als progressive Epochen der ökonomischen Gesellschaftsformation bezeichnet werden."

(Marx-Engels Werke, Band 13; Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1961, p. 9). This is a restatement of the earlier view on the forms of property: tribal property is the first form, communal/state property the second, feudal or estate the third, bourgeois property the fourth. See MECW Vol. 5. (The German Ideology), pp. 32-35. Marx never clearly

differentiated between 'primitive communism' and the 'Asiatic mode of production', although the existence of the state is generally the point of demarcation between them. Even in Theories of Surplus-Value, however, the two are somewhat equated, although here the principal confusion is between communal and caste relations:

"The original unity between the worker and the conditions of production (abstracting from slavery, where the labourer himself belongs to the objective conditions of production) has two main forms: the Asiatic communal system (primitive communism), and small-scale agriculture based on the family (and linked with domestic industry) in one form or another.

(Vol. 3; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975, pp. 422-23).

- 3) Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, introd. by Eric Hobsbawm, p. 70. (New York: International Publishers, 1975). Marx notes, however, that there are both despotic and democratic forms of these communities.
- 4) op. cit., p. 78.
- 5) op. cit., p. 83.
- 6) op. cit.
- 7) op. cit., pp. 91-93.
- 8) op. cit., p. 95.
- 9) op. cit., cf. pp. 107-13; also Grundrisse (transl. with Foreward by Martin Nicolaus; London: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 183, 230, 504, 535, 857-59.
- 10) See Grundrisse, pp. 486-87 (=PEF p. 83). See also Grundrisse p. 859, where Marx notes that systems of caste and guild prevent the merchant from becoming a producer, or vice-versa. This is in contradiction to Avineri's statement (The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx; Cambridge: University Press, 1968, p. 12) that there were no dialectical elements of internal change in Marx's notion of the 'AMP'.
- 11) Avineri, Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernisation, op. cit., p. 313.

IV. Marx and Engels 1861-84

- 1) Theories of Surplus-Value, 3 (hereafter TSV), p. 435.
- 2) TSV 3, p. 400.
- 3) TSV 1, p. 157.
- 4) TSV 1, p. 277.

- 5) See TSV 3, p. 422.
- 6) TSV 1, p. 370.
- 7) Quoted in Krader, op. cit., p. 153.
- 8) TSV 3, p. 246.
- 9) op. cit., p. 368.
- 10) op. cit., p. 271.
- 11) TSV 2, p. 43.
- 12) op. cit., p. 407.
- 13) op. cit., p. 528.
- 14) TSV 3, pp. 529-31, and 1, p. 369. See also Capital 3, (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 597.
- 15) TSV 3, p. 112.
- 16) TSV 1, p. 296.
- 17) Capital 3 was written in 1864-65, Vol. 1 in 1865-67, and Vol. 2 in 1967-69.
- 18) Capital 3, p. 177.
- 19) op. cit., pp. 332-34.
- 20) op. cit., pp. 333, 791, 786-87, 831.
- 21) Capital 1, pp. 40-41.
- 22) op. cit., p. 42.
- 23) op. cit., p. 79.
- 24) op. cit., p. 357.
- 25) op. cit., p. 352.
- 26) op. cit., pp. 339-40.
- 27) op. cit., pp. 358-59.
- 28) Capital 2, p. 236. Marx compares this with the Manāva-Dharmaśāstra: "Desertion of life, without reward, for the sake of preserving a priest or a cow . . . may cause the beatitude of those base-born tribes."
- 29) Anti-Dühring, p. 109. Engels adds (p. 222) that "the wealth of the tribal and village communities of antiquity was in no sense a domination over men." (my emphasis). This demonstrates a pronounced tendency to

collapse the distinctions between the 'primitive communal' and 'Asiatic' forms of production, which because of similarities in the level and some aspects of the organisation of production distorts crucial differences in social relations. Engels appears here to virtually paraphrase Marx's thoughts as expressed in a letter to Dr. Kugelmann. See Letters to Kugelmann from Karl Marx (London: Martin Lawrence, n.d.), p. 99. This letter is dated February 17, 1870.

- 30) Anti-Dühring, pp. 179, 194.
- 31) op. cit., p. 211. This is however only a reference to river valleys, not to artificial irrigation.
- 32) op. cit., p. 215, with emphasis added. See Capital 1, p. 514 n2.
- 33) Krader, The Asiatic Mode of Production, p. 355.
- 34) op. cit., p. 359.
- 35) op. cit., p. 367.
- 36) op. cit., p. 366.
- 37) Selected Correspondence, p. 412.
- 38) See Marx's notes in The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx, edited by Lawrence Krader, (Assen: Van Gorcum and Comp. BV, 1972).
- 39) Marx's ethnological researches, however, provide only an indication as to the emphases and general direction of his thought. We cannot therefore assume that his views are altered by a particular reference in his notes, tempting as this may be.
- 40) op. cit., p. 106.
- 41) op. cit., p. 183.
- 42) op. cit., p. 232.
- 43) op. cit., p. 282.
- 44) op. cit., p. 314.
- 45) op. cit., pp. 255, 314.
- 46) op. cit., pp. 39-40. Krader's assertions about water control are dubious, however.
- 47) op. cit., p. 334. Marx had already noted (p. 356) that from Manu on customary laws were increasingly brought under the authority of the smritis.

- 48) op. cit., p. 292.
 - 49) Krader comments on this at p. 40. Marx's observations on Maine are at p. 309.
 - 50) See op. cit., p. 39.
 - 51) Dialectics of Nature (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), p. 182.
- V. The Concept of the 'Asiatic Mode of Production' since Marx
- 1) Claude Meillassoux, "From Reproduction to Production", Economy and Society, Vol. 1, No. 1 (February 1972), p. 97.
 - 2) G.V. Plekhanov, Fundamental Problems of Marxism (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), p. 53.
 - 3) As, for instance, Ferenc Tökei asserts, in Sur Le Mode de Production Asiatique (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1966), p. 7.
 - 4) G.V. Plekhanov, "Socialism and the Political Struggle", in Selected Philosophical Works, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d.), p. 79.
 - 5) Karl Kautsky, "Die Moderne Nationalität", in Die Neue Zeit; quoted in Hal Draper, Marx's Theory of Revolution (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 662.
 - 6) Joseph Stalin, Dialectical and Historical Materialism (New York: International Publishers, 1940), p. 34.
 - 7) Stalin to some extent follows Lenin on this point. See V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 21, p. 56 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972).
 - 8) See the criticisms of the views of S.A. Dange by D.D. Kosambi and D.K. Bedekar, in India Today (Allahabad), Vol. 1, No. 2 (June 1951) and Vol. 1, No. 3 (July 1951).
 - 9) Karl Wittfogel, Oriental Despotism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 6.
 - 10) See Pierre Vidal-Naquet, "Karl Wittfogel et le concept de 'Mode de Production Asiatique'", Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations, Vol. XIX (1964), p. 532.
 - 11) Wittfogel, op. cit., pp. 25, 49, 303-45.
 - 12) Wittfogel, "Results and Problems of the Study of Oriental Despotism", Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 28 (February 1969), pp. 357-67.

- 13) Diskussia ob Aziatskom Sposobe Proizvodstva (Discussion of the Asiatic Mode of Production), Moscow and Leningrad, 1931; quoted in loc. cit., p. 358. See also Grundrisse, p. 882, where Marx describes India as the "point of departure for all cultured peoples." It might be added that, in forming the 1859 serial ordering of the modes of production, Marx was doubtless considerably influenced by the recent discovery of the Sanskrit origins of the Greek language. This scientific fact, rather than a political desire to place communism as the first 'Golden Age' of mankind, probably induced Marx to outline the various stages sequentially. Once the structural categories were settled, the dialectical method then demanded a predominant emphasis upon the modes of transition between the various forms. Although political concerns were always vital to Marx, they never obfuscated the pursuit of historical evidence, since Marx believed (unlike many of his successors) that the clearest rendering of historical events would always eventually aid the interests of the oppressed.
- 14) Marx and Machiavelli share this conception of nature to a large extent. See The Prince, Book XXV, and The Discourses, I.1 and II.1,3,5,9,12.
- 15) See fn 4 to the Introduction, infra. On the paradigm which philosophically elaborates the position of the human being in the world, in the language of Marx's later writings, see TSV 2, pp. 117-18.
- 16) See the Selected Correspondence, p. 230:

". . . what the philistine and vulgar economist's way of looking at things stems from, namely, from the fact that it is only the direct form of manifestation of relations that is reflected in their brains and not their inner connection. Incidentally, if the latter were not the case; what need would there be of science?"
- 17) See, for instance, p. 3 of Precapitalist Modes of Production (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), where Hindess and Hirst disclaim the validity of any recourse to 'empiricist facts' in the refutation of their perspective. See also Talal Asad and Harold Wolpe, "Concepts of Modes of Production", Economy and Society, Vol. 5, No. 4 (November 1976), pp. 470-506.
- 18) Ernest Mandel, The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 127.
- 19) For example, Maxim Rodinson, op. cit., pp. 61-62.
- 20) Ferenc Tökei is among those to elaborate this position. See op. cit., pp. 47, 59, 68.
- 21) For instance, Banu and others who emphasise the 'tributary' characteristics of this mode of production. See the CERM collection of writings on the Asiatic mode.

- 22) Jean Chesneaux and G. Melekechvili are among many to have adopted this perspective. See op. cit., pp. 38, 274.
- 23) It is precisely the interaction between these two that remains least explored in the Indian context.
- 24) Grundrisse, p. 496; PEF p. 83.
- 25) Grundrisse, pp. 492-93. This is also the source for Marx's view that "Slavery and serfdom are only further developments of the form of property resting on the clan system."
- 26) See Jean Baudrillard, The Mirror of Production (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975), pp. 13-14, 69-88; also Claude Meillassoux, loc. cit., pp. 99-102; and Joan Mencher, "The Caste System Upside Down, or the Not-so-Mysterious East", Current Anthropology, Vol. 15, No. 4 (December 1974), pp. 469-90.
- 27) Grundrisse, p. 496.
- 28) op. cit., p. 487.
- 29) See Grundrisse, p. 859; also Capital 1, pp. 358-9.
- 30) See Capital 3, pp. 597, 334.
- 31) See Christopher Hill, The Century of Revolution 1603-1714 (New York: W.W. Norton and Comp., 1961), p. 21, for the unique domination of London over the British hinterland during the early period of the development of capitalism in that country. Marx's inadequate exploration of this area is all the more curious given his notation that under Akbar, Delhi was "the greatest and finest city then existing in the world." (Notes on Indian History, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947, p. 43).
- 32) Marx terms this relationship the politisches Abhängigkeitsverhältnis (political dependency relation). Draper (op. cit., p. 564) argues that this was intended to define the central relationship of the mode of production itself.
- 33) Capital 1, p. 237, for example.
- 34) op. cit., p. 357.
- 35) op. cit., pp. 79, 714.
- 36) Capital 3, p. 772.
- 37) Marx obviously understood that in many precapitalist societies prior usage - custom and tradition - were

predominant in determining the evolution of production and its relations, despite the 'natural' proclivities or 'laws' of the productive process itself. See Figure Two, infra. The clearest statement of this in Marx's work is probably Capital 3, pp. 773-74:

"it is evident that tradition must play a dominant role in the primitive and undeveloped circumstances on which these social productive relations and the corresponding mode of production are based. It is furthermore clear that here as always it is in the interest of the ruling section of society to sanction the existing order as law and to legally establish its limits given through usage and tradition. Apart from all else, this, by the way, comes about of itself as soon as the constant reproduction of the basis of the existing order and its fundamental relations assumes a regulated and orderly form in the course of time. And such regulation and order are themselves indispensable elements of any mode of production, if it is to assume social stability and independence from mere chance and arbitrariness. Under backward conditions of the productive process as well as the corresponding social relations, it achieves this form by mere repetition of their very reproduction. If this has continued on for some time, it entrenches itself as custom and tradition and is finally sanctioned as explicit law."

To this should be added Marx's analysis of the political tactics of Aurangzeb, who saw that "religion was the great motive power of the empire." (Notes on Indian History, p. 48).

- 38) Tökei (op. cit., p. 68) apparently does not see this. Engels probably believed that the basis of Indian life was no different from that of the Greek and Roman social formations in one cardinal aspect: "In Asiatic and classical antiquity, the predominant form of class oppression was slavery." (Letters to Americans; New York: International Press, 1969, p. 288). This was written, furthermore, not as an aside in a private letter, but in the Introduction to the 1887 American edition of The Condition of the Working Class in England. Hence it is likely that Engels considered the caste system to be a customary form of personal bondage, perhaps deriving from but in any case little different from direct chattel ownership.

CHAPTER TWO

ECONOMY AND SOCIETY IN THE FORMATION OF THE
'ASIATIC MODE OF PRODUCTION' IN EARLY INDIA

A. Introduction

Our central concern in this chapter is the relationship between economy, class structures, and forms of political rule. This connection then provides the basis for a periodisation of early Indian social formations, whose common characteristics will define any larger abstract category seeking to encompass them. This follows from the preceding discussion, where the 'Asiatic Mode of Production' was used as a unifying and idealised abstraction, enabling the observer to 'freeze' the fluidity of social movement through a generalisation of prominent characteristics.

The notion of a 'Mode of Production' (as opposed to the concrete and empirical description of a 'way of producing') thus grants the capacity to organise epochal social behavior under a single rubric. It is an abstraction whose value lies precisely in its broadly-sweeping, all-encompassing character, allowing cross-cultural comparison and thus providing the framework for universal theories of economic and social development. For detailed historical studies, however, it has little utility. These must seek the degree of correspondence between the 'ideal category' (gattungsbegriff, as Weber, who largely followed Marx's historical method in this regard, was to call it), and specific conditions. The larger category should then function to indicate the direction and structure of movement, without unduly overdetermining our reading of the 'evidence' of history itself.¹

Such categorical causality is unfortunately endemic in Marxist historiography. Indian scholarship in particular

has suffered grievously from the imposition of transhistorical conceptions of development. This is largely the result of Marxists/zealously anxious to find historical evidence in agreement with their own mechanical misreadings of Marx. Among many others, the works of S.A. Dange and R.P. Saraf demonstrate this pronounced tendency to polemically rewrite history.²

On the other hand, the works of such authors as D.D. Kosambi mark the inception of a clear, reasoned, and careful application of productive and class analysis to Indian history. The combination of scholarly exegesis with rigorous and selfconscious methodological principles shows that Marx's ideas, suitably innovated upon, can aid greatly in the understanding of ancient history. Such efforts clearly salvage the analysis from the reputation thrust upon it by the mechanistic school.

To integrate the three phenomena introduced above, while meaningfully discussing eight hundred years of Indian history, is a peculiarly difficult task. While our description must necessarily remain extremely succinct, this need not detract from the primary purpose of this chapter, which is a conjunctural exposition of three key periods in early Indian history. By 'conjuncture' is meant a structural 'cross-section' of a particularly illustrative historic period, in which the movement of social forces is sufficiently clear to trace at least the broad outlines of the larger period.

The era of political integration (c. 600-400 BC) which saw the rise of the 'heterodox' religions will be first

discussed, followed by similar overviews of the Mauryan empire (325-185 BC) and the Gupta period (c. 320-440 AD). These historical segments, we will argue, allow the demonstration of the direction of the key elements under consideration.

B. Caste and Class

The institutions of caste - the varnas in their ideal form, the jātis in their innumerable social permutations - have only rarely been the subject of analyses which link them to the results of research upon class in other societies. In the debate that has arisen, two extreme positions have often occupied a monopoly position. On the one hand, the uniqueness of caste is stressed. The system is perceived as the symbolic expression (and, more rarely, the product) of a Way of Being whose primitive rituals and elaborate mechanisms of social distinction derive from a 'hierarchical mentality' whose origins are lost in (and embellished by) the mists of time.

Juxtaposed to this has been the view that one finds in India a system of the regulation of human behavior familiar to many peoples, quite 'rational' given certain socio-economic conditions, and little stranger to us than would be the social roles of our own medieval ancestors. The underlying unity of economic and social life, and the similarity of patterns of human development, form the primary assumptions for this position, which is broadly that of both Marx and Weber. Admixtures of different degrees of cultural complexity then serve to explain the continuing existence of behavior deemed 'primitive' (but not irrational)

from the perspective of developed capitalism.

Conceptually the former of these two positions (publicised of late by Louis Dumont³) denies that the terminology of class is fundamentally applicable to the caste system. Although other reasons are adduced, this refusal is most strongly grounded in the observation that jāti stratification has usually been maintained by the prohibition of intermarriage, interdining, and other ritualised modes of social exclusion. Class, correspondingly, is defined in terms of differential access to political and economic resources. Classes (and other groups whose nature is less distinct) may thus tend to similar forms of maintenance of exclusivity (and this is even more true for feudal estates), but these in no way form central or defining characteristics.

This view appears to suffer from considerable analytic confusion. Firstly, the criteria of internal ranking are tacitly accepted as the primary standard of evaluation, often in fact as the sole original rationale for the development of the system itself. Secondly, the ahistorical nature of this position tends to be wholly misleading, as we hope shortly to demonstrate. This is tied to the misapprehension of factors of maintenance as sources of origination, which is little less naive than the acceptance of the mythical Brahmin view of the origins of caste as a creation of the gods.

Marx's theory of class, which shares the primary assumptions of the second view outlined above, attempts to explain two fundamental phenomena: (1) the origins of similar life-

conditions of groups of individuals; and (2) 'the common political, economic, and social behavior of these groups. Needless to say, it has become a truism that "purely economic criteria are not sufficient to determine and locate social classes", as Poulantzas has written.⁴ This refers explicitly to the 'objective' side of the conditions of existence of social classes (#1 above). This sense of the definition of the existence of a class does not require the 'consciousness' distinction (the class für sich as opposed to an sich) first elaborated by Marx in The Poverty of Philosophy (1847).⁵ Joan Mencher's analysis of the caste-class relation, among others, fails to recognise this dichotomy and thus collapses several key distinctions.⁶

Given the conceptual grounding of class analysis in the division of labour, the ideal varna nomenclature is clearly based upon the simple division of semi-tribal formations in the late Vedic age.⁷ Historically, the shift usually emphasised in the process of the institutionalisation of caste is that from varna to jāti. From the middle Upanisadic period (c. 600 BC) on, varna was usually understood as a function of lifestyle rather than birth, whereas jāti continued to be hereditarily transmitted.⁸ We will shortly consider this evolution in its political and economic matrix. Occupation, however, became gradually integrated with jāti, and in many ways serves as its basis. Thus while varna may indicate the likely occupation of a given individual, knowledge of jāti will almost invariably reveal this fact. Although birth was (and is) the central criterion for both varna and jāti statuses, class as determined prim-

arily by occupation overlaps the varna categories considerably.

The status differential implicit in this activity came to be of considerable social importance. The relation of class to this phenomenon is that an increase in social wealth altered the entire social structure when distribution became differential, leading to the coexistence of groups whose status was based upon customary privilege (and whose livelihood was contingent upon their status, primarily the Brahmins) with groups whose status was based almost wholly upon their wealth. If the Brahmin-Kṣatriya-Vaiśya-Śūdra-Mleccha hierarchy represents the idealised status system of caste, then the disjunction between caste status and class status in the periods of interest here can be schematised in the following manner:

<u>Early Vedic Tribes</u>		<u>Monarchy/Early Market Society</u>	
<u>Status</u>	largely coincident, little class differentiation prior to slavery	<u>Wealth</u>	increased status of low-caste monarchs and wealthy merchants; some coincidence in Brahmanical accumulation
<u>Decentralisation/Brahmin Reaction</u>		<u>Village System/Social Orthodoxy</u>	
<u>Status</u>	legal reinforcement of Brahmin privileges; shared with merchant classes	<u>Wealth</u>	largely coincident within village division of labour
	peak of mercantile accumulation; increase of Brahmin holdings		demise of merchant class, rise of prominent individual and monastic Brahmin landholdings

The special status of the Brahmins makes this intermixture less complex than is immediately apparent. As might be expected, it is with the priests that the determinant strength of religious tradition is most clearly manifested. After the repeated pressures of crisis circumstances, the

Brahmins evolved a theory allowing themselves a wide latitude of access to different occupations, to be temporarily undertaken without the status loss inherent in the ritual impurity of the 'lower' occupations themselves. Varna status was usually only lost after several generations of following secular or specifically common vocations. Sometimes the varna label was kept, while a new jāti was formed to indicate the loss of status. This very clearly exemplifies the overdetermination of caste by class. The process is however somewhat mitigated when status loss occurred through inter-marriage with a nonBrahmin, although the maintenance of purity of occupation is still the principal issue.

The crucial facet of the maintenance of hereditary Brahmin privileges is the extent to which the social power of the Brahmins is a function of the accumulation of material wealth. Control over property in the political sense is of central importance, since 'ownership' in the sense of Roman jurisprudence is rarely applicable to landed property in early India. Where land is not scarce, control over crop disposition and commodity production are the principal means of capital accumulation and social power.

Class in early India is thus largely a function of the regulation of property relations, rather than the ownership of the means of production in the modern sense. It is here that the hereditary monopolisation of social function becomes most closely explicable in the language of class. Caste in the specific (jāti) sense evolves out of the fluid Vedic class structure as the outgrowth of relations of production fixed in custom, but altered by the introduction of slavery

and the conflicting demands of relations grounded in new forms of productive organisation, materials, and technique. 'Class' and 'caste' are never coterminous, the first referring to occupational differentiation, the second to status stratification. In an economy whose relations involve both market exchange, as well as reciprocity and redistributive transferrals, this distinction is of central importance. The two uses of the term varna after 500 BC (ie. Panini's Brāhmaṇa for those who follow the Brahmin way of life, and Brahmin for those hereditarily-determined members of the Brahmin jātis), shows that this difference was important enough to be recognised in grammatical practice.⁹

PART ONE: THE FORMATION OF STATE AND SOCIETY (c. 700-400 BC)

I. Character of State Formation

'Politics' as a term emerged out of the adjudicative experience of the early Greek city-states. The polis was at that time recognised and praised as a novel entity, whose civic interactions (if properly understood and performed by the observer-citizen) ostensibly provided the basis of what we now normatively refer to as civilisation, that which distinguishes man the social being from his more bestial forbearers. 'Society', however, existed long anterior to the specialisation of political functions. The entity we now call the 'state' arose only through the gradual complexification of social behavior. More enduring bonds and forms of collective interest have ensured the general survival of the former, while states as physical entities have necessarily been determined by the continuous fluctuations of power

configurations, alliances between nations, classes, tribes, other states, individuals, etc.

'Society', therefore, has often been forced to rely solely upon its ancient routinised ordering practices, pending the reconstitution of more organised and centralised legal, administrative, and military capabilities. This subsumption of the state by society Rousseau (and later Marx) proposed as the only viable basis for a democratic management of human affairs, especially with respect to the perpetual imbalance between rural and urban life. In India, however, this reclamation by society has been possessed of a fundamentally hierarchical and conservative character, even if the often-severe extractions of centralised authority were frequently avoided. We have noted Marx's ambivalence towards this form of social life, which derives from conflicting views of human 'progress' within his formulations. In this chapter we will assume the opinion that the category of the 'AMP' represents Marx's only articulation of the pre-dominance of social over political relations, which thus lends to the historical exposition of this form a theoretical affinity to the restructuring problems of the future. In particular, however, we will be concerned with the evolution of this formation in relation to the hypotheses of the 'AMP' subparadigm. Hence we will attempt to sketch the devolution of the active formation schematised in Figure Two, infra, to the self-contained village system which for the most part characterises Indian life thereafter.

Out of the migratory and relatively isolated extension of the Aryan tribes across north India, there arose in the

late Vedic age more permanent and territorial forms of political rule. Sedentary urban communities led to the institutionalisation of sovereignty (which had evolved much earlier) in the forms which we commonly associate with the political rule of the state.¹ By the time of the Buddha (c. 500 BC) there existed sixteen principal janapadas (states or territories) stretching across northern India from the Oxus to the Ganges, as well as a plethora of smaller political units in various stages of urbanisation.

Among these demarcated groups there existed as many different forms of political rule as Aristotle was later to classify in reference to the Greek political tradition. Federated tribes, in at least ten major groupings, were called gana or sangha. These provided the institutional model for the Buddhist (and to a lesser extent Jaina) religious organisations.² These 'republics', however, have often been mistaken (as with the Greek polis) for democratic forms in the modern sense. As A.S. Altekar has indicated, however, "Most of the republics had a clan origin", and internal to the vast majority of these clans a hereditary 'aristocracy' composed of warriors and tribal elders debated all issues of importance. This is not to deny, however, that more democratic forms did not exist; these were not dominant in this period of relatively late tribal development.³

Occupied with virtually continuous strife, and little able to engage in extensive social welfare, the smaller entities gradually became integrated into the larger (and usually monarchical) territories. It is this process of incessant struggle, and the alteration of Vedic social

relations under the auspices of the first great kingdoms, which gives the Buddhistic age its tragic and confused, nihilistic asceticism, later to be considered in greater philosophic detail.⁴ Factionalism was frequent; alliances were simultaneously constructed and treacherously betrayed.⁵ Under such conditions even relatively democratic central assemblies in the republics were forced to abrogate political power to their military commanders, and thus it can be argued that many groups were in the process of evolving more stringent forms of kingship, only to have similar institutions imposed upon them from without. With reference to India, A. Ghosh follows Lewis Mumford's observation that the institution of kingship then serves as the most important agent in effecting the initial historical shift from rural to urban areas.⁶

Between the seventh and fifth centuries BC, two large states - Kosala and Magadha - fought the tribal republics, the nomadic barbarians, and each other. Kosala was the largest state in terms of the extent of its territory. Magadha, however, controlled important mineral reserves within its boundaries, and had better access to river and caravan supply routes. The advantages of these resources eventually helped to lead to the ascendancy of Magadha, whose capital, Pātaliputra, was founded in the year of the Buddha's death. It was to be India's greatest city for nearly 800 years.

While the smaller Kṣatriya republics and monarchies were largely organisations composed of the settlers of the land themselves, the mahājanapadas (great territories) tended

towards more complex and gradated forms of rule, with the professional military and political groups (as well as the priests) almost wholly dependent for their livelihood upon the taxation of the agrarian and mercantile classes. Such extractions were often only grudgingly forthcoming, thus increasing the desire for further military expansion. A professional military clearly encompassed imperialist designs as a part of its very raison d'être. This process was aided by the fact that the semi-tribal confederacies usually failed "to accumulate that military strength which was needed to resist an imperialist power."⁷

A variety of republics thus came slowly under the auspices of the larger states, whose rulers journeyed continuously building forts and avoiding climactic extremes, accompanied by increasingly larger groups of retainers. Citizenship slowly came to rival kinship as a basis of social association, although there existed ganas already internally organised on the basis of the varnas, having separate councils of Kshatriyas, Brahmins, Vaisya, and Sūdras.⁸ These councils, however, were less caste organs than they were arbiters of the conditions of labour of the various groups, thus marking a middle stage in the "usual passage" which Kosambi has characterised as moving from tribe to guild to caste.⁹

By the end of this period, the state controlled sufficient resources to be able to claim its repressive function in many spheres of civil activity. Powers of arbitration in civil and criminal law were however shared with the nascent guild organisations as well as with the Brahmins. Legitimation of authoritative social relations - the second

major function of the state - had rested largely with the tribal priests in the Vedic age, and now came to be divided between the rulers, the Brahmins, and the guilds. Concurrent with the alliance of the purohita (royal priest) and ruler, the Brahmins evidently increased their sacrificial fees. Using the terminology of Jürgen Habermas, this was crucial in bringing about a "legitimation crisis", wherein

"the contradiction exists between validity claims of systems of norms and justifications that cannot explicitly permit appropriation, and a class structure in which privileged appropriation of socially produced wealth is the rule." (10)

Intervention into previously unpoliticised areas of social relations thus characterised the initial activities of the state as a differentiated component in the general division of labour. This is both a product of, and a cause of, the movement from the predominance of kinship relations to those of classes, in which the emergent state reflects new relations of production, and then seeks to justify de facto shifts of power through the invocation of new sanctions, in this case both divine and quasi-secular. Underlying the genesis of the state are the expansion and qualitative extension of productive life, to which we now turn.

II. Production and Trade

Limitations upon tribal economic activity were guaranteed by widespread political hostility, the lack of passable trade routes and, underlying these, a minimum of external needs created by productive self-sufficiency, inadequate communication of the existence of new goods, and the readily exhaustible potential of barter as a form of exchange. Cattle constituted the principal means of exchange and the accumul-

ation of wealth in Vedic society; the expression "going to war" (gavisti) in fact meant "searching for cattle".¹ In the earliest period of their settlement the north Indian tribes adopted rice as the most common measure of acts of exchange. Finally, in about the seventh century BC, silver coinage was introduced as trade with Persia increased under stable political conditions.²

Market mechanisms in the early period grew along side of, and derivative from, two more traditional modes of exchange: reciprocity and redistribution. Karl Polanyi explains the main distinctions between the three forms of interaction as follows:

"Reciprocity denotes movements between correlative points of symmetrical groupings; redistribution designates appropriate movements towards a center and out of it again; exchange refers here to vice versa movements taking place as between 'hands' under a market system. Reciprocity, then, assumes for a background symmetrically arranged groupings; redistribution is dependent upon the presence of some measure of centricity in the group; exchange in order to produce integration requires a system of price-making markets." (3)

Reciprocity thus occurs earliest historically, followed (in the period of initial urbanisation) by redistribution, where exploitation is still minimal. The market-exchange pattern of economic integration could not have arisen without the institutional supports provided by the emerging centralised monarchies.

The introduction of money as the abstract medium of exchange revolutionised human relations as perhaps no other single phenomenon has ever done. Besides functioning as the standard of measurement of all commodities, money came very quickly to surpass other 'possessions' of character (such as virtue) in the assessment of an individual's 'worth'.

The ancient status system had been based on the possession of cattle and the cultivation of heroic and fraternal traits. Although elements of the latter were of course retained, both of these 'measures' were turned inside out by the use of money.

As abstract wealth, excess accumulation could appear not to be waste, requiring redistribution in a tribal system. Indeed, inordinate hoarding could be virtually hidden from public view. Hence the real extent of the surplus, especially in terms of commonly-required necessities, could be concealed and denied. Only through this crystallisation of wealth did class society become possible: greed required a mask before its social acclamation could emerge. Reactions to this process were numerous, and as we shall see there was considerable consciousness of the basic differences between this mode of interaction and that fostered by the previous interdependence and collective responsibility.

Despite its continuous growth, the market economy at this stage fails to dominate the major sectors of social life. If we follow a restricted definition of the term 'economic', meaning "provision for want-satisfaction"⁴, we find that there still existed communal means of mutual support, particularly in agriculture. Here needs, while economic in this sense, were met largely through traditionally established patterns of the relatively equalised sharing of resources. Brahmanical revenue, gained from the 'holy' exchange of yajña (sacrifice) for material goods, was as well embedded in the ancient status relations which characterised Vedic tribal life. When the merchant classes (and

the rulers who taxed them) began to amass previously unknown amounts of wealth, the Brahmins reacted by seeking an increase in their fees, in the manner of the classical inflationary spiral of an anarchic economic order. This led to various degrees of revolt (which helped to revolutionise the society although they cannot be called revolutions in the modern sense) by those strata of society who did not directly benefit from the new exchange process.

Localised self-sufficiency (Aristotle's oëconomia) was still maintained throughout the greater part of India in this period, although its qualities are not specifically those which later came to be embodied in the system of self-sufficient villages which we examined from the perspective of Marxist theory in the last chapter. Weber's comments with reference to the later Roman empire also hold here: "Exchange economy was a sort of superstructure; beneath it was a constantly expanding infrastructure of natural economy in which needs were met without (market - GC) exchange."⁵ Needless to say, market exchange also became continuously more extensive, spurred on in particular by the increase in the urban division of labour, which in turn produced further advancements in productive technique.

Vanijja was the name given to commercial and trading activity.⁶ Major trade routes ran from southwest to northeast, and from east to northwest. Caravans operated by sarthavakas (traders) carried the major agricultural crops (rice, barley, wheat, millet and sesame), and an ever-increasing number of luxury goods, which because of their high rate of weight to value yielded much greater profits (vridhi,

also the term for usury).⁷ Individual guilds (śrenis) were frequently the owners of these caravans, which were underwritten by a moneylender (śreshthin), whose interest (prayoga) varied according to the dangers involved and the caste of the particular merchant.

Commercial capital, largely through trade and usury, thus began to become centralised in the growing urban centres. This process of concentration was initially aided by the guilds; later they were to hinder its development. Commodity production and circulation still remained very limited, and although the profits from commerce stimulated further production of some commodities, there was little impetus for the enhancement of agricultural surplus. Since the process of mercantile concentration, and the growth of urban life generally, were contingent upon the extraction of this surplus, low productivity abetted by a lack of peasant motivation established the general parameters of economic growth.

With the dissolution of the Vedic viś (clan) in urban life, some property formerly held collectively or by families came to be increasingly owned by individuals. In the grāma (village), however, the most fundamental unit of social life (five hundred thousand still contain 85% of India's population), various forms of property ownership and control might be present, with common lands generally being those grasslands surrounding the settlement.⁸ Periodic redistribution of croplands was also probably widespread. Possession (bhoga) naturally preceded ownership (svāta, svāmītvā), and served as its basis, occupation of the land being the most frequent merit for title.⁹ Complex as the question is, it

seems likely that there were a number of forms of ownership at all periods in Indian history, and that while the king had taxation rights, as well occasionally of inheritance, the land was not 'owned' in the modern sense by the monarchy. We will return to this question shortly.

Grants of revenue rights to the Brahmins are first recorded at Kosala in this period, although these differ greatly from the later form of land grants, which are more feudal in nature.¹⁰ Merchants also came to 'own' farms at this time, with some apparently as extensive as one thousand acres.¹¹ Wealthy peasants (gāhapatis or kutumbinis¹²) had large holdings, and in addition (in the view of Jaimal Rai) there may have been a large class of absentee Ksatriya landlords, attached to the court in many cases, but deriving revenues from the land.¹³ Free and simple disposal of landholdings was however probably unlikely.

It was the new iron plough, first applied in about 600 BC, that enabled the farming groups most directly to increase their surplus. This productive gain, however, "was not a technical but a social product"¹⁴, in the sense that it might have remained largely with the peasantry in the form of use-values had the emergent suprasocial authorities not usurped as large a proportion as possible. Alternatively, had the use of iron in weapons not encouraged the development of metals, the iron plough might not have emerged, at least at this point in time.

As new agricultural techniques grew more widespread, more land was brought under cultivation, further surplus was generated, and disparities in wealth came to radically

alter the fabric of social existence. Divisions of kin and tribe at first intermixed freely (amidst great social confusion) with those produced by wealth, but the power of the latter, without doubt, grew slowly stronger and clearer.

III. Class Formation

As the tribal social formation began to disintegrate, cattle-raising and the simple nomadic division of labour proved to be supple bonds little capable of resisting the manifold complexities of the new society. As the Bronze age concluded, a new social formation arose, characterised as we have seen by the growth of production for exchange, and dominated by monarchical polities.

Class society first appears in India largely within the context of slavery, since private property in human beings preceded that in land. Vedic custom had distinguished between āryā (tribal member, later 'noble')¹ and dāsas, slaves captured from the Dravidian tribes during warfare. Dāsas could, however, apparently become āryās after various initiation rites, at least during the Mauryan period. As intervarna mobility became less frequent, many aryanised dāsas became relegated to a new varna - the Sūdras. With the divestiture of most of their pastoral functions in the initial period of urbanisation, some Vaiśyas moved into trade and crafts, while others became labourers and servants, thus joining the menial class usually assigned to conquered peoples, and dropping in social status as a result.

Vaiśyas who moved into similar occupations formed guilds, largely to regulate the extractions demanded by the Brahmins and Kśatriyas.² Despicable occupations beneath even the

gaze of the pure Brahmin (although by now such ritual propriety was becoming a luxury for the caste of Brahmins as a whole) were increasingly foisted upon another new group, the Chandalas and others, 'out-castes' forced by both birth (of mixed high and low caste parentage) and, primarily, occupation, to live outside of the main urban centres in the ancient equivalent of the ghetto.³

Most of the population was thus Vaiśya, Śūdra, or Chandala, with specific subdivisions into jātis occurring as a result of occupation and even region.⁴ Jāti names, in particular, were attached to productive tasks. Little competition between jātis developed, since each (over a long period) gradually came to have a monopoly in its own peculiar field, in the region of its inception.⁵ Aryanisation, as it is often called, thus rested primarily upon the incorporation of tribal groups into the expanding division of labour, often with the retention of many tribal practices, especially among the Śūdras.⁶

As new groups entered the labour force, they were thus gradually categorised into the status and occupational position appropriate to their relation to the society as a whole. This fusion of tribal elements with caste and guild constitutes the enduring and central process of Indian history, projected above the society in the amorphous spiritual polyglot usually termed 'Hinduism'.⁷ Virtual monopoly over the oral heritage of Vedic society had given the Brahmins an enormous legitimative prestige, which came however increasingly into conflict with the legitimative claims of political authority. In addition, there were doubtless

disagreements over revenue rights, since the Brahmins were exempt from normal taxation, and made continuous incursions into the social surplus through the ritualisation of everyday life. Fees were paid at births, deaths, marriages, innumerable holy days, medical operations, journeys, the construction of houses, etc. A multiplicity of sacerdotal laws concerning the treatment of Brahmins grew up, in which the punishments most frequently involved the payment of further priestly fees, as 'holy penance'.

Rivalry between Brahmin and Kṣatriya at the end of the Vedic age was often expressed in terms of the primacy of secular versus sacred power. In an animistic epoch, spiritualist arguments frequently carry the advantage of superstition, hence the attempt by the Kṣatriyas (permeating the Upanisads) to claim that knowledge of god was a function of virtuous meditation on the part of any individual, rather than through the medium of priestly sacrifice.⁸ This separation of claims by birth from those by virtue or actions usually demarcates a stage in the collapse of traditional order, similar distinctions also having been drawn by both Socrates and Confucius.

Legend has largely obscured the historical background to the rivalry in this period, but some tentative observations are still possible. Brahmanical aims at supremacy were often frustrated in those republics where the Kṣatriya aristocracy was still in the ascendant. In the larger states, however, a novel phenomenon arose. Dynasties whose founders were Vaiśyas or Śūdras became the principal ruling families, from this point on. Mahāpadma Nanda, a principal competitor

in the Magadhan consolidation (c. 400 BC), is described in the Purāṇas as "an exterminator of the Kṣatriya varna."⁹ He was a Śūdra in origin, as was Chandragupta Maurya, whose seizure of power founded an empire in 322 BC.

Śūdra monarchs required a substantially greater degree of social legitimisation than did their Kṣatriya counterparts. Alliance with the Brahmins was thus a natural consequence of this state of affairs, for the Brahmins in turn benefited from the enforcement of some rules concerning the priestly monopoly of their varna, so long indecisively contested.¹⁰ Buddhist and Jaina 'heresies' represent the last attempt by the Kṣatriyas (among whom were the founders of both religions) to claim an equal right to the merits of spiritual superiority. That this effort later succumbs to a Brahmin counterattack, however, is both a reflection of the more widespread pervasiveness of Brahmin power, and, more importantly, its entrenchment in the villages in the later decentralised period.

With increasing land revenues assigned to the Brahmins as royal gifts, diminished Kṣatriya landed and political power, and the rise of trade and merchant economic influence, the main outlines of class movement can be demonstrated. Political power and economic wealth were gradually separated from their traditional roots through the institution of the low-caste monarchy and the rise in power of the merchant class. The Brahmins tapped the merchant wealth both through normal fees, and through ensuring that the disposition of landed estates (as opposed to urban property) was confined to religious purposes.¹¹ Vaiśya merchants paid taxes to kings and

fees to Brahmins, but largely supported the heterodox religions, which gave them a higher social status. Guild strength, and the Vaiśya monopoly on usury were both important factors in the protection of this caste. Neither, however, survived intact at the start of the early medieval period.¹²

Once the outlines of class society had become perceptible, social practice by the ruling classes began the process of institutionalisation. Differential rates of interest, taxation, inheritance and punishment for the four varnas (and those beneath the system) preserved some of the privileges of Vedic society, especially for those members of the upper varnas who did not profit well by the general alteration of society. But if varnadharma (the differential duties of each of the castes) on the whole represents a 'historical compromise' between Vedic society and the new class social formation, its injunctions concerning the division of labour, especially those tending to render occupation hereditary, tended to clarify and practically perpetuate the new balance between productive and status relations. The net effect was to more closely solidify caste (status from birth) with class, but this process was to undergo a number of fundamental changes before social mobility declined significantly.¹³

PART TWO: THE MAURYAN EMPIRE (325-180 BC)

I. The Nature of the State

We have seen so far that the rise of kingship in India

created, and was in turn conditioned by, a period of extraordinary social turmoil. This climate of upheaval was to a large degree instigated by military conquest. Thereafter, however, it was the process of internal assimilation which gave rise to long-term antagonisms between classes and other groups. Marxist theory traditionally ascribes such social conflict to a dialectic of contradictions between the demands created by new forms of production, and the institutions, customs, and lifestyle adopted through and within earlier modes of production. Within this analysis the role of the state as a relatively autonomous actor is frequently underestimated, largely because Marxism arose in antithesis to the nineteenth century elevation of the state to the level of a sacrosanct and independent entity.

It is important, however, that neither extreme of the view of the relation of the state to classes and production be given prominence at the level of theoretical generality. In a mediatory capacity, the state in the Mauryan era (as in the present) did not and does not always fulfill the wishes of the dominant social class or even the dominant fraction of this class. Particularly in a period when power is diffused among various fractions of a class or among several classes, the state may play a critical role in the determination of social policy. When one class occupies a strongly hegemonic position, however, the political form is likely to act in a fairly automatic fashion, fulfilling the will of this class against that of other social groups. Neither of these ideal types is however applicable to the historical process as a whole, although the latter has predom-

inated historically. Generalisations can therefore only be made within specific periods, and even here the tendency of overabstraction presents a dangerously reductionist perspective.

Only an unimaginative observer overly grounded in empiricism would describe the realm of the political as merely pejorative, technical-administrative, or conspiratorial. Nonetheless, a powerful case may be argued concerning the emergence of the state in India, as elsewhere, as an organised extortionary monopoly on the part of the armed classes. Such a perspective begs the question of the function of the political form as an organ of legitimation, as well as that of an alliance of classes, some holding power which is hardly military in the normal sense of the term. What this view does provide is a vision of the state common to most of those who function under its auspices, as a rapacious and self-aggrandising interest group resting, 'in the last instance' on its coercive potential. Even citizen-soldiers, however, will eventually fail to follow orders if they remain unpaid, or, at the very least, unfed. In this ulterior sense military power rests upon productive and distributive mechanisms at the imperial core, when the plunder of the periphery (as invariably occurs) is either insufficient or inefficient.

Eventually the Mauryan empire found itself contingent upon the resolution of this problem. Largely this was the result of two processes: the form of the state, and the relation of the state to the empire. Under the Mauryas northern India achieved a degree of political unity not encountered elsewhere in this period. Neither China, Rome, nor Egypt, as Filliozat has noted, produced as complex an

administration nor as developed a cultural form, although these are difficult phenomena to evaluate.¹ But although the Mauryas and later the Guptas constructed what S.N. Eisenstadt has categorised as 'centralised historical bureaucratic empires', involving a substantial degree of autonomy of the political sphere and, in the Mauryan case, an enormous degree of economic intervention on the part of the state, this political form failed, for reasons shortly to be examined, to become a solidly organic sphere of social life.²

Chandragupta Maurya, educated in the thriving centre of Greek influence at Taxila, led the rebellion which overthrew the last Nanda king. Aided by Kautilya, his Brahmin advisor, he then constructed the empire whose principal political text, the Arthasāstra, has given the dynasty its modern 'totalitarian' reputation. Even Justin, the Roman commentator, pronounced the regime as unbearably harsh. But modern evidence, finding these elements of the Arthasāstra to have been partially wishful thinking, tends to mitigate this attributed severity.³

Bureaucratic control over virtually all social resources lay at the heart of the power of the Mauryan state. Originally the administrative system may have been modelled on that of the Achaemenid dynasty in Persia, thence mediated by Greek colonial usage, and Nanda theory and practice.⁴ The empire was divided into provinces, members of the royal family being usually appointed as governors. Mauryan imperialism gradually encompassed many of the republics which had survived the period of Magadhan expansion. Internal rivalries among these smaller states formed an important

part of Kautilya's exploitative foreign policies. Organised opposition to the Mauryas was rare, most tribes agreeing (in the face of vastly superior forces) to tributary federation. But sporadic resistance and continuous plotting were still apparently extensive throughout the reigns of the Mauryan emperors.⁵

A hierarchy of administration continued from the province to the district, town, and village. Public order was carefully maintained, but the efficient aggrandizement of taxation was both an underlying necessity and a manifest goal of the bureaucratic process. Taxation was both severe and widespread, but it is evident that normal levies were unable to meet the growing expenses of a huge landed army and the king's own retainers.⁶ Kautilya recommended (and we may assume that these policies were probably implemented) the deliberate creation of new religious sects, whose funds could then be channelled into the state treasury.⁷ While this and similar programs aided in the immediate flow of revenue, state officials (especially under Aśoka) probably came to be paid increasingly in kind, through the granting of village taxation rights. Kautilya's policy was payment in money, but under Bindusara (c. 297-268 BC) and Aśoka (264-227 BC) inflation and devaluation rendered this much more difficult. The full consequences of granting revenue sources, however, to both functionaries and priests, became most dramatically evident under the Guptas.

Despite Wittfogel's proposed analysis of 'hydraulic despotism', there is little evidence to suggest that irrigation played any other than a tangential role in the central-

isation and maintenance of state power.⁸ An increase in agricultural produce naturally benefitted the state, but the monopolies on mining and metallurgy were, on Kautilya's self-admission, far more important a basis of immediate wealth. In addition, traders in many commodities, such as salt (a focus of Gandhi's opposition to the British) were in fact state officials, salaried individuals whose profits flowed entirely to the treasury, although corruption was widespread if severely punished.⁹

Misinterpretations begun by Megasthenes in the fourth century BC and continued by Bernier, among others, indicated that the monarch was the legal owner of all lands. This is a nominal pretense on the part of the state, providing juridical grounds for what was basically a 'protective' form of contractual taxation, but disguising this as ground rent, which thus avoided the onus of a contractual burden in exchange on the part of the state. Crown lands (sita) were held by the royal family, and some farms were wholly operated (developed and occupied) by the state.

But the right to a percentage of the crop is fundamentally a tributary relation, which while it constitutes in a sense a form of ground-rent, cannot be called ownership in the modern sense. Private ownership in this latter form was most closely approximated with respect to houses and limited plots of land in the cities and towns. Private possession of houses gradually entered village life, but the vast majority of croplands were communally worked and occupied, at first by the whole village and later by families. Where private holdings did develop in their earliest form, this

was probably the result of new settlements by wealthy merchants who were able to maintain day-labourers to farm as tenants. Other workers received a proportion of the crop in a share-cropping arrangement. But here again this was primarily a relationship of possession on the part of the landlord (in the original political sense). Hereditary possession did develop in these cases, but the land was automatically alienated if abandoned, which demonstrates that such rights were based only upon de facto use of the land. Furthermore, the state if sufficiently powerful, could use the pretext of inadequate private development in order to seize lands from its political enemies, which retaliation later became frequently used against the Buddhists. This again indicates, however, that land rights were based upon possession and use (which could be legally enforced), but not in general upon ownership.

Gradually usufructuary rights held in perpetuity, which became common under the Guptas, came to hold the de facto and de jure characteristics of modern ownership. Here the state alienated its tributary obligations in most respects, in return generally for the protection of its frontiers, which thus did not require policing by royal officials. Privatisation of possession within the village gained in strength in this similar later period, but taxes were still owed to local lords, who theoretically still held overall use rights. Complete and free hereditary disposition of large landholdings does not come into being until long after the periods of concern to us here. Hence both notions of total royal control or ownership are misleading, since privatised posses-

sion arises only at the expense of political control, which was in any case a political right over the results of labour (as subjects of a lord) rather than dominion over territory, which was the legal fiction proposed by the state. Even control by the state was probably only widespread and efficient for short periods during the Mauryan era. Social control was later primarily maintained through the granting of estates to the Brahmins, who were the principal agents of the privatisation of holdings larger than village size.¹⁰

In the Mauryan period the state administrative structure was primarily concerned with efficient taxation and the regulation of exchange, rather than the production or the direct exploitation of raw materials. Mining is the major exception to this, the Superintendent of Mines being among the most important of all state officials, responsible for ten separately lucrative forms of revenue.¹¹ Otherwise, although the state derived benefits from such monopolies as salt and liquor, its ultimate support lay in the ability to control and license the profits of the guilds, extract forced labour (visti), and ensure the continual flow of produce from the periphery to the palace, the military, and the civil administration.

II. Trade and Production

Extensive regulation of trade was probably initially profitable to the state, but possibly acted as a significant deterrent to further growth and accumulation. Maximum profits allowed on domestic commerce were 5%; on foreign trade, 10%. In addition, there was a general tax of 10% on all commodities, based upon the cost of manufacture. Toll duties were

one-fifth of the value of the goods, with a further one-fifth of this amount superadded as a trading tax. Enforcement of rules of sale was aided by the imposition of the death penalty in the event of false declarations concerning transactions.¹ No commodity could be sold at the source of its manufacture, and the centralisation of both sales and production largely precluded the growth of competition between any but the smallest units of production.

Foreign trade at this point was still bound by the degree of risk involved, as well as an inadequately developed technological basis. Even at its height during a later period, sea trade was confined to relatively light and highly-priced articles, since the ships available rarely displaced more than 500 tons in total weight.² Nonetheless, trade with Greece, Egypt, Arabia and Persia increased somewhat, with Roman exchange expanding enormously at the very end of the Mauryan period. Cloth, iron products, spices, jewellery, and precious stones, drugs, and perfumes constituted the vast majority of goods carried.³

Following the period of imperial consolidation, commercial activities expanded rapidly within India. Here food-stuffs and articles of comfort (as opposed to necessity or luxury) tended to predominate. Gradually certain regions came to be known for the particular qualities of a specific product, such as cloth and perfume with respect to Benares. Jaimal Rai argues that this regionalisation of both production and commerce became most important under Kautilya, i.e., in the early years of the Mauryan empire. Although urbanisation continues in the post-Mauryan epoch, in relation especially to the impetus of Roman trade, the conflict bet-

ween large-scale specialisation and local self-sufficiency was eventually resolved in favor of the latter. The Mauryan state failed to maintain its centralised administrative apparatus to the same degree as, for instance, the Chinese bureaucracy, which became an organic and accepted part of the social structure. The transition from an imposed political entity to a necessary social phenomenon was impeded by many factors which, had they not occurred, might have led to the integration of the state into society on the same scale in India. Linguistic and caste barriers were strong; political allegiances proved extremely temporary in many cases. In particular the bureaucracy lacked a homogenous class basis upon which to perpetuate itself, which in turn subverted its ability to dissociate itself from the actions of a particular monarch. Both the Brahmins and the merchant classes were opposed generally to the enhanced strength of the bureaucracy, and there were additional internal dissensions of caste, family, and administrative subdivision. All of these inhibited the transition to state/bureaucratic administration. Neither institution could dominate society without the other; hence state-enjoined economic specialisation failed to become more extensive and did not eventually alter the fundamental character of the dominant mode of production.⁴

Despite the efforts to render production more efficient through the use of the natural division of labour, a low level of technological achievement, and the social inhibitions upon both scientific exploration and the combination of various workers in larger enterprises (except for slaves) hindered the development of what we now term 'industry'.

The economy was thus based largely upon trade and agriculture, both at this point expanding continuously.⁵ State efforts in many ways aided the latter far more than the former.

Both the guilds and the state shared economic control in urban life. In the rural districts, control by the central authority was always tenuous, and many outlying provinces were virtually independent by the time of Aśoka. Autocratic efforts and the nascent bureaucratic formation ultimately failed to significantly alter the relatively loose federation which the empire became shortly after achieving the unity of its massive conquests.⁶

One major attempt to simultaneously secure the border regions and increase the revenue of the state was the forced resettlement of whole groups of villages to outlying areas. This was accomplished with the clear understanding of the relation of class to productivity: Kautilya personally suggested a ratio of 500 Śūdra families to 100 of any other group in the new population.⁷ This policy also helped to dilute some exiled populations of the conquered sanghas (tribal republics), who were however also apparently forced to engage in agriculture. Some exemption from taxation was granted, and there were increasing degrees of independence from royal interference for these settlements. This marks the inception of the self-sufficient economic system on a massive scale, and is strongly parallel to the policies of the Roman empire on the Germanic border during the eclipse of the system of widespread exchange, which laid the groundwork for European feudalism.⁸

Land revenues were collected both on individual and collective holdings, at the standard rate of one-sixth of the crop, unless state-supported irrigation was involved. It is possible that crop extractions rose as high as one-quarter during certain critical periods, and it is furthermore clear that Mauryan land revenues were substantially higher than those achieved by the Guptas.⁹ Certainly on the sita (royal lands) taxes were even higher, up to seven-eighths of the crop, although those willing to bring private funds to develop state lands accordingly received a far greater proportion in return than those who contributed only their labour, who were in the large majority.¹⁰ In addition the state occasionally levied extra regional crops or taxes upon villages, sometimes demanding even the planting of an additional crop.

Where land grants were made to royal officers, they were merely usufructuary, disallowing sale or mortgaging of the holdings. There is no evidence yet for any organised Brahmin control over substantial areas in this period. The ancient prejudices against manual labour inhibited Brahmin penetration into agriculture for some time; in addition Brahmins who were priests, as well as Buddhists and other religious organisations, received direct support of both food and money from the state.

Later land grants became the conditio sine qua non for the revival of Brahminism. Although the crown possessed vast agricultural estates, and acted to aid cultivation wherever possible, it is not known if there was a class of landowners between the medium peasants and the king. This

is a complex question, but of the greatest importance to the overall understanding of the evolution of Indian history in the ancient period. We will as a result consider it at some length in relation to the general configuration of classes in the Mauryan period.

III. Class Formations

Since there has been little agreement on a number of important aspects of class formation and constitution, it seems best to commence with a few generally acceptable propositions. One problem is particularly perplexing: whether or not a bureaucracy can be termed a class has puzzled Marxist theorists greatly, even before the phenomenon of the 'new Soviet class' added an onerous practical dimension to certain general historical considerations. The whole question has been generally faced with only a very limited degree of analytic rigour, especially in relation to modern history.

As with property relations generally in early India, ownership per se is not the principal criterion in addressing this question. The extent to which a given group appropriates and benefits from a particular relationship to the productive process determines its homogeneity as a class. However, to pick a clear example, both a master and his servant may derive their livelihoods from the ownership of a factory by the former, yet this does not place them both within the same relationship to that workplace. In a bureaucratic formation, the lowliest soldier and the prime minister of the state both are paid from the social surplus rendered as taxation to the state. They thus stand in the same relationship to the means of production, yet occupy

very different positions within this relation, and enjoy few similarities of wages or social status. Yet in an objective sense their interests as members of a group remain common, although as members of fractions within the larger whole friction concerning distribution may be evident.

Hence appropriation generally may determine common grounds of identity, and provide objective grounds for the existence of a class, while differential benefit incurs further subdivisions within this group, and may greatly restrict its ability to function as a collective actor.

In the Mauryan case, the establishment, maintenance, and disintegration of the administrative structure can be traced with some detail. Senior officials in the Mauryan state were often Brahmins, a prominent example being the army commander who slew the last Mauryan emperor during a public parade.¹ Brahmin influence was naturally most notable in areas where literacy was required. But the bureaucracy, as a whole, encompassing tasks ranging from first minister to spies and day labourers, included all castes, with the possible exception of Chandalas, who at any rate stand theoretically outside of the system. The pay ratio was in the order of 1:96 from the lowest to the highest grades.² Ultimately the bureaucracy, despite its inherent rationalism, probably continued rather than mitigated divisions of both caste and class. While the monarch might be a Sūdra, such status seems to have been especially rare among great state officials. Many Kśatriyas remained with the profession of arms, and there is little evidence to indicate that state employees in other professions did not follow the general

exclusivity in the caste-guild-profession relation.

Lacking sufficient time and tradition to develop a homogenous sense of distinctive self-interest, the administrative apparatus disappeared quickly once its basis - taxation - was unendurably strained. Rivalries of caste, family, region, and class remained probably barely submerged below the surface of official activities. At a later date two sections of the former bureaucracy became jātis of scribes, apparently in competition with the Brahmins for positions under lesser princes.³ While it is thus a misconception to see in the Mauryan state only the personage of the king, yet the bureaucracy cannot be construed as much more than an appendage to the royal family. Monarch, administration, and army did share the same basis of income, but within the state corporation (the state in many ways originating as a military guild) conflicting interests undermined collective consciousness of common goals. Given the short duration of imperial tenure, nothing like the gentry-scholar mandarinat with its Confucian tradition developed in India. Had the administration developed a strong basis of caste/class in a more self-conscious manner, this might have altered these circumstances.⁴

Other features of the social structure maintained a greater degree of consistency. Guilds, in particular those of merchants, grew despite the fetters of state control. Private accumulation of wealth continued, despite the immanent threat of simple expropriation by the crown, on political or economic grounds. Whether or not there was a large intermediary class is, as we have noted, a matter of great conject-

ure. Pran Nath has argued, on the basis of an interpretation of the Arthaśāstra, that the term sāmanta indicated a large-scale landowner (or receiver of rent-tributes), and that the king "wanted to reduce all powerful sāmantas into peaceful loyal landowners, and if possible to bring their property directly under the control of the king."⁵ It appears that hostages were taken from this class of former rulers, and settled at Pātaliputra in order to ensure their allegiance. In addition strategic royal marriages took place in order to cement military alliances.

Slavery may have played a major role in Mauryan production, particularly in the mines, although it seems doubtful that Thapar's suggestion that "most of the labour power was provided by the slaves" can be extended beyond certain specific state enterprises.⁶ Artisans seem to have been both independent and incorporated into the guilds. Labourers included slaves (in households and in the new settlements) as well as bonded individuals paying debts, and free day workers.⁷

Agricultural workers tended increasingly to be Śūdras, although in the Punjab region, where both Vedic and Greek influences were stronger, all the varnas apparently engaged in agriculture on a large scale.⁸ Despite the possibilities of arbitrary deportation, there is some evidence that the Śūdras "were under better terms under the Mauryas than at any other time", since the liquidation of large 'private' estates and widespread employment by the state tended to reduce private discrimination.⁹

Aside from the abortive attempt at administrative central-

isation, the settlement of new regions constitutes the most important change in overall social relations in the Mauryan period. There is some evidence that a few state officials came to hold hereditary tenure in some regions near the end of the dynasty. Class distinctions in remote areas were less fluid, and therefore tended to become hereditary at a more advanced pace, thus contributing to the general separation of varna from jāti. Brahmins were also 'exported', and gradually became the recipients of land grants, less in exchange for spiritual merit than for the maintenance of moral and civil order. Although urban growth continued at least until the middle of the Gupta period, the displacement of the rural elite by the urban middle class was hindered by the relatively rapid resurgence of rural independence and self-sufficiency, both planned and unintended. This process was initially aided by the Buddhist and Jaina religions, which attempted to found their retreats far from urban centres, but still situated on the trade routes. But the lending of money to merchants by these religions also tended to drain wealth from the countryside into the cities, which was to contribute significantly to the alteration of conditions in the subsequent era.

PART THREE: THE GUPTA EMPIRE (320-440 AD)

I. Formation of the Empire

So tenuous was the degree of determination of the society by the state in ancient India, that when the Mauryan empire collapsed into rival kingdoms, social prosperity and cultural expansion continued unabated, in some ways distinctly

aided by the alleviation of Mauryan restrictions upon accumulation. Without a doubt Aśoka's conversion to Buddhism alienated important allies. With the suppression of virtually all animal sacrifices, and the appointment of Dhamma-mahātmas as 'supervisors of public morals', Brahmin economic and political interests were aroused to a new height.¹ After Aśoka's death in 236 BC the dynasty continued, weakened, for a few more years, only collapsing completely after the coup by the Sunga general Puśyamitra (c. 184 BC). After neutralising the Greek invaders who had rendered chaotic the remnants of the Mauryan administration, Puśyamitra - a Brahmin - performed the great aśva-medha (Vedic horse sacrifice), which traditionally legitimised the territory of the monarch and the unity of the state and the orthodox religion. Concurrently he began a full-scale persecution of the Buddhists, some of whom had allied themselves with the Greek invaders.²

These events in many ways foreshadowed the climate of social life which was to develop over the next half millenium. Slowly the imperial edifice crumbled, while lesser monarchs and a few re-emergent warrior republics attempted to secure local borders. Several lineages distinguished themselves in the extent and duration of their dominions. The Kuśānas held power in north-west India, reaching their peak under Kanīśka in the first century AD. Kharaveli, king of Kalinga, competed with the Sātavāhana empire for control during the second century BC. The latter were the first to extend Sanskrit culture on an organised basis into the Deccan plateau. The Sakas in western India gradually introduced some aspects of Mauryan administrative procedures in the regions under

their control, even to the extent of introducing Prakrit (a popularised form of Sanskrit) and Brāhmi script where formerly the Graeco-Roman styles, language, and political traditions had been predominant.³

Most of these empires, however, failed to achieve even the duration of their Mauryan predecessor. Kuṣāna supremacy lasted for barely a century, for despite the commercial wealth derived from a position on the trade routes between the Chinese and Roman empires, centralised authority remained largely tributary and federative. Vassal states and tribes continuously challenged Kuṣāna supremacy, and after several centuries of gradual decay the dynasty disappeared in the early fourth century AD, attacked from the west by Sassanid (Persian) expansion, and from the east by the Guptas.

Although the Sātavāhana empire was to meet a similar fate, it was the most long-lived of all the early Indian empires, lasting 460 years despite great changes of fortune (c. 130 BC - 330 AD). At the height of the empire (c. 90-150 AD), vast wealth was attained through international trade, and colonisation of areas of modern southeast Asia rose greatly. Despite the existence of a vast and thriving exchange economy, it is probable that state officials were paid entirely in kind, another instance of the partial transfer of economic power from the political classes to the merchants. Already in this period tax revenues had fallen enormously from the Mauryan peak, such that the state relied increasingly upon its agricultural levies, basically maintaining only the salt monopoly from among the innumerable

important commodities over which it earlier had control.⁴

Wars and changes of boundary threatened trade and undermined the role of the state in the legitimation of social activities. Military conflict doubtless had the effect of more or less permanently identifying the state with its coercive rather than its legitimative function. Since the ascendancy of low-caste dynasties, in fact, much of this legitimation had been transferred to those social forces - the Brahmins and Kṣatriyas - who were willing to recognise and support with family, status, and tradition a military leader powerful enough to seize the throne. Conflicts between Brahmins and Buddhists were far less religious struggles than the attempt to claim this right of social sanction for political activities. Had republican institutions persisted (where national and social identity were more strongly fused), or if the various empires had been guided by families of Brahmins or Kṣatriyas, it might not have been true that "the loyalty which in most other cultures is given to the state was given to the social order."⁵

What political devotion did exist in the empires, however, was directed towards nothing more abstract than particular individuals. Given the great economic, ethnic, and linguistic divisions in society, even Aśoka's policy of Dhamma (order through righteousness) failed to more than temporarily identify the socio-religious with the political institutions.

Before the ascendancy of local dharma over collective adjudication, however, there remained the imperial admin-

istration of the Guptas. Arising somewhere in the Magadhan region, the Guptas were probably of Vaiśya origin, although they later managed to achieve (as was the custom of the age) Kṣatriya status.⁶ Chandra Gupta I founded the empire in about 320 AD, but defensive wars followed extensive conquests, and this continual conflict lent great support to those decentralising tendencies already mentioned. Monarchs tended to remain much more mobile than earlier, thus aiding in the general decline of the cities. Many later land grants are thus ascribed simply from 'camp headquarters', indicating the gradual separation of political from commercial and cultural centres.⁷

Initially the state shared in the commercial prosperity of the period: more gold coins have been discovered from this dynasty than any other. The gradual alienation of land rights, however, multiplied its consequences with great rapidity, once trade began to decline. Most of the major sources of royal revenue were specifically included in the grants of land to feudatories and Brahmins. General land taxes, salt, mining, and crop revenues, herd increases, and even the right to buried treasure were all surrendered. For the price of the initial value of the land (which was often unsettled), the vast majority of future revenues was exchanged, indicating a probable shortage of funds on the part of the monarchy. In addition, this was doubtless an attempt to give subordinates a stake in the defense of the empire, as well as extending the nominal region of tribute. In particular, the borders could be defended by local resid-

ents, which lessened the requirement for a standing army. Many grants, especially those to religious organisations, remained inalienable 'in perpetuity', thus discouraging speculation and the further development of private property, which might have led to the emergence of a landed class whose interests might not have coincided as directly with those of the state.⁸ As we will see, this is for the most part what occurred anyway, especially once individuals rather than organisations became frequent recipients of land grants.

These conditions, coupled with the state-supported revival of Brahminism, demonstrate the increasing reliance of the state upon more traditional, social means of the maintenance of public order. Brahmin strength grew internally through the elaboration of new cults and their incorporation into the Brahmanical varnaśrāmadharma paradigm. The additional rights of revenue conferred upon them a political capacity which, as it increasingly became localised, undercut the authority and power of the state beyond reparation. Other factors then guaranteed the solidification of this process.

II. Trade and Production

It is perhaps no mere coincidence that the first century BC witnessed the beginnings of the land grant system under the Sātavāhanas, at the same time as this very dominion began to trade extensively with the Roman empire. The discovery of monsoon regularity structured trading patterns and decreased the risks involved in long-distance transport. Sufficient

plunder and the use of mercenaries created a class of idle wealth in Rome more than eager to partake of the luxuries of mythical India. While land passage had offered some commercial advantage as early as the second century BC, the sea routes avoided a number of hostile middlemen (such as the Parthians) and also reduced many expenses.

Indo-Roman trade began for the most part with the reign of Augustus (27 BC-14 AD). An exchange of ambassadors (who were primarily commercial representatives) assured the good faith of both parties. Monsoon courses were probably discovered about 70 AD, after which the volume of trade rises enormously.¹ For a number of generations (for the Romans at least until the state intervened in the first century AD under Justinian to effect price controls), profits were enormous.² Despite the fact that merchandise was frequently sold at 100 times its cost, the Roman upper classes developed considerable tastes for Oriental wares. In turn this was proffered to the barbarians conquered by the Roman legions, to such an extent that (in one of imperialism's lesser-known but more blatant ironies) when Alaric stood at the gates of Rome in 408 AD, among his demands were 4000 Chinese silk robes and 3000 pounds of Indian pepper.³

There is sufficient evidence to state that, while trade revenues did not constitute the principal economic basis of the various Indian monarchies, they did provide the foundation for their social prosperity generally. Strabo mentions a letter from an Indian king to Augustus extending the latter access and assistance, and during one Sātavāhana war Indian

ports were subjected to an economic blockade, suggesting that this trade must have been considered vital to the outcome of the conflict.⁴ On the whole the trade balance seems to have rested greatly in India's favour: Pliny records a drain of 55 million gold sesterces annually to India. From Rome slaves, wines, papyrus, lead, copper, tin and glass were imported. Those products which India gave in exchange we have already listed previously.⁵

After the third century AD trade fell off greatly, mainly due to the virtual anarchy attendant upon the collapse of the Roman empire, which engendered a return to barter and payment in kind after continual depreciation destroyed the value of currency.⁶ The drain of precious metals to Asia doubtless aided in the general decline of the empire, just as the collapse of Roman trade in turn favoured the processes of decentralisation already at work in Indian society. After the Gupta empire few gold coins are discoverable, indicating the influence of both processes at work.⁷

It is difficult to calculate the internal effects of this trade. Guilds became a much more significant factor in the elaboration of state policies generally. Between the second century BC and the third century AD Srenidharma (corporation laws) apparently came to command a degree of respect equal to that accorded to the laws of the state. Supported by their own private armies, the larger guilds must have been virtually states within states, since they employed hundreds of workers and controlled their lives to

the extent of being able to veto the choice of a wife.⁸

It was not, however, the extent of their membership, nor the degree of loyalty and cohesiveness of their organisations, that gave the guilds their central position in social life. Many of the larger guilds, especially those in urban areas, were financed, controlled, and administered by financial middlemen, usually merchants. It was the main concern of these individuals to show a profit, and not especially to be concerned with the development of a particular enterprise.⁹ Thus the guilds acted as banks for all sectors of the population, paying interest not only on cash but as well on properties extended for investment. Furthermore, in cases where money was granted to religious organisations by the crown, it was often directly invested with one or another of the approximately 31 guilds offering such services. Lest this seem too fluid a set of circumstances, however, it should be remembered that the huge profits which went to a few individuals were largely hoarded or converted into jewellery.¹⁰ Conspicuous consumption thus provided the basis for the carefree sensuality of the Kāmasūtra, whose philosophical origins we will examine in the next chapter.

We have earlier noted the beginnings of regional specialisation under the Mauryan empire. During the period of trade with Rome it appears that villages of up to 1000 families engaged in a single task, such as woodworking, potting or trapping, often on contract to merchants whose tasks were simplified by this localisation.¹¹ With the decline of the trade with Rome it is likely that the vast majority of these

concentrations disappeared, since the self-sufficient village system precluded such widespread and well-organised exchange of commodities.

It is doubtful that the guilds were important land-owners, their wealth deriving largely from trade and commerce. Through the Buddhist sangha, however, there did exist an enormous degree of influence in the disposition and use of land. Buddhism had secularised greatly since the first scandal in the fourth century BC when a monk accepted money rather than food while begging. Centuries of monastic life supported by royal endowments and gifts from the rising middle classes had produced not only an immense alteration in the religion itself, but a religious corporation of great strength. Inscriptions relating to the gifts of merchants, bamboo-cutters, and potters' guilds indicate that support cut across the divisions between trade and manufacturing. Monks travelled overland with the merchants, doubtless aiding the sales efforts of both parties.¹² The monasteries, frequently situated on major trade routes, both accumulated and supplied capital to the merchants, much less frequently so to manufacturers and producers of goods made locally from raw materials. Buddhist support even extended to the prohibition of debtors entering the sangha.¹³

Drastic reductions in economic momentum altered this relationship significantly. Although intrastate and local trade continued, profits fell, and the Buddhists became more dependent upon the incomes from their vast-landed properties. Partially because of its middle-class orientations, Buddhism

was never very solidly based in agrarian areas. With the resurgence of the Brahmins as a landed power, conflicts with the Buddhists became more frequent. The decline of the urban guilds became pervasive by the sixth century AD; thereafter Buddhism begins its descent, virtually disappearing entirely from the Indian plains by the ninth century. It is interesting that both Pataliputra, once the greatest city in India, and Nālanda, which as a university with over 12,000 Buddhist monks was the largest such establishment in the world in its time, were almost completely abandoned by the middle of the seventh century.¹⁴

III. Class Formations

Three of the ruling houses in post-Mauryan northern India were composed of Brahmin lineages. In addition to this immediate political power, this epoch, so often termed the 'Classical Age' of early Indian society, was also marked by the virtually "unchallenged intellectual supremacy of the Brahmins."¹ The flowering of cultural activity, however, was more the responsibility of the settled urban class of patrons, many of whom were merchants, than it was the result of any 'purification' of religion or culture by the purveyors of the ancient tradition. Still, the triumph of the Brahmins was much more than cultural and represents both the development of earlier conditions and, later, the reaction to the decline in trade and the ruralisation (by comparison) of social life.

Occasionally in the past the Brahmins had reverted to control over estates, both independently, through religious

organisations, and as secular middlemen. Three interrelated phenomena now altered the character of this activity. Firstly, as we have seen, Brahmin dynasties arose, and concerned themselves with the rectification of tradition, in particular with the avoidance of caste contamination, which one Sātavāhana monarch claimed to have completely halted.² A continual decline in state control over landlords, who were able to purchase use-rights and freedom from taxation from the state. Finally, the specific assignment of land grants to Brahmins cemented the power of this caste, since the landlord nobility were probably mainly supporters of Brahminism anyway.³

Thus the idealised vision of the caste system presented in the Codes of Manu, which were formulated in this period, is in many ways appropriate to the inception of the Indian middle ages. Prior to the Guptas intercaste mobility, especially among the three top varnas, seems to have been fairly frequent. With the decline of the cities a rigidity set in which has characterised India ever since. As land revenues slowly supplanted commerce as a basis of social position, the class intermediate between king and cultivator gained increasingly in power, wealth, and status. In some areas the inception of a baronial form of feudalism may be noted, where the king granted revenues in exchange for a promise of future military service.⁴

Ultimately the new position of the Brahmins as a class was reflected in Gupta political thought, as well as in the revitalised Brahminism which is usually referred to as 'Hinduism'.⁵ The new estates demanded legal protection, and thus the law codes of Nārada and Brihaspati contain the first

mention of the partition of landed property.⁶ In turn, as the Brahmins became a quasi-feudal aristocracy, the law codes noted that they may normally carry arms. Formerly this had been only an emergency measure.⁷

Meanwhile the Kśatriya varna had disappeared from large areas of north India. A few militantly independent republics managed to survive, especially in the west. In the south and east there were for the most part only Brahmins and Śūdras.⁸ While there were exceedingly few Kśatriya ruling houses, many soldiers continued their hereditary profession in all grades of service. A chivalric ethic stressing military virtues (similar to the feudal knights in Europe, the Samurai in Japan, or parts of the Mohist school in China) arose, well-suited to the needs and aspirations of the landed aristocracy. As elsewhere, it enjoined simple heroism and demanded that no great reflection be made on the nature of soldierly duties. This is the essence of Kṛiṣṇa's advice to Arjuna in the central episode of the Bhagavat-Gita, which epitomises the social relations of the new age. Women, as well, found their virtues more elevated and their freedom more restricted than at any previous point in Indian history.⁹

Directly linked to the consolidation of the Brahmins as a landed power was the political and economic demise of the Vaiśyas as a class. Some degree of social control over mercantile activities had always taken place through the presence of Brahmins or their allies within the administration of the guilds. We now find in Bṛihaspati, however, the

injunction that only those acquainted with the Vedas and having a noble family lineage shall be appointed as guild executive officers.¹⁰ This was probably an effective policy in inhibiting gifts by wealthy guilds to the heretical religions. Individual Vaiśyas could of course still succeed in gaining wealth and status, nor should it be forgotten that the Gupta dynasty was Vaiśya in origin.

Yet it is clear that the general trend is closely tied to the decline in trade. Although there is at least one instance of a vaiśy-āgrahāra (land grant to a Vaiśya) in the region of modern Orissa, this is evidently exceedingly rare.¹¹ After the seventh century the guilds virtually disappeared completely, replaced by gosthi, which were temporary organisations apparently only erected in times of great distress.¹² Prior to this, of course, was a tremendous increase in both the number of traders and their collective power as a class, providing the basis for the great degree of cultural expansion already mentioned. The decline of this class in power was likely an event of dramatic proportions in some areas; evidence exists to indicate that some merchant properties may even have been simply confiscated and given to the Brahmins.¹³

Many of these former déclassé merchants and store-owners (this was probably less true of caravan operators, the third Vaiśya subdivision) seemingly returned either to agriculture, or to an appropriate place in the village division of labour. Famine, plague, and a decline in population may have eased the competition potentially attendant

upon such a transition. After the gahapati (landlords), who were rarely Vaiśya according to present knowledge, there were two divisions of the peasantry. The kutumbi were the middle peasants, farming their own land and hiring labourers occasionally. After these comes the kināsa category of poor landless cultivators.¹⁴ Into this group, most of whom were traditionally Sūdras, now doubtless fell members of the displaced Vaiśyas, attaining after some generations the status of their new occupations. Just as the gāmabhojaka (administrative overlords) became gradually simply hereditary landlords, so it seems that the peasantry became increasingly tied to the land.

This is not literally true, however: tenants were not directly bound to the soil as in European feudalism, and in fact the last recourse of the Indian peasant (sometimes whole villages) has always been simple flight from abominable conditions. But the poor peasantry did sink into increasing debt, and superimposed upon this was a further debility still pending resolution. The Brahmanical revival, which by now was so powerful as to receive significant support from the Gupta monarchs, despite their own origins, engendered a heightened sense of the ritual purity associated with the personages of the Brahmins. Untouchability begins to become widespread in about 400 AD, shortly after cattle-killing had been made a capital offense by the Gupta kings.¹⁵ In relegating many groups to a severely dehumanised status, this class action of supreme cruelty represented the ultimate triumph of the Brahmins over the Buddhists and

the labouring classes, for despite the fact that the Buddhists prudently never attacked the institution of caste, neither had they grossly attempted to increase its role in society. To the great degradation of the Sūdras was added an even deeper dimension of the deliberate infliction of suffering because of occupation. This has created a debt of which only the twentieth century may yet provide the means of repayment.¹⁶

PART FOUR: THE ASIATIC MODE OF PRODUCTION AND EARLY INDIAN SOCIAL FORMATIONS

It is not our purpose here to evaluate the overall historical utility of the category of the 'Asiatic Mode of Production'. Our concern is rather to assess the degree of correspondence of this concept with the reality of conditions prevailing in early India, according to the evidence furnished by contemporary scholarship. Marx felt, as we have seen, that the 'AMP' was one of a variety of forms encountered after, or as a part of the process of, the dissolution of the tribal/primitive communal forms of existence, but incorporating elements of the earlier ways of life. While the 'AMP' was thus not for Marx the earliest form prevailing in India, we are in agreement with Mandel, Melotti, and others that he did intend it to describe most of Indian history prior to the inception of British colonialism in the eighteenth century.¹

A number of interpretive comments may aid in judging the applicability of Marx's category. Firstly, the notion of a Mode of Production is, as must be frequently emphasised,

a legitimate historical abstraction describing the dominant mode of production at a given time and place in history. As such, this concept fully enjoins the description of other modes of production interacting with the dominant mode but of subordinate extensiveness or importance. Such a dual analysis is implied in all of Marx's historical researches, although it remained insufficiently articulated. In addition, it is worthwhile reiterating the fact that Marx never studied Asian or Indian history adequately enough to more than elementally offer certain tentative opinions, which are nonetheless still frequently treated with a devotion worthy of divine revelation.

Foremost among Marx's motivations in describing the 'AMP' was the desire to understand why capitalism first arose in western Europe and not elsewhere. Since he merely carried forward many of the views (political, economic, and philosophical) of his predecessors and contemporaries, Marx's notion of the 'AMP' was mainly a syncretistic contribution of the comprehension of nonwestern societies. In this sense it does illuminate the principle of uneven development prior to the age of bourgeois capitalism. The primary barriers to development Marx found were the polycasual phenomena of political despotism, the unity of agriculture and manufacturing, and the insufficient growth of towns, trades, and hence class antagonisms.

In relation to the particular period of our investigations, some of Marx's assertions are either clearly wrong or severely overstated. Ownership (in the modern sense)

of all lands either by the crown or the state was a legal fiction perpetuated by the class of rulers. Nonetheless, repetition and mimicry of this view continue. The functional centrality of irrigation to the maintenance of state power is far more applicable to China than to early India.

'Despotism', as the crucial attribute of the state, is also largely inappropriate nomenclature, and points to the collapsing of various historical periods of state strength and great decentralisation within the 'AMP' category. This is not to suggest that the despotic usage of power did not exist. Both arbitrary and wholly legal cruelties were exercised by the state on numerous occasions. But to impute these as a universal description is to ignore the frequent weakness of central authority, and to misread the extreme sadism and brutality of the social system, which as we have seen is not necessarily congruent at all with the activities of specifically political authorities. This latter point helps to demonstrate the central contradiction of the 'AMP' hypothesis, which lies in the ostensibly simultaneous dominance of the state and of society (the self-sufficient villages and their customs).

In addition, there is a very dubious utility (in any but the most abstruse philosophic sense) in describing the relations of production under the 'AMP' as "generalised slavery", a Hegelian metaphor of little analytic significance. Nor, for this period, is it true that rent and tax absolutely coincide, since levies on commercial activities are decidedly different from ground rent. Furthermore, the bureaucratic interlude of the Mauryan empire (not to

mention the Chinese mandarin² of which Marx had a far greater knowledge) demands an explanation in terms of a class analysis, in terms of benefit and appropriation in relation to the means of production, given the obvious paucity of private property relations. Marx's failure to confront this issue in this context accounts at least partially for the analytic paralysis of later Marxists in the face of the Soviet state.

Most of the inadequacies criticised here can be ascribed to a combination of insufficient evidence upon which to draw conclusions, and a certain propensity (invariably universal) to remain within a number of paradigmatic biases, here those of the middle part of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, we see how seriously erroneous is the simple application de novo of the tentative assertions in Marx's texts, as if innovation were a form of original sin.^o The vast majority, unfortunately, of commentators within the Marxist tradition continue to argue from the general analytic framework to the historical particular, often with no knowledge whatsoever of the phenomena being generalised. This in turn largely a function of the positivistic bias of Marxism in the twentieth century.

Criticism, however, does not suffice in the least to comprehend the evolution of Indian history. We tend to hold to the view that several major changes in early Indian history radically altered the mode of production, somewhat contrary to Marx's own assertion.³ Metallurgy, which altered agriculture and warfare and provided a strong basis for the foundation of the Mauryan state, was the first of

these. The system of caste was the second, once the decline in trade deprived the merchants of their economic base and allowed the Brahmins to complete their political ascension. In this sense the system of caste is not a natural but distinctly a political product, if its specific content and not merely the general form of hereditary occupational relations is the issue. The growth of trade in the period between the first two factors remains a third major force of innovation.

Such an interpretation presupposes several assumptions. If, by the 'AMP' is meant the combination of self-sufficient villages with the caste division of labour, then it cannot describe the primitive tribes, even those engaged in sedentary activities, who inhabited most areas between the Aryan invasion and the later extension of Hindu customs into the interior of the country. Thus the 'AMP' would apply to north India only after the decline in trade under the Guptas, by which time much of India had been subjected to caste. Secondly, while agriculture doubtless remained the principal activity for the largest proportion of the population throughout the period of our consideration, its character varied from communal to family, private, and state control, ownership, and management. There appear to be grounds as well for the claim that commerce and trade in some periods contributed the majority of social wealth (in terms of money, not goods), although manufacturing remained endemically a subordinate mode of production in early India.

After the foundation of the first major Indian empire

(discounting the Harappan civilisation), that of the Mauryas, a pronounced tendency to vacillate between centralised and decentralised forms of rule characterises the majority of Indian history. This alteration between the predominance of empires versus that of village communities constitutes the great dialectical movement of Indian history, never truly resolved until British penetration. It is as a result of this consistent lack of a durable institutional balance that the 'AMP' has been termed a 'transitional' mode of production, since the forces at play in Indian history remained unresolved for such a great period of time. The skeletal 'AMP', stripped of its more dubious encumbrances, definitely applies only after the institutionalisation of the jajmani division of labour in the villages, in other words only after approximately 500 AD. Prior to this, as we have seen, the specialisation of whole villages occurs, although this never, of course, predominated in Indian production. We are thus left with an 'interim' period between Vedic detribalisation and the rise of the state, and the later period in which 'society' largely tends to overwhelm civil authority and the state, or in which such authority becomes primarily social rather than political.

With the possible exception of a few years of the Mauryan dynasty, neither the monarchy nor the state apparatus can be described as the "repository of all power".⁴ Tributary relations tend to be prevalent, and ultimately the powers of the state are alienated and mediated in such a way as to secure the predominance of rural life. Despite the constraints of royal interference, the towns and civil

society generally grew from the Magadhan age onwards. As Marx stressed early in his researches, it was within the realm of city life and civil society that the growth and alterations in production ('history') were to be located.⁵

In this sense, the period spanning that of the strength of Buddhism in India precisely represents the aspirations of civil society, when the cities became centres of trade commerce, and where savings and investment (prerequisites of a market economy) emerged to a considerable degree.

Marx was extremely accurate, however, and far in advance of all others of his age, in comprehending that commerce and trade intruded only lightly upon the process of production as a whole. Power was extensively shared by the state with the guilds, as well as with local overlords, as it was later with the landlords of the protofeudal epoch. For a number of reasons, however, the whole of society did not become involved in either trade or commodity production, even at the apex of commodity exchange. Thereafter, as in Europe, labour came to supplant money as the means of distribution of vital goods and services.⁷ The restrictions upon the guilds preventing them from directly owning and administering large estates may have hindered their development in this aspect, and thus facilitated the general economic decline, but external factors clearly play an extremely prominent role here as well.

Recently it has been increasingly suggested that the period beginning with the major land grants can be described as 'Indian feudalism'. Without entering into this debate, which raises the larger question of the typology

of tributary ('political dependency') relations, we may note that this is a substitution for the 'AMP', barring its inapplicability, in our view, to the earlier periods. The 'feudal' view, in turn, directly raises the problem of caste relations anew. We believe that caste involves a system of status relations, loosely based on the classes which first emerged out of tribal life. Only in this sense is it correct to assert that caste is "class at a primitive level of production", which is probably not what Kosambi intended in his definition.⁸ It is usually true that caste has obscured class, and, as Mencher has commented, therefore hindered the development of class consciousness.⁹

But, if this clearly demonstrates that the problem of caste is rooted in the maintenance of classes, we must again emphasise that caste and class are not equivalent concepts, the clearest evidence of this being the widespread coincidence (demanded in the logic of the system itself) of servants and their masters being of the same caste. In view of the fact that early Indian society is not as a whole characterised by serfdom, slavery, or 'generalised slavery', it is the relationship between caste and class that forms the basis of later Indian social relations, and the caste system may in this sense be described as the ossification of a set of transitional relations between tribal (preclass) and class societies, thus incorporating aspects of both. These relations - not 'tradition' but the establishment of a new political and economic order with the aid of traditional precepts - then predominate over production and exchange as a whole.

If the label 'Asiatic' is to be superceded because of its unanalytical and vaguely racist character, yet the uniqueness of the Indian modes of production must be preserved to avoid the obvious dangers of unilinear analyses of world history. At the heart of any description of early Indian social formations lies the triadic relationship between tribe, caste, and class. With the entropy of the dialectic of civil society, production and social relations fail to develop strong forms of contradiction. In later Indian history powerful states did occasionally emerge; we have noted Marx's record of the fact that Delhi under the Mughals was the greatest city in the world. Trade, despite its vacillations, always managed to make at least a few individuals extremely wealthy. But the village system as a whole, as Marx had emphasised, remained largely untouched by the 'political storm clouds' once its form had been established through the processes which we have attempted to briefly outline in this chapter.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

- 1) One of Marx's reflections upon this aspect of his method notes that "In a general analysis of this kind it is usually always assumed that the actual conditions correspond to their conception, or, what is the same, that actual conditions are represented only to the extent that they are typical of their own general case." (Capital 3, p. 141). Since the equation of these two propositions seems somewhat dubious, we are here following the general trend of the second statement.
- 2) S.A. Dange, India From Primitive Communism to Slavery (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1949); R.P. Saraf, The Indian Society (Kashmir: M.Yousuf Publishers, 1974).
- 3) Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications (London: Paladin Books, 1972). Dumont's reified concepts of 'hierarchical society' versus 'egalitarian society' are largely inspired by De Tocqueville's analysis of American society in the early nineteenth century, with its especially strong emphasis upon the 'egalitarian mentality'.
- 4) Nicos Poulantzas, "On Social Classes", New Left Review, Vol. 78 (1973), p. 34.
- 5) Karl Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy", MECW Vol. 6, especially pp. 211-12.
- 6) Joan Mencher, loc. cit.
- 7) On this, cf. Ludo Rocher, "Caste and Occupation in Classical India: the Normative Texts", Contributions to Indian Sociology, (New Series), Vol. 9, No. 1 (1975), pp. 139-51.
- 8) For further discussion see K.N. Sharma, "On the word 'varna'", in the same volume as cited in footnote #7 above, pp. 293-97. This clearly corresponds to the usage by Confucius of the term jen, which originally denoted the free-born members of the tribe, and later came to mean 'noble', and then 'virtue', achieved ostensibly through education and not as a result of birth. Similar etymological transformations occur in many other societies largely as a result of parallel developmental transitions.
- 9) loc. cit., p. 296.

PART ONE: THE FORMATION OF STATE AND SOCIETY (c. 700-400 BC)I. Character of State Formation

- 1) See Lawrence Krader's comments in The Formation of the State (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1968), pp. 13-15.
- 2) See D.C. Sircar, Studies in the Political and Administrative Systems in Ancient and Medieval India (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), pp. 236-37.
- 3) A.S. Altekar, State and Government in Ancient India (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1958), p. 136.
- 4) Max Müller denies that the term 'nihilism' is applicable to Buddhism, arguing that nirvana does not mean 'absolute nothing'. I am using the term here, however, to denote a general attitude towards social relations and the plausibility of a secular improvement in material life. See F. Max Müller, "On Buddhist Nihilism", in Lectures on the Science of Religion (New York: Charles Scribner and Co., 1872), pp. 131-51.
- 5) See, for instance, the treachery described by Ananda Coomaraswamy and Sister Nivedita in Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists (New York: Dover Books, 1962), p. 152.
- 6) A. Ghosh, The City in Early Historical India (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1973), p. 20.
- 7) Shobha Mukerji, The Republican Trends in Ancient India (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1968), p. 13.
- 8) op. cit., p. 14.
- 9) D.D. Kosambi, An Introduction to the Study of Indian History (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1975), p. 154.
- 10) Jürgen Habermas, Legitimation Crisis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), p. 20.

II. Production and Trade

- 1) R.S. Sharma, Light On Early Indian Society and Economy (Bombay: Manaktalas Publishers, 1966), p. 56.
- 2) D. Aquique, Economic History of Mithila (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1974), p. 45; see also Kosambi, op. cit., p. 139.
- 3) George Dalton, ed. Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies: Essays of Karl Polanyi (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 149.
- 4) K. Polanyi, C. Arensberg, and H. Pearson, "The Place of Economies in Societies", in Polanyi, op. cit., p. 120.
- 5) Max Weber, The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations (London: New Left Books, 1976), p. 394.

- 6) Narendra Wagle, Society at the Time of the Buddha (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966), p. 145.
- 7) P.N. Chopra, B.N. Puri, and M.N. Das, A Social, Cultural and Economic History of India (Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd, 1974), pp. 129-30; see also Aquique, op. cit., p. 80. The equivalence of these terms in many societies demonstrates the resistance accorded by kinship relations to the intrusion of market economics and the rise of the merchant classes.
- 8) U.N. Ghoshal, The Agrarian System in Ancient India (Calcutta: Saraswat Press, 1973), p. 3.
- 9) See Aquique, op. cit., pp. 33-47.
- 10) op. cit., p. 48. The early grants were for the most part limited to revenue rights, thus retaining for the crown the right of forced labour, entry of royal soldiers, etc.
- 11) See Jaimal Rai, The Rural-Urban Economic and Social Changes in Ancient India (Delhi: Bhavatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1974), p. 329. See also R.S. Sharma, "Role of Property, Family, and Caste in the Origin of the State in Ancient India", Journal of the Bihar Research Society, Vol. 44 (September 1958), p. 230. This class would seem to be no more landowners in the modern sense than was the king. They were rather (in the original sense of the term) local lords to whom tribute was granted in return for civil and military protection.
- 12) The term gāhapati apparently referred to any large landlord, while kutumbinis were probably only those of the Vaisya caste.
- 13) See R.S. Sharma, op. cit., p. 62, and Jaimal Rai, op. cit., p. 2.
- 14) Ghosh, op. cit., p. 20.

III. Class Formation

- 1) A. Guha, "Marxist Approach to Indian History: A Framework", in K.M. Kurian, ed. India: State and Society: A Marxian Approach (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1975), pp. 38-40.
- 2) This is the explanation offered for the formation of the guilds by B. Datta, in his "Origin and Development of Indian Social Polity", Man In India, Vol. 22 (1942), p. 39.
- 3) This propensity seems to mark the first major manifestation of class in developing societies. See U.N. Roy, Studies in Ancient Indian History and Culture (Allahabad: Lokbharti Publishers, 1969), p. 97.

- 4) See Tara Chand, Material and Ideological Factors in Indian History (Allahabad: University Press, 1966), p. 24. The tendency of occupation and region to become associated is increased with the beginning of Mauryan economic interventionism.
- 5) See N.K. Bose, "Caste in India", Man In India, Vol. 31 (July-December 1951), p. 268.
- 6) Guha in Kurian, op. cit., p. 40. A number of explanatory terms have been utilised in the attempt to describe the process of assimilation of tribal and foreign elements into the caste formation, among them 'Aryanisation', 'Sanskritisation', and 'Brahminisation'. The first of these tends to assume a homogenous Aryan culture interacting with a separate indigenous culture even at later points, thus tending to regard somewhat simplistically the degree of 'purity' retained by the Brahmanical customs. 'Sanskritisation' refers to the imparting of the written and spoken word, since it is apparently only around the third century BC that Sanskrit ceases to be a frequently used language in daily life. It also refers to the means by which a lower caste may eventually rise to higher status, through emulation of the ritualised activities of the upper varnas, particularly the Brahmins. This thus also refers functionally to the means by which the lower castes are further separated from the possibility of an intercaste unity. 'Brahminisation' often refers simply to the introduction of varnasramadharma, and is thus more precisely a legal term. See J.F. Staal, "Sanskrit and Sanskritisation", Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 22 (May 1963), pp. 261-68.
- 7) See Kosambi's comments in this regard, op. cit., pp. 20-27.
- 8) See K.N. Sharma, "For a Sociology of India: on the word 'Varna'", Contributions to Indian Sociology (New Series), Vol. 9, No. 1 (January-June 1975), p. 296. This apparently represents a reaction on the part of the Ksatriyas to the Brahmin attempt to gain a monopoly within the priesthood, which takes its most full expression in the creation of the Buddhist and Jaina religions.
- 9) N.K. Dutt, The Aryanisation of India (Calcutta: Firma Mukhopadhyay, 1970), p. 117.
- 10) See B. Datta, loc. cit., p. 39. It was through the office of purohita (royal priest) that the Brahmins managed to retain and even extend their social influence. For further discussion see V.W. Karambelkar, "Brahmin and Purohita", Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. 26 (December 1950), p. 300, and Stephen Cohen, "Rulers and Priests: A Study in Cultural Control", Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 6 (1963-64), p. 213. It is clear through the example of Kautilya, among others, that this office was very

quickly secularised, and was used as much in the direct interests of the state (especially under the Mauryas) as for those of the Brahmins as a class.

- 11) R.S. Sharma, loc. cit., p. 226.
- 12) See R.S. Sharma, "Usury in Early Medieval India (AD 400-1200)", Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 8 (1965-66), pp. 57, 75.
- 13) The numbers of mixed castes grows from here steadily onwards. There are eight in the later Vedic literature, ten in the Vasistha, fifteen in Baudhayana, eighteen in Gautama, seventy-two in Manu, and over one hundred in the early medieval Brāhmavaivarta Purāna. See R.S. Sharma, "Caste and Marriage in Ancient India", Journal of the Bihar Research Society, Vol. 39 (March 1954), pp. 45-54.

PART TWO: THE MAURYAN EMPIRE (325-180 BC)

I. The Nature of the State

- 1) Jean Filliozat, Political History of India (Calcutta: Suslill Gupta Ltd, 1957), p. 134 ff. See also H.G. Rawlinson, Indian Historical Studies (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1913), pp. 23-37.
- 2) S.N. Eisenstadt, The Political Systems of Empires (New York: The Free Press, 1963), pp. 11-23; also S.N. Eisenstadt, ed. The Decline of Empires (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), for comparative information.
- 3) See, for example, E.J. Rapson, ed. The Cambridge History of India (Cambridge: University Press, 1922), F.W. Thomas, "Chandragupta, the Founder of the Mauryan Empire", pp. 472-74.
- 4) See Lallanji Gopal, Chandragupta Maurya (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1968), p. 65.
- 5) Shobha Mukerji, op. cit., pp. 124-25.
- 6) See Tara Chand, op. cit., p. 32, and R.S. Sharma, op. cit., p. 62.
- 7) D.D. Kosambi, The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline (Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1970), p. 164.
- 8) This reflects the major disability in collapsing India and China into an analysis of 'Asiatic' societies. See S.N. Eisenstadt, "The Study of Oriental Despotisms as Systems of Total Power", Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 17 (May 1958), pp. 435-46, and R.S. Sharma, op. cit., p. 67.

- 9) See F.W. Thomas, "Political and Social Organisation of the Maurya Empire", in Rapson, op. cit., pp. 477-79.
- 10) On this question see Romila Thapar, "The Role of the Economy in Mauryan Politics", in B.N. Ganguli, ed. Readings in Indian Economic History (Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1964), p. 21; also U.N. Ghoshal, op. cit., pp. 102-34, and I.W. Mabbett, Truth, Myth, and Politics in Ancient India (New Delhi: Thomson Press Ltd, 1972), pp. 90-91.
- 11) J. Samaddar, Lectures on the Economic Condition of Ancient India (Calcutta: University Press, 1922), p. 108.

II. Trade and Production

- 1) See Thapar, in Ganguli, op. cit., pp. 24-25, and H.G. Rawlinson, Intercourse Between India and the Western World (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), pp. 55-58. Pran Nath also discusses other restrictions upon merchant activities during this period, in A Study in the Economic Conditions of Ancient India (London: Royal Asiatic Society Monograph Series, Vol. 20, 1929), especially p. 160.
- 2) See D.R. Chanana, "Some Problems in the Economic History of Ancient India", in Ganguli, op. cit., p. 6.
- 3) Shysamsunder Nigam, Economic Organisation in Ancient India 200 BC-200 AD (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1975), p. 190.
- 4) Jaimal Rai, op. cit., pp. 194-99.
- 5) The paucity of industrial growth is emphasised by G.L. Adhya, in Early Indian Economics (London: Asia Publishing House, 1966), pp. 93-95.
- 6) See Thapar in Ganguli, op. cit., p. 24, Tara Chand, op. cit., p. 32, and D.R. Bhandarkar, Aśoka (Calcutta: University Press, 1969), pp. 48-57.
- 7) Thapar comments on this in Ganguli, op. cit., p. 26.
- 8) The Romans gave land to the barbarians in exchange for military duty on the borders of the empire. These land grants, Weber explains, aided the natural economy already operating. See Max Weber, op. cit., pp. 407-411.
- 9) See D.N. Jha, "Land Revenue in the Maurya and Gupta Periods", in R.S. Sharma, ed. Land Revenue in India (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), p. 5.

III. Class Formations

- 1) The historical implications of this act lie in whether or not it encompassed a deliberate conspiracy on the part of the Brahmins led by Pusyamitra, or whether this was simply another palace coup led by a military commander. The former opinion seems increasingly likely to be the case.
- 2) The great discrepancy in pay among the bureaucracy points to a number of reasons as to why it cannot be considered a class, but is rather inclusive of a number of classes employed by the same organisation. In the case of modern bureaucracies, however, this is true only to a much lesser extent.
- 3) See Kosambi, Culture and Civilisation, op. cit., p. 143.
- 4) For the reasons cited in footnote #2 immediately above, we do not believe that the state structure can be said to comprise a single class, nor is the monarchy simply a ruling class employing elements of other classes. At the same time we cannot agree that the castes "constitute real social classes", as Melotti has lately suggested. See Umberto Melotti, Marx and the Third World (London: The MacMillan Press, 1977), p. 60.
- 5) Pran Nath, op. cit., p. 133. Nigam (op. cit., p. 301) denies the importance of the samanta class in the degree to which Nath has stressed. Kosambi claims that the later Mauryan kings were increasingly dependent upon a large class of intermediate landlords, created early in the dynasty. See his Culture and Civilisation, op. cit., pp. 150-52. It is likely that many of the so-called samantas were high officers or members of noble families in the sanghas (republics), many of which, while internally unified by political, economic, and religious ties, were traditional enemies, thus making it very difficult to apply the subjective side of class to this formation. See U.N. Ghoshal, "Political Organisation - Post-Mauryan", in K.A.N. Shastri, ed. A Comprehensive History of India, Volume Two: The Mauryas and Satavahanas (Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1957), p. 347.
- 6) Thapar in Ganguli, op. cit., p. 25. Although slavery was an old institution by this time, its exact position in relation to production remains unclear. See, however, U. Thakur, "The Institution of Slavery in Mithila", Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. 35 (September 1959), M.M. Singh, "Slavery as Known from the Buddhist Pali Sources", Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. 39 (March 1963), and R.G. Agrawala, "Position of Slaves and Serfs as Depicted in Kharosthi Documents from Chinese Turkestan", Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. 29 (June 1953).
- 7) See G.L. Adhya, op. cit., p. 82.

- 8) Sharma (op. cit., p. 62) argues that stratification tended to be much more severe in the eastern areas of the empire. It is also interesting that sāti (the self-immolation of widows) was apparently practised by only two tribes in this period, but these were to be found in the Punjab, in the far western regions of Mauryan influence. See Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 59.
- 9) Jaimal Rai, op. cit., p. 363. Again, this was probably less true in the east than in the western provinces.

PART THREE: THE GUPTA EMPIRE (320-440 AD)

I. Formation of the Empire

- 1) Ramashankar Tripathi, History of Ancient India (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967), pp. 166-180. Also see A Comprehensive History of India, op. cit., pp. 37-38, and Romila Thapar, Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas (Oxford: University Press, 1963), pp. 198-99.
- 2) This apparently gave the Brahmins an ideal opportunity to accuse the Buddhists of political treachery, in addition to the already-established heresies. See P. Jagannath, "Post-Mauryan Dynasties", in A Comprehensive History, op. cit., pp. 97-99.
- 3) See the article by various authors in op. cit., pp. 339-355.
- 4) K. Gopalachari, "The Satavahana Empire", in op. cit., p. 318.
- 5) Romila Thapar, op. cit., p. 210.
- 6) P.L. Gupta, The Imperial Guptas (Varanasi: Vishvavidyalaya Prakashan, 1974), pp. 234-35.
- 7) Kosambi, op. cit., pp. 303-04.
- 8) R.K. Mookerji, The Gupta Empire (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969), pp. 154-56.

II. Trade and Production

- 1) B.N. Mukherjee, The Economic Factors in Kushāna History (Calcutta: Pilgrim Publishers, 1970), pp. 53-57.
- 2) R.S. Sharma, op. cit., p. 105.
- 3) E.H. Warmington, The Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), pp. 140, 274.
- 4) B.N. Mukherjee, op. cit., pp. 39-40.
- 5) See E.H. Warmington, op. cit., pp. 272-74.

- 6) Warmington, op. cit., pp. 311-16. See also Dipakrajan Das, Economic History of the Deccan (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1969), pp. 253-55.
- 7) Aquique, op. cit., p. 172.
- 8) See Das, op. cit., p. 209, R. Majumdar, Corporate Life in Ancient India (Calcutta: Firma Mukhotpadhyay, 1969), pp. 29-39, and R.K. Mookerji, "Economic Condition", in R.C. Majumdar, ed. The Age of Imperial Unity (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1968), p. 601.
- 9) See the comments of N. Gupta in The Industrial Structure of India During the Medieval Period (Delhi: S. Chand and Co., 1970), p. 227..
- 10) Das, op. cit., pp. 210-13; Majumdar, Corporate Life, op. cit., p. 31, and N. Gupta, op. cit., p. 228.
- 11) It is unfortunately extremely difficult to assess the extent of this important tendency. See Warmington, op. cit., p. 309, and Majumdar, Corporate Life, op. cit., p. 19.
- 12) See Kosambi, Culture and Civilisation, op. cit., pp. 182, 184, and Das, op. cit., pp. 217, 221.
- 13) Kosambi, op. cit., p. 129; N. Gupta, op. cit., p. 228; Majumdar, Corporate Life, op. cit., p. 274.
- 14) See H. Chakraborti, Early Brahmi Records in India (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1974), p. 52; Vishwanath Varma, Early Buddhism and Its Origins (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973), p. 343; H. Sankalia The Nālanda University (Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1972), p. 55; D.D. Kosambi, Culture and Civilisation, op. cit., p. 182; and Romila Thapar, A History of India, Part One (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 243.

III. Class Formation

- 1) Tara Chand, op. cit., p. 39, in reference to the Sāta-vāhanas.
- 2) Bhaskar Chattopadhyay, Kushāna State and Indian Society (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1975), p. 192.
- 3) This, at least, is the opinion of Chattopadhyay, op. cit., p. 210.
- 4) Romila Thapar, A History of India, op. cit., p. 147; Kosambi, Culture and Civilisation, op. cit., p. 197; and G.L. Adhya, op. cit., p. 44.
- 5) The title of the religion thus corresponds to the settled land arrangements of the period. See Majumdar, Corporate

- Life, op. cit., pp. 346-47; Romila Thapar, A History of India, op. cit., p. 162; Peter Pardue, Buddhism (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1968), p. 44; and Charles Drekmeier, Kingship and Community in Early India (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1962), pp. 92, 296-97.
- 6) R.S. Sharma, op. cit., p. 82.
 - 7) See U.N. Ghoshal, A History of Indian Political Ideas (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 425.
 - 8) Tara Chand, op. cit., p. 37. This was at least partially the effect of Mauryan land resettlement policies.
 - 9) That a feudal ideology was present in India, occasionally to a very extreme degree, was one of the first indicators of the possibility of the application of the terminology of feudalism there. See Romila Thapar, A History of India, op. cit., p. 246, and Rushton Coulbourn, "Feudalism, Brahminism, and the Intrusion of Islam upon Indian History", Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 10 (1967-68), pp. 363-64.
 - 10) Majumdar, Corporate Life, op. cit., p. 49. If this is entirely an innovative phenomenon of this age, the new political power of the Brahmins had extended even to complete control over guild leadership.
 - 13) S.K. Maity, Economic Life in Northern India in the Gupta Period (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), p. 27.
 - 14) A. Bose, The Social and Rural Economy of North India 600 BC-AD 200 (Calcutta: Firma Mukhopadhyay, 1922), p. 64.
 - 15) B.R. Ambedkar, The Untouchables (Shravasti: Jetavan Mahavihar, 1969), p. 199; also see Ambedkar's Who Were the Shudras? (Bombay: Thackers and Co., 1970), pp. 177-214.
 - 16) Irfan Habib comments that "Members of the low castes, assigned to the most menial and contemptible occupations, could never aspire to the status of the peasants, holding or cultivating the land on their own. It would not, indeed, be surprising if the actual status of many of them was semi-servile, involving a kind of bondage to a particular community of caste peasants or zamindar." The Agrarian System of Mughal India (London: Asia Publishing House, 1963), p. 122. Habib also denies the central importance of irrigation in the Mughal empire, see p. 122n and p. 256.

PART FOUR: THE ASIATIC MODE OF PRODUCTION AND EARLY INDIAN SOCIAL FORMATIONS

- 1) Melotti, op. cit., p. 16; Mandel, op. cit., p. 127.
It should be emphasised that most of Marx's notes on Indian history begin at the seventh century AD. Thus despite the attribution that the 'AMP' existed "from time immemorial", Marx may have intended the category to include only the period of his own knowledge, since he does say of the village communities that they "transformed a self-developing social state into never-changing natural destiny." (New York Daily Tribune, 25 June 1853). If this is the case, then Marx's observations are far more valid than has been heretofore assumed. Since this periodisation was not stated anywhere in Marx's works, however, we may probably assume that it was merely accidental that the notes begin where in fact there is greatest evidence for the applicability of the 'AMP' in any form. Marx likely felt that the village system as it was constituted in the later period had been little different in earlier times, hence the historical extension of the category.
- 2) Marx states that "The Oriental Empires always show an unchanging social structure coupled with unceasing change in the persons and tribes who manage to ascribe to themselves the political superstructure." (in Avineri, op. cit., p. 442). This is a generalisation based largely upon knowledge of the Mughal empire, but valid only, we have argued, from the period of the Gupta decentralisation onwards.
- 3) The expression is Melotti's (op. cit., p. 68), although the flavour is clearly that of Wittfogel's familiar theme.
- 4) "Civil society is the true source and measure of all history, and how absurd is the conception of history held hitherto, which neglects the real relationships and confines itself to high-sounding dramas of princes and states." (Karl Marx, "The German Ideology", in MECW, Vol. 5, p. 57.
- 5) See Melotti's discussion, op. cit., pp. 101-104.
- 6) See Pierre Vilar, A History of Gold and Money 1450-1920 (London: New Left Books, 1976), p. 30.
- 7) Kosambi, Culture and Civilisation, op. cit., p. 50.
- 8) See Edward Jay's comments attached to Mencher, loc. cit., p. 484.

CHAPTER THREE

ASPECTS OF THE ROLE OF MATERIALIST PHILOSOPHY
IN THE FORMATION OF THE 'ASIATIC MODE OF PRODUCTION'
IN EARLY INDIA

Introduction

A. Historiographical Background

In the last chapter we attempted to adduce evidence in support of the view that early Indian society developed in a manner markedly different from that presumed in the hypostatized variants of the 'Oriental Despotism' and 'Asiatic Mode of Production' paradigms. Remaining far from stagnant, the period of 600 BC - 500 AD produced one of the most active cultural, political, and economic milieu among any then flourishing. Available evidence, however, seems to demonstrate that as a result of a combination of circumstances a social formation arose in the Gupta age (with roots somewhat earlier) whose characteristics indicate a modified form of Marx's 'AMP' hypothesis, although its exact typology lies outside of the present work.

Despite the evidence brought increasingly to bear in support of the above view, we have noted the pronounced persistence of a grievously uneven development of knowledge in the field of Indian studies. Two particular examples of this were offered in the last chapter: the longevity of an extreme form of the 'Oriental Despotism' thesis as indicated by the publication of Karl Wittfogel's work on the subject, and the tendency of Marxist theorists to internally explore the implications of Marx and Engels' writings on Asian society, without recourse to recent historical scholarship. The latter form (now less prevalent than formerly) has generally followed a procedure of remaining within a

discussion of Marx and Engels' views, yet concluding with some ostensibly novel (or reinforcing) pronouncement upon the nature of Asian societies.

In both of these cases we may note that the further development of our understanding of India is directly, and fairly deliberately, obscured for political reasons. In the case of Wittfogel, an attack upon the Soviet Union, Marxism and socialism in general is the key issue. In the second instance, a defense of all of these (and sometimes more) is frequently intended. It is thus fairly obvious that the plight of Indian scholarship has been to remain somewhat ignored among this ideological polemicising, which is well-suited to the fact that the desires of Indians concerning their own country have generally been lost amidst the arguments amongst those who have sought (and continue to seek) to exploit her wealth.

As we saw with the case of 'Oriental Despotism' in Chapter One, self-proclaimed neutrality in scholarship has often provided the basis for one or another moral, political, and economic position. To the extent that this is an accurate observation concerning the political characteristics of Indian society, it is true to an infinitely greater degree with respect to the history of Indian philosophy. While the notion of 'Oriental Despotism' encompassed misunderstandings about the power of central authority, the role of irrigation in politics, and the categorisation of property relations, the 'myth of India' with respect to philosophy relies largely upon the view of the absolute predominance of transcendental,

contemplative, spiritualistic thought.

A multiplicity of ironies unfold as we trace the development of this notion of the history of Indian philosophy. H.T. Colebrooke's Essays on Hindu Philosophy (1824-32) provided the basis, held by generations of scholars (including Hegel) for the negative view of Indian life as lacking in freedom, the sense of self, rationalism and a 'healthy' attitude towards science. Scarcely a quarter century later, these same characteristics were praised by the school emanating from the philologist Friedrich Schlegel and the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. India was seen as far more profound in her philosophical speculations than anything the West had produced, although this was simultaneously a defense of the neo-Kantian position in certain vital philosophic issues.¹

While this school produced several of the first great Sanskrit scholars (among them Paul Deussen and F. Max Müller) its accentuation of the idealised merits of Indian intuitionism drew great support from totally unforeseen quarters. Near the beginning of the twentieth century Indian historians began to throw over the 'epochal' and 'heroic' methodologies dictated by the contemporary British approach.² The rise of Hindu nationalism demanded efforts to seek enduring values in Indian civilisation, in order to establish the grounds of liberation of the 'national psyche' from the complex of subservience and inferiority acquired during centuries of colonial rule. Much of the gist of this nationalism in scholarship has been the attempt to claim the ethical superiority of Indian thought over Western technocentric

rationality.³ This process, needless to say, closely parallels that of the penetration of the West into China.

Indian Marxism has ipso facto followed the views of the 'rationalistic' school. Rather than trying to demonstrate the alleged moral superiority of Hindu existence, most Indian Marxist scholars have attempted to outline the process by which materialist and proto-scientific thought developed in India, thus disclaiming any spectacular uniqueness for the 'Indian experience', but exposing at the same time a form of conspiracy designed to conceal this aspect of the past. That materialism was prosecuted in ancient times is hardly unique to India: Socrates, Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Theodorus, and others were severely punished for their ostensibly materialistic and/or atheistic heresies in 'humane and enlightened Athens'.⁴ Neither is the contemporary denegation of 'materialist values' especially confined to India, although it plays a somewhat different role here than in many other places. What is rather more peculiar to India as we shall see, is the considerable degree of historical success in obliterating virtually all primary articulations of materialist thought.

B. Method of Exploration

It is precisely this paucity of primary philosophical source-materials that, we will argue, renders a Marxist method most appropriate to the analysis of early Indian materialism. The standard alternative, simple deduction of arguments from extant commentaries by other schools, has long since proven its own limitations. Two of the most extensive accounts of

materialist thought are the Sarvasiddhāntasarasamgraha of Śamkarachārya, and the Sarvadaraśanasamgraha of Madhāvachārya. Both are written from an orthodox Vedānta bias, the first in the seventh century AD, the latter in the fourteenth century. These texts have formed the starting-point, and frequently the sum total, of renditions given concerning the main arguments of Indian materialism, but their reliability as anything other than a very late secondary corroborations has become increasingly obvious.

In this chapter we will try to illuminate four problems:

- (1) the 'earliest grounding of materialist thought' in the Vedic period;
- (2) the development of materialism in its relation to the rise of 'renunciatory', ascetic values and their philosophic expression;
- (3) the role of materialism in political philosophy; and
- (4) the relationship between the evolution of materialism and evolution of the socioeconomic formation whose genesis was outlined in Chapter Two.

We will maintain that the use of socioeconomic history to deduce the elaboration of philosophy, far from invalidating the latter and reducing it to 'mere ideology' in fact allows a far greater depth and breadth of the understanding of social reality (and therefore of the philosophy itself) than the method commonly referred to as the 'history of ideas'.

Our principal concern here is to establish a degree of congruence or correspondence between the evolution of social structures and of social theories, but we must disclaim any directly causal deductions which may be drawn from the results of this enquiry. Such considerations are far more complex than the scope of this work permits, although by way of a conclusion some tentative propositions will be offered concerning this relationship.

It will also be our concern to articulate the levels or dimensions of materialism in Indian thought. A predominant emphasis upon the tangible world is in some senses adequate in defining a perspective as 'materialist'. Within this label, however, are subsumed a very diverse number of aspects of social thought. To collectively describe these as 'materialist' is valuable insofar as our object here is partially a demystification of the prevalent view of Indian philosophy. Beyond this, however, the general category is less useful in its relevance to specific description.

This problem is especially important because we will argue here that what is called 'philosophy' in the traditional sense excludes a large proportion of the reflections upon society and nature in any given society. Although in some forms materialism has tended towards an anti-scholastic posture, this is largely because orthodox learning was being rejected, not the acquisition of knowledge per se. There were 'schools' of materialists in ancient India, although they are difficult to trace. These revolved around teachers and particular

doctrines, both of which provided the basis for rational systematisation of and innovation upon the paradigm of central focus. Here we will examine the views of the naturalists, political skeptics, 'social scientists' and hedonists, all of whom eventually operated within the parameters of what is generally termed a philosophical tradition.

There is yet, however, an entirely different plane upon which materialist ideas had a fundamental central impact. This is the dimension of folk-culture, of stories, idioms, metaphors and aphorisms which form a large proportion of the popular understanding of reality. The Mahābhārata and Rāmāyana are the two largest collections of this aspect of Indian life, but there are many others. Here we will attempt to argue, upon a tentative basis, that materialism in many ways formed the philosophical ground for what is often termed "common sense".

It is/because the vast majority of the population was on the exploited end of political and economical relationships, we will argue, that wealth, power and a lust for both were understood by the common person to be the determinant and motivating forces for most of human behaviour. The less money and influence one has, the more these factors tend to frame the limitations of activity. Hence the primary importance of 'material' factor was (and is) usually best understood by the lower classes, because the determinant strength of these realities is most obvious among them.

This view does not claim that this part of folk-culture

(excluding music but encompassing drama, poetry, and even painting in a full articulation of culture) is wholly materialist in its inclination. Even the texts which are often predominantly materialist such as Pañchatantra include many injunctions and beliefs whose basis is Brahmanical or generally mystical or spiritualist. Our argument is rather that an emphasis upon material well-being, and the importance of 'material' factors, pervades popular culture and must be wholly recognised in this light.

PART ONE: THE NATURALIST HERITAGE AND ITS EVOLUTIONI. Vedic and Tantric Origins

In addition to their pastoral nomadism and vigorous expansionist tendencies, the Vedic peoples brought with them a cultural form vividly expressive of their lifestyle and fundamental aspirations. The three Vedas - the Rig, Sama, and Atharvaveda - as well as their various recensions, eventually formed the basis for the orthodox Brahmanical religion and its various philosophical representations. Vedanta, whose principles are often assumed to encompass either the entirety or the highest expression of Indian transcendentalism, actually means the 'end of the Vedas' in the sense of their most complete and pious statement of intention.

It is this essential predilection for the identification of the cosmology, epistemology, and ethics of the Vedas (especially the Rig-Veda, the most socially informative of the three) with Vedantist philosophy that has generated a potent mythology. This has obscured the historical development of Vedic thought and rendering its scholarship a mass of scotomised contradictions. The first major consequence of this state of affairs was a predisposed bias towards treating the Vedas as a finished organic whole, even though early scholars were well aware that the literary composition may have spanned fully two millenia. It was only when Sanskrit philology added the historicism of comparative anthropology that levels of textual development were understood to exist. Although the Vedas were an oral tradition not committed to

writing until the fourteenth century AD, the possibilities of an enormous number of later interpolations are still often disregarded.¹ Thus numerous contemporary commentators still echo the authority of A.C.Das' RigVedic Culture, where the idea of direct communion with Brahman (the goal of Vedanta) is held to be the inspiration and primal activity of the Vedic poets.²

Such spiritualist aspirations, however, would seem to go contrary to the majority of evidence provided by both the texts and the comparative historical analysis which it is now possible to apply to them. There is much doubt, firstly, that the texts represent or describe 'purely Aryan' deities: it seems very likely that indigenous (Harappan and/or Dravidian) elements were gradually included as the expansion into India was begun.³ Even the term 'deity' may in many senses be inappropriate to early and middle Vedic thought. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya argues, in his valuable study on the bases of Indian materialism, that the individuals enjoined in the RigVedic sacrifices were viewed with a status somewhere between the human and the divine. While these 'gods' are thus dehumanised, yet they are often treated with the most intimate of expressions, hardly applicable for the omnipotent and supernatural celestials which legend and interest later created them to be. The texts thus have a strongly hagiographical rather than a theological bent.⁴

The key concept in this latter argument lies in the term 'super-natural'. That which lies beyond the province

of nature depends to a large extent upon the domain of the sacred, the forbidden, the monopolised realm of those whose qualities render man by comparison a despicable and powerless being. Until a very late stage, however, it seems highly unlikely that Vedic culture had achieved this quantum leap into religiosity in the modern sense. Although the RigVeda became eventually invested with the highest scriptural authority, direct revelation, it is now clear that "Most of the hymns were not composed as such, but were mechanically manufactured out of fragments of a floating anonymous literature."⁵ Thus it is possible to surmise that the popular poetry of a previously 'epic' or 'heroic' age underwent a process of gradual condensation, wherein the mythologising of the forgotten past was crystallised by the practical needs of those upon whose livelihood such values depended.

To the reader familiar with the abstruse and often ascetic admonitions of Brahmanical ritual, the RigVeda often seems not merely impious but positively verging upon the profane. A profound secularity dominates the majority of the songs (kamavarsi, or 'showerers of desire') as the following examples indicate:

"Brihaspati and Indra, ye of mighty wealth
 Drink Soma here, rejoicing at this sacrifice
 May these invigorating drops now enter you
 Bestow on us great wealth and sons exclusively
 Brihaspati and Indra, make us prosper
 Let that benevolence of yours be with us
 Arouse rewards and give our prayers fulfillment
 The enmities of foes and rivals weaken."

"Various indeed are our concerns
 And mens vocations manifold
 The carpenter and leech desire
 A break, the priest a Soma rite
 The smith, with dry wood on his hearth
 With wings of birds to fan the fire
 With anvil and with glowing flames
 Desire a patron rich in gold
 A poet I, my dad's a leech
 Mama the upper millstone turns
 With various aims we strive for wealth
 As if we followed after kine." (6)

Such temporal and mundane attainments as that of 'wealth renowned and ample' render the division between natural and supernatural less extreme than has been formerly believed. There is evidence, furthermore, that the RigVeda exhibits a profound naturalism in assuming the gods to be subservient to a 'higher' cosmic order, described by the term rita. Chattopadhyaya argues that rita originally lacked any spiritualistic significance whatsoever. Etymologically the concept apparently derives from the observation of the regularity of the movements of the sun.⁷ As an elementary concept of natural law, it formed a background to the presence of the gods, who acted through it, not in command of its basic nature.⁸ Later, almost as an ancilla theologica, the gods are granted a greater degree of latitude in the intervention into the operations of karma. But by then the natural order is frequently conceived in moral terms more correspondent to the emergent social hierarchy, rendering the instrumentality of the 'guardians of public morality' a clearer and more facile practice. In the RigVeda, however, while sacrifice (yajña) is called the "path of rita", there had not yet

evolved a distinction between sacrificer (yagamana) and priest.⁹

Such are the main arguments for the proto-materialist context of Vedic thought. There is in addition a further fundamental source for the nascent materialist outlook: the corpus of rituals and beliefs termed 'Tantra' in its more mature formulation, but as ancient if not more so than Vedic thought. Tantric scholarship remains tentative and obscure, not only as a result of the traditional secrecy surrounding the transmission of its doctrines, or its infusion with external ideas, especially those of Buddhism. The principal cause rather rests with the attitude of puritanical and self-righteous repression with regard to its sexual practices, and to a lesser extent its usage of alcohol and meat. The great irony is that it has been Vedic and Vedantist purists who have been most loath to admit any degree of orthodox acceptance for Tantric views, despite the fact that the Vedas themselves seem to permit a liberal sensuality, the use of liquor and intoxicating drugs, the sacrifice and consumption of meat, and the worship of female deities. The latter characteristic is generally considered to be definitive of Tantric practices, especially in contradistinction to the orthodox male Brahmanical deities. These strong similarities led later Tantrikas to claim, in the face of the Brahmanical ascendancy, Vedic origins for their own beliefs.¹⁰

It appears that the later Tantric schools had a two-fold origin. Firstly, Tantric rituals are strongly

grounded in the use of magic with respect to agricultural ceremonies, and may be largely Dravidian as a result. This is the root of their association with the female fertility goddesses, indicative of the governing role which women played in the evolution of sedentary farming, and of the correspondent period of matrilineality in Indian history.¹¹ The elevation of the 'female principle' (prakriti) is the expected summum bonum of such a tradition. Secondly, the Atharvaveda contains mainly materials which are "frankly magical incantations that were doubtless of non-Brahmanical inspiration."¹² While some scholars have claimed that there has been an overemphasis upon the Atharvanic links to Tantrism, it is clear that there was much cross-fertilisation in the doctrines and practices of magic.¹³ This influence, it might be added, is probably strongest upon the descendants of the Vedic peoples rather than the indigenous population. In ritual though rarely in belief, then, it can be said that "Brahmanical worship all through is permeated by tantricism."¹⁴ Furthermore, although we have tried to draw out the tremendously practical emphasis of both Vedic and Tantric thought, we should bear in mind the maintenance of these quotidian concerns especially among the lower classes, in particular the 'despised castes'.¹⁵ In fact we are in agreement with Agehananda Bharati that such tangible interests constitute the vast majority of Indian thought:

"Well over ninety-five percent of Indian religious literature of all the three indigenous traditions, deals with the polytheistic patterns, ritualistic elements, and themes which the Indian sophisticate has been relegating to vyavahāra, the phenomenal sphere." (16)

II. Science and the emergence of systematic naturalism

Our examination of the early stages of the evolution of Indian materialist thought now implies movements in two different, though closely related, directions. In what follows we must necessarily diverge from a strictly historical perspective in order to offer a more coherent overview of the materials at hand. In this and the following section a discussion of the Upanisadic period will serve as the starting point. Here our discussion will center upon the materialist foundations of the progress of science, while the next section will be predominantly concerned with the relations of early materialist questions to the larger content of social philosophy.

Taken as a whole the Upanisads cover a diverse number of doctrines, reflecting the enormous degree of intellectual disputation during the period in which they were composed (c.700-400 BC). To assume them to be uniformly Vedantic or orthodox in nature, as has often been done, is therefore a grave error.¹ A number of attempts at natural speculation rather coincide (at least textually - chronologically there is greater doubt) with the derivation of all phenomena from Brahman, the 'indescribable Oneness'. Although the naturalistic cosmology of some of the Upanisads

is simplistic, it provides the basis for much of the later speculation.

While the RigVeda contained the most elementary conjectures concerning a monist origin of matter, suggesting viśvajyotti (cosmic light) as a life-principle, and ap (water) as one of the potential first causes, the Upanisads begin the evolution of the doctrine of the four, and later five, elements. This theory, called pañcamahābhūtas in India, appears virtually universally at similar historical stages.² Water is several times given as the most original of the elements, but occasionally the so-called 'food doctrine' betrays characteristically human concerns: "From food, verily, are produced whatsoever creatures dwell on the earth."³ There is little synthetic elaboration of these ideas, which very likely emanated from different 'schools' and regions. Those thinkers with whom we are generally concerned with here largely dwelt only upon the four 'physical' elements: earth (prthvī), water (ap), fire (tejas), and air (vayu). The fifth, ākāśa, 'ether', or 'containing the quality of sound', is admitted in the Sāṃkhya system later, but was probably not a part of its early explorations, as the Jaina, Buddhist, and Cārvāka elemental theories contain only four components.⁴

This is largely a result, as Chattopadhyaya had indicated, of the fact that the Sāṃkhya system formed a battleground between the materialist positions and the emergent spiritualist outlook. The Brahma-sūtra (c. 200 BC)

treats the nature speculation of the Sāṃkhya as the greatest enemy of the Vedas and their various claims. Gradually, however, with our first evidence deriving from the Mahābhārata period, Sāṃkhya is transformed into an orthodox (āstika) set of doctrines, its original plurality of puruṣas ('atoms') converted into a nondual puruṣa along Vedantist lines.⁵ Much of this alteration was elaborated in the third century AD treatise Sāṃkhyakārikā of Iśvarakrishna, which has become the earliest extant Sāṃkhya text owing to the probable destruction of antecedent doctrines.⁶

In its essence the earlier Sāṃkhya view asserted the primacy of matter as the ultimate cause of the world (the doctrine of pradhana), the causal theory of parinamavada (the effect as a real modification of the cause, as opposed to the illusory quality of cause/effect held by Vedanta), and the multiplicity of puruṣas.⁷ Around this core there later developed increasingly abstract and metaphysical assertions concerning the relation of mind to matter, largely taking the form of the association of elements with qualities, faculties, organs, colours, plants, etc., as occurred in the formation of Taoist metaphysics.⁸

Out of these foundations there grew several systems of atomism, among the more notable being the Jaina theories of Umāsvāti (c. 50 AD), and the Vaiśeṣika speculations of Kanāda (c. 150 AD). Several concerns animated the further exploration of the elemental and atomist theories. The first and in many ways the most

important of these is alchemy, which seems to have begun in a widespread fashion in about the seventh century BC, strongly related to the Tantras but derived as well from the magical rites of the Yajurvedas.⁹ The desires of Indian alchemists were two-fold (as elsewhere): the manufacture of gold out of other elements, and the attainment of immortality through isolating the vital chemical principle of life. Needham terms this essential unity 'macro-biotics plus aurifaction.'¹⁰ Fear of recurrent death, whose social basis we will shortly examine, played the same motivating role here as in Vedanta, and in general provides the foundations for all but the most secular of the Indian systems of thought. In most of these this concern overwhelmed the will to examine the particularity of nature, which is the ground of scientific exploration: "Whatsoever is here, that (is) here. Whosoever perceives anything like manyness here goes from death to death."¹¹

Artificial production of gold, however, provided more tangible and popular results. With the transition from a pastoral to a money economy in the Brahmana period (c. 700-500 BC), the acquisition of the new wealth became a vital part of magical ritual: "He who knows the correct sound of this Sāman obtains gold."¹² Although Yajñavalkya might preach that "Of immortality... there is no hope through wealth"¹³, the prevalent attitude is still captured in Vasistha's advice to Rāma: "Acquire wealth. This world has for its root wealth. I do not see a difference between

a poor man and a dead one."¹⁴ Gold was believed associated with fire, light, and even immortality, such that it was possible to jointly aspire to earthly wealth and heavenly life.¹⁵

Alchemical researches continued in some Buddhist schools, later often in conjunction with the evolution of medicine: "Chemistry in ancient India was the handmaid, not of technology, but of medicine."¹⁶ Medical and physiological explorations were based in the Ayurvedic classifications of plants useful to both magic and healing, which were early almost synonymous. By the time of the Buddha (which is when atomic speculation began in earnest) the medical schools of Ātreya and Suśruta were founded.¹⁷ These systems drew upon Greek knowledge, and in some ways surpassed the efforts of Hippocrates and Galen. While it may be true, as has been asserted, that the compassion of the Buddhist religion contributed to the growth of medicine as a science (especially under Aśoka), medical knowledge became scholastic relatively quickly, and is often practiced at the same level today among the rural poor.¹⁸

Astronomical researches similarly drew upon Vedic observations, and progressed rapidly in some areas. The siddhantis (treatises on astronomy) were synthesised by Āryabhata (b. 476 AD), who taught that the daily rotation of the heavens was only apparent, and was in fact caused by the rotation of the earth.¹⁹ But, as Basham points out, this theory never affected astronomical practices, much

less popular beliefs.²⁰ Astronomy later became interwoven with the significant progress.²¹ Other sciences, as well, notably mathematics, encountered initial development and then decline. While technical exploration very rarely surpasses the practical demands placed upon it by the development of the level of productive forces (Da Vinci, for example, is an exception to this in his theoretical sketch of the helicopter), the determinant influence of ideas hostile to scientific endeavors cannot be underestimated. In the Indian case, the entire rejection of the validity of examining the phenomenal world (and in the extreme case, denying its existence), was to have a profound impact upon the development of the entire cultural spectrum. In order to most fully realise this we must return momentarily to the competing doctrines of the Upanisadic milieu.

III. The Formation of the Epistemological Shift in the Buddhist Period

In the last chapter we briefly analysed the concurrent emergence of a money economy and monarchical forms of polity, the 'state' in its repressive form, as it has been known throughout most of human history. These novel forces were mutually dependent, in turn predicated upon the presence of an agricultural surplus, the more easily converted into exchange-value with the increase in trade which urbanisation and secure, widened political boundaries helped to provide. It is not difficult to provide a brief sketch of this conjuncture in an analytical but mundane fashion.

In terms of the alterations in social psychology which accompanied this process, immense barriers of time and cultural specificity hinder our comprehension to a far greater degree.

It would probably not be inaccurate to characterise this period in the history of any society as the first of two great revolutions in human relations. A second dramatic break with previous social relations occurs with the introduction of capitalist production. Passing through the stages of the predominance of mercantile, industrial, and finance capital, modern economies (at variable rates of speed) tend to promote the reduction of all human relations to those of exploitation for economic gain. With the ascendancy of wage-labour instrumental rationality in activity and philosophy becomes the dominant mode of cognition. In turn the loyalties of kin, political dependency, ethnicity and religion become slowly subservient to the demands of the mode of capital formation and production. Thence the earlier bonds of duty and morality tend to become submerged under the acquisitive and egotistical traits of a crude individualism.

In the first revolution, needless to say, the radical alteration of social relations (and therefore behavioral characteristics) is neither so widespread nor as complete. But we will argue here that the effects of the rise, in coalition, of the state and an exchange economy were as dramatic, and in many senses as important, as the transformations in the present world outlined above. This is because, firstly, our own lives are burdened and enlightened

by this misunderstood heritage, contingent upon the degree and attitude of our understanding. Secondly, socialism as a system has always derived inspiration from many of the modes of existence prevalent prior to the profound determinancy of the market.¹

Not surprisingly, the first social revolution produced an immense degree of confusion at all levels of human reality. With the emergence of class society unfettered desires for wealth and power sprang triumphantly from the shattered bonds of the more tranquil communal life. All prior conceptions of moral behavior within (though not between) groups sharing a commonly assumed identity were thoroughly transformed. For those for whom the present meant not profit but uncertain destruction - or at best, increased exploitation - the past acquired a gilded tinge, the more idyllic because each decade seemed to broach the possibility of its complete extinction.²

In this milieu we may distinguish three basic attitudinal responses. The nostalgia alluded to above was practically recreated by the Buddha in the institution of the sangha, which was almost identical to the relatively democratic tribal structure which formed his own roots. Secondly, there was a reaction against the exploitative role of the priests and upon their doctrines, culminating in a position of 'cynical realism' which we will shortly examine with respect to Lokāyata/Cārvāka doctrines. Finally, the notion of world-renunciation arose out of a response of

pessimistic despair, rooted in the conclusion that men were helpless in the face of the cycle of birth, sickness, old age, and death.

Confronted with the apparently complete determination by Nature of men, with no history, political economy, or comparative anthropology to relativise experience and attribute human responsibility on a social scale, many found that 'suffering' seemed to democratically capture the metaphysical totality of the species' experience in the world. Elevated to the most abstract status, this principle quite simply epitomises the sheer hopelessness of those for whom the new society offered little by way of compensation. "Non-attachment" in this social sense meant simultaneously the realisation that the prior bonds of kinship were insufficient, and that the presently evolving classes were based upon crude acquisitiveness. Thus the Jaina Sūtrakīṅga says that "the great sages are above such things as gotra" (clan) and "the iniquity of all these men who cling to property goes on increasing."³ From this despair and resignation arose the contemplative attitude so often assumed to typify Indian life. Not only was faith in the old gods dissolving, the belief in mankind was itself at issue.

As a result of this age of tribulation, similar to the sophist period in Greece and that of the hundred schools in China, the investigation of nature became transmuted and internalised, largely taking the form of the search for 'human nature'. The principle that suffering could

only be alleviated through the most profound form of knowledge was upheld, except by the most extreme of the nihilists. Faced with the grave uncertainties and omnipresent flux of social life, those with the leisure of abstraction were often forced to the conclusion that the irrefutable and authentic reality beyond the realm of appearances lay somehow within themselves. In the appreciation that the external personality was preponderantly an environmental creation lay the germs of modern behavioralism, the sociology of knowledge, and related concerns. In the context of ancient India, however, such knowledge was considered as the basis of mokṣa, or liberation from the ephemeral world.

Early Buddhism represents the middle position in this epistemological shift in Indian philosophy.⁴ Upon the basis of early Sāṃkhya, and other atomist beliefs, two arguments were set against each other.⁵ On the one hand the early materialists had sought to determine the nature of the ultimate status of matter. Deriving from this were positions relating to the causal efficacy of the material world. Buddha accepted the existence of separate physical elements (sarvam prithak), but found them to be impermanent, engaged in a continuous process of 'dependent origination' (praitya samutpada). Matter thus lacked any eternal or essential quality: the source of the images on the wall of the cave (to borrow Plato's metaphor) was as transient and lacking in reality as the images themselves. Thus the argument of an elaborate causal chain was wedded to the

skepticism concerning materiality expressed in many of the Upanisads. Nirvana (liberation) represented an end to this causal sequence, once the desire for involvement with it has been extinguished.⁶

We have used this example to indicate that some materialist doctrines were, in effect, turned upon others by various schools. Gods, rituals, and Vedic priests could be denied, and a naturalist view of causality affirmed, and yet the validity and worth of worldly life could still be found lacking, because only the permanent did not contain the quality of suffering.

The other two major responses to this classical impasse presented simpler solutions to the same problematic. The materialist schools we will shortly consider. For the Brahmanical religion the soul was believed to exist. Ātman, originally merely 'wind', later identified with prana, the breath, eventually emerged as the conception of the soul, the only permanent part of the personality.⁷

To this was added the doctrine of Brahman. This term, first a mantric invocation with magical associations, came to mean the transcendent essence of the world, simultaneously immanent in all things. Thence arose the philosophy captured in the famous phrase 'tat tvam asi': thou art that, the essence of the phenomenal self and that of the noumenal world do not differ. Mokṣa for the orthodox initiate (āstika, he who believes in paraloka, the other world) thus became the realisation of this

coincidence. For the lower castes, the proper performance of caste duties (varnadharma) was to suffice as a substitute, pending eventual reincarnation as a Brahmin able to fathom this insurpassable mystery. Ironically, it appears that it was the Kṣatriya teachers who led the Brahmin priests out of their rituals and towards this nondualism.⁸

We have argued in this section that the social conditions of the seventh and sixth centuries BC led to a crucial shift in emphasis on the part of many Indian philosophers, both orthodox (āstika) and heterodox (nāstika). The immediacy of the Vedic requests for earthly goods became surpassed by a deeper, sadder concern for a well-being more permanent than the 'short, nasty and brutish' existence of the majority. From this transferral of focus from nature to the human being to the infinite arises the general myth of the spiritualism of Indian philosophy. And, as we have seen, even the heterodox and materialistically-based philosophy of the Buddha shared in this existential denial of any reconciliation between suffering and existence other than the termination of both.

A third plausible alternative was also offered in this period, however, a coherent and relatively systematic form of materialism which affirmed the value of life despite its extreme vacillations between pleasure and pain. Through the exposition of this school, moreover, we will argue that this affirmation constitutes the real basis for the philosophies of existence shared by the vast majority of the Indian

people throughout their history.

IV. Cārvāka/Lokāyata: 'Common Sense' as Empiricism

Less is known about the specifically materialist schools than any others in the Indian tradition. We may reasonably surmise that this is due as much to the deliberate destruction of the texts as to any accidental editing on the part of the historical process.¹ Polemics across the course of Indian history have either condemned outright the views of the materialists, denigrated them as not being 'philosophical' in any true sense of the term, or simply denying their importance in the understanding of the evolution of Indian thought. Hence in the Mahābhārata Cārvāka is introduced to King Yudhishtira as a 'wicked Rakshasha' (demon) 'in the guise of a Brahmin' who 'seeks to accomplish the purposes of (the) enemy' because, after the great fratricidal battle, he appeals to tribal values and tells the king: "Since you have slaughtered your kinsmen and elders, death is desirable for you, and not life."²

Much of the more modern prejudice derives from Madhva's delineation of Lokāyata as the lowest form of philosophy, as seen from the Vedanta perspective. We will examine this view momentarily. In the present, the prevalent attitude is often that "The chief mark of Indian philosophy in general is its concentration on the spiritual. Both in life and in philosophy the spiritual motive is predominant in India." Given the difficult nature of accurate scholarship in this field, this observation is both a cause of, and a

reflection upon, the same opinion which judges the influence of materialism in terms of "the relatively minor materialistic school of the Cārvāka and related doctrines."³

Far from accepting this latter view, we will attempt here to support and develop the position that materialist philosophy in India enjoyed tremendous popular success as a 'school of thought' for over a millenia, during which time it passed into the level of common speech as an idiom for understanding the world in a 'realistic' fashion. Here, as elsewhere, we will argue, materialism (whose exact definition here is still pending) occupied a position of the greatest importance in the development of social thought. Our view here clearly hinges upon an understanding of the term 'philosophy' as not only the 'officially' enunciated doctrines of literate groups. We must as well include the reflections upon the processes of life prevalent among those whose semantics, articulation and degree of abstraction may be limited by comparison, but whose powers of perception remain nonetheless accurate, and in many ways less fettered by the impediments of formal knowledge. In this sense one of the Indian names for materialist thought, Lokāyata, meaning 'prevalent among the people', serves in a self-explanatory manner as one of the bases of the above view of the importance of materialism.

In light of the textual difficulties (if a lack of texts can be so described) mentioned above, any approach to this material will necessarily be fraught with hazardous

speculation, and for an analysis which attempts to be historical this is even more true. No accurate developmental schema has to date been set forth. The most comprehensive attempt is Dakshinaranjan Shastri's A Short History of Indian Materialism, Sensationalism and Hedonism, which for all of its conjectures, some of which have been since surpassed, serves as an adequate general guideline, in combination with the opinions provided by more recent scholars.⁴ We will attempt, therefore, to present our analysis in as evolutionary a manner as possible, rather than commencing with the purvaks (opponent's views) of Madhāva and Śāṅkara, and deducing backwards historically from their late commentaries.

Naturalistic concerns, as we have indicated, occupy an important though not predominant position in the philosophy of the Upanisads. The basis of the former, as we have argued so far, can be traced to the fundamental themes of the RigVeda, and thus it is transcendentalism, not naturalism, which is the novel element in Upanisadic speculation. The converse of a general interest in, and belief in, the actions of nature, is a skepticism with respect to the spiritual and its prospective intervention into the realms of both natural and social life. Several indications of this attitude survive even from the Vedic period:

✓ Striving for strength bring forth a laud to
Indra, a truthful hymn if he in truth existeth.
One and another say, There is no Indra. Who
hath beheld him?
Whom then shall we honour?"

"Who hath beheld him as he sprang to being, seen
 how this boneless one supports the 'bony'?
 Where is the blood of earth, the life, the
 spirit? Who may approach the man who knows
 to ask it?
 Beneath the upper realm, above this lower,
 bearing her calf at foot the cow hath risen.
 Whitherward, to what place hath she departed?
 Where calved she? Not amid this herd of cattle.
 Who, that the father of this calf discerneth
 beneath the upper realm, above the lower,
 Showing himself a sage, may here declare it?
 Whence hath the godlike spirit had its rising?"

(5)

In the Upanisads, both positively and through
 refutation, this tendency is even more pronounced. The
 stereotypical orthodox attitude towards materialism has been
 to attribute it to 'demons' (usually asuras), and here this
 description is first developed:

"Even here they say of one who is not a giver, who has no
 faith, who does not offer sacrifices, that he is a demon, for
 this is the doctrine of the demons."⁶ One who omits to perform
 the proper sacrifices, or gives 'offerings contrary to rule',
 is correspondingly threatened with cataclysm and destruction.⁷
 There is, in addition, at least one verse in the major
 Upanisads alluding to an attempting to refute the early
 materialist doctrine that the soul is identical with the body.⁸

More substantial is the passage in the Maitrī
Upanisad discussing the role of Brihaspati (apparently an
 abbreviation of Brahmanhaspati, the teacher of the gods) in
 the expostulation of Anti-Vedic views. Apparently the
 reference is a Brahmin attempt to rescue the reputation of
 Brihaspati, a recognised RigVedic teacher, from an
 association with materialism:

"Verily, Brihaspati (the teacher of the gods) became Sukra (the teacher of the demons) and for the security of Indra and for the destruction of the demons created this ignorance. By this (they) declare the inauspicious to auspicious and the auspicious to be inauspicious. They say that there should be attention to the (new) law which is destructive of the (teaching of the) Vedas and the other scriptures. Therefore one should not attend to this teaching. It is false. It is like a barren woman. Mere pleasure is the fruit thereof as also of one who has fallen from the proper course. It should not be attempted."

(9)

It is possible that even these early Brahmins suffered from a simple confusion of names: there may have been two or even three Brihaspatis teaching in early India, none of whom can be placed with any degree of certainty whatsoever.¹⁰ What is important is that a certain Brihaspati came to be regarded as the founder of the most heretical system in Indian thought. Those materialists who were early critics of society claimed his authority, as did those initiators of the first discipline of political science, such as Kautilya, whose views we will examine in the subsequent section. The philosophy of materialism as a whole is accordingly referred to by some commentators as Bārhaspatya, in honour of its founder.

As to the connection of the other two names given as titles for the materialists, - Lokāyata and Cārvāka - and their relation to the development of the corpus of materialist opinions as a whole, several hypotheses have been inferred. Schermerhorn is dubious concerning the original view, put forward by Rhys Davids and others, that Lokāyata in its

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formative period (c. 700-400 BC) meant 'nature lore'.¹¹ He concludes, rather, that it more likely described "logical and sophistical disputation". This opinion is based upon a few particular references, such as the Śanti Parva passage which states that "Some fools, versed in the science of logic, deny the existence of the soul"¹², implying that the epithet 'Lokāyatika' referred to those who studied logic rather than those who held heretical beliefs regarding the existence of the soul.

This belief is in addition grounded upon the more general hypothesis that "materialism in India... arose from a denial of Vedic dogma"¹³, hence the presence of the title of nāstika (as one who disbelieves in paraloka), which we have already mentioned. Most commentators have come to accept this position as valid for the description of the origins of Indian materialism, relying upon a latent sense of dialectics in the evolution of the history of thought, with various schools defining their positions largely to meet previously existing arguments. Shastri, Dasgupta, and Radhakrishnan are in agreement that the earliest meaning of Lokāyata was 'casuistry' (vitanda), and that this was its most exact description throughout the Buddhist period.¹⁴

In this position the principal problem is that while materialism can be described as repudiating the increasingly ritualised ancient religion of custom and magic, which "signifies the declaration of the spiritual independence of the individual and the rejection of the principle of,

authority"¹⁵, the same text admits that "materialism is as old as philosophy."¹⁶ By the latter phrase is meant a generic type of materialism, in other words the investigation of nature and the faith in its causal efficacy rather than that of any transcendental entity. What Radhakrishnan apparently believes is that there is no connection between the early naturalists, the Vedic and Upanisadic skeptics, and the rise of Lokāyata as a school. Given the many common features of these groups, however, this view seems most improbable. The rejection of the view that the Lokāyatikas were students of nature and the laws of nature can probably be traced to Guiseppe Tucci, who preferred a third alternative which we have yet to consider, that the principal concern of Lokāyata was the acquisition of wealth, hence its position as a forerunner of the Arthasāstra tradition.¹⁷

Much of the overall view about the origins of materialism derives from very few references, especially one from the lost Brihaspati-sutra which states that "The aphorisms of Brihaspati have only this aim, to refute the opponent", leading to the conclusion that "The decisive thing...is its purely negative interest."¹⁸ M.N. Roy holds, in addition, that "Indian materialism arose as a reaction to nihilism"¹⁹, which itself was posited as a reaction to both contemporary social conditions generally and the specific failure of the Brahmanical religion in particular to restore harmony. To further confuse this issue, we may add

the view of Max Muller that "The Buddhists use Lokāyata for philosophy in general"²⁰, which presumes the sense of Lokāyata as 'prevalent among the people' rather than materialism in particular.²¹ Then, to finally furnish the greatest degree of support for what Chattopadhyaya has described as 'anarchy in the academic world', there are two further definitions of Lokāyata with which we shall have to contend: 'worthy of a Brahmin's learning', and 'the study of the world', the latter of which may imply exclusively either the natural or the social world.²²

Out of this morass of conflicting opinions it is possible to derive seven possible definitions of Lokāyata:

- (1) 'of the world', in the sense of the study of nature;
- (2) 'of the world', in the sense of the study of society, with the presumed coincidence of the assertion that wealth and pleasure are the ends of man's existence (arthakaman purusa rthau; (23))
- (3) as vitanda, destructive reason, negatively;
- (4) as the science of logic and disputation generally, more neutrally;
- (5) as 'prevalent among the people', meaning the lower classes whom Sankara later describes (using this term) as the 'crude mob'; (24)
- (6) as 'prevalent among the people', meaning the simple process of the formation of ideas, and perhaps also its study, which is apparently Muller's understanding of the Buddhist usage;
- (7) 'worthy of a Brahmin's learning', i.e. a general form of knowledge ('science') useful to one who is a participant in society, and perhaps applied to either nature, society, or both.

Having derived this catalogue from various sources, it should be possible for us to deduce, using the historical materials at our disposal, the evolution of at least some, if not all, of these definitions. Clearly the most enigmatic consideration is the relation of the three components of Indian materialism - the naturalist concern, the skepticism and social criticism of religion, and the formation of a political philosophy - to each other. We must, first of all, rest content with the understanding that there were significant degrees of mutual determination in the evolution of the three interrelated concerns. To attempt to trace this process in any exacting fashion presents virtually insurmountable problems, beyond the range (to date) of any analysts of early Indian thought. As we will temporarily hold in abeyance a consideration of the Brihaspati/Arthasāstra tradition, we can concentrate here on the interrelationship between naturalism and skepticism, especially in regard to the development of the latter as a mode of logical argument (anviksi); which is Kautilya's apparent understanding of the term 'Lokāyata'.²⁵

It is at least clear that the first positive theories of the materialists (for we will attempt here to deny the purely negative hypothesis offered above) can be traced, in their denial of causality, to the natural speculation of some of the Upanisads. Hence the Lokāyata darśana (teaching) "seems to have (had) merged in it the Svabhāva doctrine."²⁶ How this connection took place

we may only reasonably surmise. The naturalists probably evolved a number of logical positions in order to refute their Brahmanical opponents. In the process of distilling their technique, the heterodox thinkers apparently produced a 'being unto its own', a method whose utility thence became public property. Vitanda was the name given by the opponents of this system; anvikshi was that offered by those willing to treat it as a more neutral tool. This at least clarifies several of the definitions offered above.

We may conclude from this that just as not all logicians were heterodox, neither were all students of nature, nor, for that matter, all students of society. Tucci records the rise of one artha school which became, or was originally, orthodox, and hence incorporated into the dharmaśāstras.²⁷ This may account for the 'general' notion of Lokāyata as 'worthy of a Brahmin's learning', which implies at least the absence of heterodoxy, though not necessarily the pronounced acceptance of the studied doctrines as in conformity with Vedic teachings. On the other hand, some of those who studied nature obviously realised the contradiction between their own views and those of the Vedic Brahmins. The focal point of this opposition was the difference of opinion on the existence of a soul separate from, and thus more enduring than, the body.

Throughout this period arguments concerning the soul, in fact, determine the lines between various schools

and sects more clearly than any other factor or point of contention. This is, obviously, because so much derived logically (ethical and epistemological views primarily) from the initial acceptance or rejection of the soul. The Jaina Canon, systematised sometime in the fourth century BC, is an important primary source for reference to materialist views on this point.²⁸ Here the disbelief in a soul is termed the akriyāvāda heresy, and the text explains that the Lokāyatikas deny the separate existence of ātman (the soul), preferring to call chaitanya (intellect) what others refer to by the former term.²⁹

This denial (nāstikā is applied in the text) is here considered to be a function of the view of the permanency of the five elements, although another school is mentioned which holds the soul to be a sixth element, probably the early Vaiśeṣikas.³⁰

In turn these ideas are here assumed to incorporate a denial of karma, leading to an attitude rather forthrightly described as "Kill, dig, slay, burn, cook, cut or break to pieces, destroy! Life ends here; there is no world beyond."³¹

In a more serious vein, however, the Jainas recognised and combatted what was obviously a partially-systematised philosophy of hedonism (sampurnam): "...a fool who longs for life will...ignorantly come to grief."³² Especial attention is paid to those heretics (pārsvastha) who asked, "What sin is there in the enjoyment of women?"

Freud would have appreciated the response: "The greatest temptation in this world are (sic) women."³³ This attitude is similarly condemned in the Buddhist Pali Canon as ukkheda-ditthi, the heresy of the view (as it is translated) that proclaims 'Let-us-eat-and-drink-for-tomorrow-we-may-die'. Such a philosophy, the commentator adds, is a 'low and pagan' way of sensuality, 'fit only for the worldly-minded', in other words, those who in fact propagated it.³⁴

These examples afford ample indication that naturalism, social criticism, and hedonism came to be associated with each other, certainly in the eyes of their enemies, but very likely independent of this as well. While originally the 'asura-view' may have been merely 'this-worldly', as Chattopadhyaya asserts, and not necessarily skeptical or materialist in other ways, it would seem that constant attacks drove these positions together, aided by various internal logical correlations.³⁵ Hence the term Nāstika, often used synonymously with 'Lokāyatika', meant both 'atheist' and 'one who condemned the Vedas'.³⁶ The term Cārvāka, as well, came to be applied fairly early as a synonym for the materialists, and may derive from either 'beautiful words' (a sophistical allusion) or 'grinders' (of virtue and vice, a reference to the anti-Vedic posture).³⁷

We should not presume, however, that a uniformity of thought prevailed among those whom we have called the early materialists. Many schools taught, and many

individuals doubtless gained fame in a lifetime, only to pass forgotten except as a historical footnote in a polemic against their views. Among the early teachers were Pūrana Kassapa, a former slave who denied the effects of karma; Mankkhali Gosāla, a servant who preached a variety of naturalism somewhat more materialistic than Jainism; Ajīta Keśakamablin, who criticised Brahmins, extolled the primacy of the four elements, and denied karma. Sanjay Belattiputta and Kakuka Kaccayana, held similar views among this list of forgotten rebels.³⁸

Of these thinkers only one - Ajīta Keśakamablin - is accepted by Mittal as wholly materialist³⁹, and it is doubtful if we will ever know whether there was an early school which combined the following set of doctrines, which would have constituted a comprehensive materialist outlook:

- (1) the identity of the body and the 'soul', or consciousness;
- (2) the recognition of the ultimate status of the four (or five, but not six) elements;
- (3) the acceptance of perception as the only valid source of knowledge, with a concomitant rejection of causation, inference, the authority of the Vedas, karmaphala, the paraloka, and fate (adrīsthi or daiba);
- (4) a 'faith' in the validity of the pursuit of life as pleasure in this world.

(40)

These include the basic components - ontology, epistemology, cosmology, and axiology - of any philosophic

system. They were probably offered, however, in combinations by various thinkers, and were only incorporated organically by their enemies, especially the later Vedantist commentators.⁴¹

It must have been extremely difficult to attempt to elaborate a systematic doctrine of hedonism (the logical ethical end of any materialist system) in those times, when so many aspired merely to the simple joys of life, yet laboured under severely oppressive conditions, which karma and related doctrines seemed to explain so very thoroughly. Certainly, however, the alliance of kāma (pleasure) and artha (wealth) was a seductive one, powerful in its capacity to explain behavioral motivation, and therefore calculated to appeal to virtually universal tastes.

Although a more sophisticated ethical system failed to evolve out of the basic philosophical elements, we can certainly deny the simplistic assertion that "the aim of the materialist schools is to reduce everything to matter."⁴²

Nor does it seem true, at the level of individuals, that the Lokāyatikas condoned the view that a man could do anything in order to acquire wealth, "beg, borrow, steal, or murder."⁴³ At the level of the philosophy of the state, however, this observation is more appropriate, but we deny that this Arthaśāstra aspect of Lokāyata thought held a similar significance among the common people, as we will shortly try to demonstrate. On the contrary, Lokāyata represents an early form of Indian humanism. Compare, for example, the Lokāyatika injunction to 'forbear from

disparaging and contemptuous remarks about women' to the 'orthodox' attitude that women are to be beaten if they do not submit to sexual advances.⁴⁴

After this period of flourishing speculation, materialist thought undergoes a number of transformations. Buddhism and Jainism borrowed and developed a number of the early materialist positions, as we have seen, and then engaged in a fierce mutual criticism with the Lokāyatikas.⁴⁵ There is evidence that even the relatively Vedic Mīmāṃsā school was thoroughly tainted by materialist ideas, such that Kumārila, a reformer of the Pūrva sect, exclaimed that "I have made this attempt to bring them into the paths of theism (āstikapathe) or the recognition of a future existence."⁴⁶ The standard view is that, after this epic period, materialist thought fairly much degenerated into crude forms of licentiousness and debauchery, hence disappearing (thankfully, most add) as a philosophy to be evaluated in any serious fashion.⁴⁷

This view fails to account, however, for what Muir calls the "wide prevalence of atheistic sentiments in the middle ages of Indian history."⁴⁸ H.P. Shastri held the view that Lokāyata survived until at least the fifteenth century⁴⁹, and this was strikingly confirmed by the researches of B.A. Saletore, who found a period of vigorous activity among Lokāyatikas between the tenth and fifteenth centuries, in both northern and southern India, and especially concentrated in four major centres.⁵⁰ This

explains the relatively detailed polemics against Lokāyata/Cārvāka in the Tattvasamgraha of Śāntaraksita (eight century), the Sarvasiddhāntasamgraha of Śāṅkara (eight century), the Prabodhadrodaya of Kṛṣṇamīśra (eleventh century), and the Sarvadarśanasamgraha of Madhāva (fourteenth century). It is the presence of the combination of views in these commentaries, in fact, which provides the strongest basis for the argument that materialist tenets were consistently and coherently united in a philosophic system.

Śāṅkara mentions the major positions of the Lokāyatikas as outlined above, inferring their incorporation while parodying the arguments in his presentation, which has probably misled the majority of later commentators, who mistake an acerbic caricature for a verbatim presentation.⁵¹ Madhāva exhibits similar tendencies at much greater length, and hold that:

"The efforts of the Cārvāka are indeed hard to be eradicated, for the majority of living beings hold by the current refrain - 'While life is yours, live joyously/None can escape death's searching eye/When once this frame of ours they burn/How shall it e'er return?'" (52)

Madhāva also offers some verses directly attributed to Brihaspati, which we will quote in full (allowing for Madhāva's partiality) in order to lend a sense of the use of language, nuance, and argument of the Lokāyatikas:

"There is no heaven, no final liberation, nor any soul in any other world, Nor do the actions of the four castes, orders, etc. produce any real effect. The Agnihotra, the three Vedas, the ascetic's three staves, and smearing one's self with ashes,

Were made by nature as the livelihood of
 those destitute of knowledge and manliness.
 If a beast slain in the Jyotishtoma rite
 will itself go to heaven,
 Why then does the sacrificer forthwith not
 offer his own father?
 If the Sraddha produces gratification to
 beings who are dead,
 Then here, too, in the case of travellers
 when they start, it is needless to give
 provisions for the journey.
 If beings in heaven are gratified by our
 offering the Sraddha here,
 Then why not give the food down below
 to those who are standing on the housetop?
 While life remains let a man live happily,
 let him feed on ghee even though he runs
 in debt;
 When once the body becomes ashes, how can
 it ever return again?
 If he who departs from the body goes to
 another world,
 How is it that he comes not back again,
 restless for love of his kindred?
 Hence it is only as a means of livelihood
 that Brahmans have established here.
 All these ceremonies for the dead -
 there is no fruit anywhere.
 The three authors of the Vedas were buffoons,
 knaves, and demons.
 All the well-known formulae of the pandits,
jarphari, turphari, etc.
 And all the obscene rites for the queen
 commanded in the Asvamedha.
 These were invented by buffoons, and so
 all the various kinds of presents to
 the priests,
 While the eating of flesh was similarly
 commanded by night-prowling demons.

(53)

These later references, and the extent and
 seriousness of the attacks upon the Lokāyatikas, adequately
 demonstrate, we feel, the continuing presence of this
 philosophy through at least the fifteenth century.⁵⁴
 Although there was partially a lull of perhaps half a
 millenium (c. 500-100) in the 'official' philosophical
 propagation of materialism, it seems that most of the major

tenets of this philosophy passed into common culture and speech, at a fairly early period. Based upon an attitude towards life which we may term a form of 'empirical realism', materialism became the basic outlook upon the world of most of those who paid outrageous interest on loans, exorbitant fees for priestly rites, an overproportion of their surplus as 'rent' to the state above them, or merely existed as slaves unable even to reach up to this level of exploitation. That there existed a widespread fear of hell and hope for heaven cannot be denied. Our point is rather that the shortness of life, with its rewarding but momentary pleasures, and the predominance of economic causality in the generation and transmission of social relations, were wholly recognised at the level of everyday speech and thought.

These considerations on life deserve the title 'philosophy' every bit as much as that which is self-consciously enunciated as such. This is a fact made neither more nor less true by their overwhelming prevalence among the common people. Hence Madhāva says of Lokāyata that it is a "name well accordant with the thing signified."⁵⁵ A disbelief in the Vedas was common among those called the dasyus (slaves) from an early point.⁵⁶ Many materialist thinkers were also drawn from the artisan class, and there were Brahmins among them as well.⁵⁷ We cite these instances not to blindly claim that materialism has been the consistent ally of the lowest classes, for we hope shortly to demonstrate that as a form of political philosophy it was a most effective

tool in sustaining their subjugation.

Our meaning here is rather that wealth was recognised in an appropriate fashion by the materialists, who also largely understood why its nature was concealed so astutely by the scholastics and theologians. Thus in Shudraka's The Toy Cart we find the following interchange:

Maitreya: "Would you rather be dead than poor?"

Charudatta: "I'd rather be dead, my friend. Death is only an instant of suffering, but being poor drags on and on."⁵⁸

So also Chanakya (the historical Kautilya) exclaims in Vistrakadatta's The Signet Ring of Rakshasha: "The ignorant thank fate."⁵⁹

The Pañchatantra, a collection of Kashmiri folktales, though admittedly heavily influenced by arthaśāstra, similarly redounds with this basic understanding of the internal motive forces of class society. A stanza begins, "As the other world is doubtful..."; another proclaims, "'Tis cash that is our next of kin"; another commences, "a man of capital/though ugly and base-born/Is honoured by the world..." Still others announce that one should "indulge in no excessive greed/a little helps in times of need"; or that "money gets you anything", or that "One thing is forever young - greed", or that "until one's belly is full, he cares for nothing."⁶⁰

Many more examples could be given from this and other works, side by side with praise for Brahmins, sacrifice, karma, and caste. Despite this textual duplicity,

however, it seems evident that Lokāyata did indeed live up to its more frequently translated definition (lokesu ayata), and in this sense it has remained perhaps the influential, consistent, and enduring part of the Indian philosophical tradition. Its potential elevation to a 'higher level' in the future may finally accord recognition to this prominence.

PART TWO: ARTHAŚĀSTRA AND THE ORTHODOX COOPTATION

I. Materialism in Political Philosophy

A. Introduction. Although we have indicated some of the effects of the rise of the state and class society on human behavior, it is not our purpose here to specifically formulate an ethical critique of this process. In the following sections, however, we will examine a number of themes - specifically the genesis of what the modern world often calls 'raison d'état'.¹ - whose interrelationship with the moral realm is more complex than is immediately apparent. First we should perhaps explain why an attitude of critical neutrality is preferable to the rather ill-considered outright condemnations which plague scholarship in this field.

In the modern Indian version of the traditional (and virtually universal, in theory) excoriation of 'realpolitik', Pandurang Kane writes that both the Arthaśāstra of Kautilya and a number of sections of the Mahābhārata "support in several places the adoption of means entirely divorced from all rules of fair dealing and morality."² While this is a mild form of criticism compared to many, it still betrays the same paradigmatic moral fallacy that we saw earlier used with reference to the ethics of the Lokāyata school as a whole. We believe that this view rests upon a misunderstanding of some of the teleological and eschatological assumptions involved, which we will examine in relation to Kautilya. More generally, this view is

hazardous in that it ignores the practical application of such methods by those who speak theoretically of the 'higher ideals' of politics. The Brahmin General Pushyamitra's mode of gaining power, cited in the previous chapter, is a prime example of this.

Clearly what is lacking in this narrow form of disapprobation, besides an empirical integrity (which is precisely what is disliked) is a larger ethical sense of the aetiology of deprivation. In modern times, good Christians and animal lovers still march gregariously off to the battlefield at the command of the state. Jaina monks literally forbidden to hurt a fly accepted donations from usurers whose health entailed untold suffering and death. To say the least, the problem is relativistic. In order to comprehend why it is that human beings find it necessary to treat each other in such a fashion, we must study the historical genesis of such behavior. Here what appears to be genuine moral censure impedes scholarly progress. In turn our ability to realistically avoid such manifestations is further inhibited.

A plea for what we have termed 'critical neutrality' is not superfluous in relation to the following section. Here we will attempt to outline, insofar as this is possible, the social and philosophic bases of the oft-disparaged Arthaśāstra school and its methods. In particular this involves an assessment of the connection between the Arthaśāstra tradition and Lokāyata. Admittedly this is a delicate question upon which literature is exceedingly scarce.

This is largely, we believe, for the reasons outlined above. The notion of a 'science of politics' need not, as Marx's lifework was an attempt to demonstrate, rest upon a pejorative conception of human nature, such as was shared by Hobbes, Machiavelli, and others. The assumption that men, seeking a maximum amount of pleasure, become and remain greedy is thus not self-evident. Perhaps the observation that they have generally done so in the past underlies the positivism of most 'scientific' attempts to formulate a theory of politics. In this sense an exposition of the Arthasastra arguments is far less removed from contemporary problems than may be apparent.

B. Kautilya's Predecessors. In the last section we saw that Lokāyata had its basis in speculation concerning the natural world, and a scepticism about Vedic teachings which were contrary to its conclusions about the laws of nature. This gave rise to criticism of the Brahmanical religion, which in turn led to vituperative attacks on the Lokāyatikas. The question as to whether Arthasāstra was initially orthodox or heterodox is a very difficult matter. Originally it is said to have been an Upaveda of the Atharvaveda, hence a legitimate part of Brahmanical learning.³ Kane explains that "Arthasāstra is really a branch of dharmaśāstra, as the former deals with the responsibilities of kings for whom rules are laid down in many treatises on dharma."⁴ Since both traditions are of relative antiquity (although if anything arthasāstra is older than dharmaśāstra), this view

presumes that arthaśāstra is a branch of rājadharma (the duties of a king in relation to the society as a whole). It should be noted, however, that arthaśāstra has two main synonyms; dandaniti (the practice of punishment) and rājanītiśāstra (the practice of royal policy).⁵ These senses of the tradition are more predominantly secular, and lead to at least the possibility, upheld by Winternitz, that Caranavyūha description of arthaśāstra as an Atharvaveda parīṣiṣṭha was simply a Brahmin attempt to claim credit for the popular acknowledgement which arthaśāstra received.⁶

This leads to the view that arthaśāstra was originally taught as a branch of dharmaśāstra, and then became independent, or that it was more autonomous still in its sources. In either case we know that this independence was lost, immersed in later Brahmanical interpolations (which have left the present texts greatly corrupted) and practically undermined by such deliberate policies as Aśoka's dhamma, which probably led to definite alterations in the relation of artha to the other puruṣārthas (ends of life).⁷

Our knowledge of the role of the purohita (royal chaplain) in early India would seem to add strength to the view that arthaśāstra was nurtured in an orthodox milieu. In the first kingdoms it is likely that both king and purohita were primus inter pares. By the time of Aitareya Brahmana (c. 600 BC), however, we read (disallowing Brahmin prejudice) that the purohita is rastragopa, the savior of the kingdom.⁸

While this may have not been used in reference to the secular services of the purohita at this time, the rise of Vaiśya monarchies shortly thereafter must have placed such ministers in a position of much greater prominence, since the entire province of traditional learning lay at their disposal. Many rulers, alternately, probably had no education whatsoever.

Thus Tucci describes Lokāyata generally, which he strongly associates with arthaśāstra, as the "science of the purohita."⁹ By asserting (albeit on scanty evidence) that there were two artha schools, one orthodox and one claiming arthakāman puruṣa rthau (wealth and pleasure as the only goals), he conveniently avoids some of the problems mentioned above. Even if this is the case, however, how was it that the more secular school evolved? What were the conditions of existence which allowed it to make this dramatic break from theology at the methodological level and to proclaim a philosophical ideal whose basis surely laid with the interests of the lower classes?

Brihaspati and his school are frequently referred to in the list upon which Kautilya draws in his compendium of and innovation upon prior and contemporary arthaśāstra opinions.¹⁰ Although euhemism (and its corollary) is common in Indian historiography, the personage of Brihaspati provides the strongest grounds for asserting a vital connection between arthaśāstra and Lokāyata. Yaśastilaka said that the nīti of Brihaspati had no place for the gods, implying an original secularity.¹¹ Kautilya later comments that it was the special

view of Brihaspati's school that the king need study only two vidyas (sciences): vārtā (economics), and dandanīti (control or punishment).¹² This at least implies a number of differing schools originally, which Kautilya takes for granted.

Brihaspati apparently not only confined kings to these disciplines, but held that Vedic knowledge (trayi) was positively injurious to the proper exercise of intellectual functions. Furthermore the Bārhaspatyasūtram advises the king to study Lokāyata doctrines at the time of securing wealth, and the Kāpālikaśāstras for sexual and other desires.¹³ Here we have the positive association of Lokāyata as a form of logic with an anti-Vedic attitude and a materialistic basis. Even the comparatively late (c. twelfth century) and very corrupt Brihaspatīsūtra assembled by F.W. Thomas follows these views, here however confining the minister, not the king, to the pursuit of danda, and dismissing sacrifices and Vedic studies.¹⁴ Several verses later in this text, however, a warning is given against Lokāyata and its heretical associations.

Connections between Brihaspati the naturalist and Brihaspati the political philosopher may offer an interesting avenue of analysis.¹⁵ Besides the fact, in Kane's words, that Kautilya "exhibits a wonderful knowledge of herbs and drugs", and a sufficiently extensive knowledge of alchemy to speak of the amalgamation of gold with mercury¹⁶, we have Kautilya's own admission that the assistants of the purohita

engage in sorcery and black magic.¹⁷ Several additional sources give evidence of Kautilya's own reputation as an alchemist.¹⁸ He may even have written the Vaidyajīvana, a text on medicine.¹⁹ It is certainly only an elementary logical transition between the practice of magic, its conversion to the search for wealth in alchemy, and the science of the acquisition of wealth at the level of the state. Several of Kautilya's predecessors are additionally known as writers on both kāma and astronomy.²⁰ We know that Kautilya spent many years at Taxila (Taksilaśa), where Greek and Syrian alchemy and foreign influences generally were stronger than in any other part of India. If this association can be built upon, it will prove a most fruitful area for future research.

Kāvya Uśanas, another early arthaśāstra writer, was later termed the "purohita of the asuras."²¹ This obscure title is in addition shared by Śandra and Amarka.²² Was this because they were materialists, supporters of popular insurrections (extremely rare²³) or secular arthaśāstra writers? Any of these possibilities may be valid, perhaps all combined. Whichever is the case, the early authors of arthaśāstra became closely associated with the materials in the disparaging eyes of Vedic orthodoxy, and it is not unlikely that there were many more objective connections between them than we have been able to offer here. The condemnations of Brihaspati as a teacher of asuras makes it unlikely that his views were merely those of 'casuistry', as D. Shastri has stated.²⁴ A specifically secular and

materialistic empiricism seems rather to have provided the basis upon which Kautilya constructed (with a selective use of the materials before him) the first science of polity of its kind.

II. The Arthaśāstra of Kautilya

Kautilya's position in the history of Sanskrit literature generally is virtually unprecedented. The text provides the greatest extent of knowledge of life in the Mauryan period known to us. Kautilya himself has been called the "greatest Indian exponent of the art of government and the methods of diplomacy."¹ Less pleasant descriptions also abound, but we will reserve a consideration of their substantive value for our discussion of Kautilya's ethics. The stature of the text, in both its breadth and content, made a considerable impact on Indic studies after its discovery in the early twentieth century. Scholars have been by tradition rather a passive breed of beings (far too much so, it might be added). But the Arthaśāstra aroused even the most laconic to issues ranging from the interpretation of ancient history to the nature of textual exegesis. In all this the rise of Hindu nationalism exerted a powerful influence. Those seeking despotism in the ancient empires were delighted by the discovery, and Wittfogel takes many of his major assumptions from the text.² Others encountered a realistic humanist whose treatment of the lower classes was superior to anything since the Mauryan epoch. This view we will also give further consideration. But all were delighted (except perhaps the most rigid

spiritualists) that India had produced a thinker whose sense of politics, economics, and history seemed at least equal to that of some of the greatest western thinkers of a similar ilk, such as Hobbes or Machiavelli.

Two major problems arose immediately which are worthy of mention. The dating of the text was given at anywhere from 300 BC to 400 AD, not atypical by Indian standards but frustrating given the variety of information offered. It is now fairly generally accepted that the work does derive from the fourth century BC.³ The original text was however furnished with additions, such that a date of c. 250 AD is acceptable for the complete compilation available to us.⁴ These addenda did not, however, completely corrupt the text, as is the case with so many other early Indian documents.

Questions of authorship are rather more important, if we are to attribute the Arthaśāstra views to Kautilya here. P.V. Kane writes that the text "impresses one as the product of a single brilliant mind."⁵ While this may remain true for a large portion of the text, nonetheless a recent "statistical investigation" concludes that "What the Arthaśāstra loses by way of individuality it gains by being seen as representative of the best of generations of thinkers."⁶ At least three authors were deduced to have been involved in the text by this method. Bearing these considerations in mind, we will for the sake of convenience treat the text as a unified work by a single author, except where this position is likely to influence the interpretation being used.

While the Arthaśāstra of Kautilya treats of an immense variety of interesting subjects, we will be primarily concerned with its relationship to the evolution of materialist thought. In this regard two main areas are of especial relevance; the method of analysis employed, and its underlying epistemological assumptions, and the ethics demonstrated at a variety of levels. From this it should be possible to offer some comments on the debate about the orthodoxy of the text and its views.

Although Kautilya writes in his initial salutation that "This Arthaśāstra is made as a compendium of almost all the arthaśāstras which, in view of the acquisition and maintenance of the earth, have been composed by ancient teachers"⁷, he asserts his own independent views almost immediately. He rejects the extreme view of Uśanas that the science of government (dandanīti) is the only science, as well as the opinions of Mānava and Brihaspati. Instead he holds that there are four science; ānvīkshakī (logic and possibly self-discipline), Trayī (the three Vedas), Vārtā (agriculture, cattle-breeding, and trade), and Dandanitī. He then explains that "Righteous and unrighteous acts are learned from the triple Vedas, wealth and non-wealth from vārtā, the expedient and the inexpedient, as well as potency and impotency, from the science of government."⁸

Ānvīkshākī is held to comprise the philosophies of Sāṃkya, Yoga, and Lokāyata. Here we encounter a considerable obstacle. If we simply take Kautilya's use of Lokāyata to

mean 'materialism', as Ruben does⁹, then we can easily conclude with Krishma Rao that "Kautilya was a Lokāyata" (sic: the proper term is Lokāyatika).¹⁰ This is not a common interpretation, however, and we have seen some of the other possible definitions which may be attached to Lokāyata. Shamaśastry wonders if 'atheism' is appropriate, but this seems unlikely.¹¹ It would seem rather to approximate a form of reasoning, since Kautilya describes the whole of ānvīkshāki as a science "most beneficial to the world, keep(ing) the mind steady and firm in weal and woe alike, and bestow(ing) excellence of foresight, speech, and action."¹² Nonetheless the 'materialist' argument has some weight, since Kautilya uses the term 'Lokāyatrāvidah' as "a man experienced in temporal affairs." (I.6) Hence the probable meaning is secular as opposed to religious knowledge.

In the course of his enumeration of the categories of knowledge, Kautilya makes it clear that the first three sciences "are dependent for their well-being on the science of government." (I.10) Danda is in turn dependent upon vinaya (discipline), and the two subsequent short chapters of the text are devoted to the 'restraint of the organs of sense' (I.11-13), "for the sole aim of all the sciences is nothing but the restraint of the organs of sense." (I.11) Thus clarity of purpose is the foremost quality of the successful king:

"for from hearing (śruta) ensues knowledge, from knowledge steady application (yoga) is possible, and from application self-possession (ātmavattā) is possible. This is what is meant by efficiency of learning." (I.11)

That inference as a mode of knowledge is accepted by Kautilya is implied in the following passage: "a man's ability is inferred from his capacity shown in work." (I.15) Furthermore Kautilya adds that the works of a king are of three types, visible, invisible, and inferential, the latter being described as "inference of the nature of what is not accomplished from what is accomplished." (I.15) Otherwise perception and experience are the most often discussed forms of knowledge (eg. I.15, 27, 43, etc.) The highest form of intelligence for Kautilya is the ability to carry into practice what one has been taught: "a man possessed of only theoretical knowledge is likely to commit serious blunders." (I.34) Kautilya's acceptance of inference per se does not put him in opposition to the materialist schools, only the most extreme of which probably rejected it entirely.

Certainly on the whole his method in this regard is materialist in the normal sense of the term. He accepts the Vedas, but for reasons of policy: "As the triple Vedas definitely determine the respective duties of the four castes, and of the four orders of religious life, they are most useful." (I.7) Otherwise, in terms of divine causation, this is necessarily rejected. Although Kautilya speaks of dharma as "eternal truth holding its sway over the world" (III.150), activities are analysed only in terms of two causes: manūsham (that within man's knowledge and control), and daivam (unforeseen or outside of human control): "what is unforeseen is providential..what is anticipated is human."

(VI.260) Kautilya adds, further, that "Causes, both human and providential, govern the world and its affairs."

In this aspect of the method of his science, Kautilya is certainly closer to the materialists than to any other general school. With respect to the object of his method, this is even more true. Kautilya's science is that of artha, variously translated as 'wealth', 'well-being', 'acquisition', etc. While the maintenance of social order is dependent on danda and "power and power alone maintains this world and the next" (III.50), of the three ends of life (charity, wealth, and desire), "wealth and wealth alone is important, inasmuch as charity and desire depend upon wealth for their realisation." (I.12) Kautilya clearly recognizes that the strength of a state lies largely in its economic power, not in the flourishing of its Brahmins nor the beauty of its maidens. The means by which states prosper was thus his primary concern, since deterioration, stagnation, and progress were the three historical movements deduced by him. (VI 263)

Kautilya's is no crude materialism in this regard. Rather we see a fine sense of the balance between the determination of historical and natural factors, and the fruits of human efforts: "Virtue is the basis of wealth and enjoyment is the end of wealth." (IX 363) In turn, "the root of wealth is activity, and of evil its reverse." (I.39) Kautilya means here that it is better to possess virtue and no wealth than the reverse, since he states that "Ignorance

and the absence of discipline are the cause of a man's troubles." (VIII.327)

We can see from the foregoing references that for Kautilya the object of science was inherently bound up with an understanding of the ends and purposes of life. Neither wealth nor power are sought here as ends in themselves:

"Strength is power, and happiness is the end. Hence a king shall endeavor to augment his power and elevate his happiness."

(VI.261) This eudaemonism is strongly rooted in a belief in the vita activa, and thus Kautilya extols the ancient warrior virtues and condemns the renunciatory and pessimistic attitudes of those who are always "trusting to fate and putting no reliance on manliness." (VII.297)

The question is not whether a king's happiness was the glorification of his own power, but that the happiness of all parts of society were dependent upon the strength of the state. Max Weber's view in this light is most certainly untenable, and results from a misunderstanding of the materialist ethic underlying Kautilya's analysis:

"The problem of a 'political ethic' has never preoccupied Indian theory, and in the absence of ethical universalism and natural right it could hardly be otherwise. The dharma of the prince was to conduct war for the sake of pure power per se." (13)

The element of truth that does lie in this view pertains more to Krishna's arguments to Arjuna, cited earlier, in favor of the duty of a warrior to fight, even against his own relatives. But this is relevant to the general prostitution

enjoined by class society, not Kautilya's positions in particular.

It is in spite of, rather than because of, Kautilya's ethics that he has gained a reputation for cruelty in certain quarters. While he realized that all men and women sought a pleasant life, Kautilya also believed that most were willing to deprive others of happiness in order to augment their own, and this led to a rather uniformly poor opinion of human nature: "men are naturally fickle-minded. and exhibit constant changes in their temper" (I.68); "vulgar men . . . form the majority of people. . . one in a thousand may or may not be a noble man, he it is who is possessed of excessive courage and wisdom (who) is the refuge of vulgar people." (VIII.331).

For Kautilya, "the state of nature was a state of war."¹⁴ Perhaps naturalism provided the basis for this understanding, for, as H.G. Wells once said, the study of nature eventually makes one as remorseless as nature. In the matter of survival, however, statecraft demanded the richest possible understanding of the relationship between military power, economic acquisition, and human behavioral propensities. There is little sense in listing the devices recommended by Kautilya for the gain and retention of power. Despite their intrinsic ingenuity, they are irrelevant to our purposes here. We believe that Kautilya thought that their end was propter utilitem publicam, and a judgment upon our part of this complex interrelation of ends to means would be out of place.

Nonetheless, this matter bears in one sense on the question of Kautilya's adherence to the orthodox Brahmanical tradition. This is because Kautilya apparently enjoins the manipulation of religious institutions to the benefit of the state, including stealing 'the property of the gods' and even proclaiming new gods for revenue purposes. (VI.244) Kautilya adds, however, that "measures such as the above shall only be taken against the seditious and wicked, never against others."

(VI.246) Brahmins are especially to be avoided. How then, does this effect the vital matter of Kautilya's orthodoxy? In what sense may he be properly described as a materialist?

The extreme comprehensiveness of the system of thought presented in the Arthaśāstra makes it tempting to agree with Pizzagalli that, by comparison, "The Nāstikas, like the Lokāyatikas, and the Cārvākas, were not theoretical materialists. The real theoretical materialism of India is to be found in the nīti."¹⁵ Several objections to this view are possible. Firstly, the nīti are not uniform in their philosophical adherence, and the later arthaśāstra thinkers tend, as we will see, towards increasing orthodoxy.

Brihaspati and Uśanas are the most overtly materialist of the early schools, but Kautilya sets himself off from them quite deliberately in the introduction of his own work.

Secondly, Kautilya does not attempt to present "the architectonic of the rationally perfect and ideal polity."¹⁶ As a statesman he is more a theorist of the modes of political activity than a philosopher of the ends of political life.

Yet these ends are present in a somewhat systematic sense, and happiness and enjoyment are given as a form of summum bonum.

These goals are clearly materialist in the normal sense of orientation towards this life and fulfillment in it. The problem is that Kautilya's concern was with the life of the state - the protection of the entire community - and not simply the exaltation of the pleasures of individual life. The means required for such an end at the level of the state dictate the praise of virtuous disciplines in a manner which popular materialism might have found counterproductive. On the other hand, materialism in everyday life also understood the value of wealth, and its accumulation (as Weber and Freud were later to emphasise) required much repressive sublimation before enduring pleasure could be enjoyed. In this sense Kautilya shared all of the basic assumptions of contemporary materialism.

As to whether this sets Kautilya distinctly off from the orthodox dharmaśāstras, this is another matter entirely. Here we agree that "the dividing line between the dharmaśāstras and the arthaśāstras must be sought in the conception of the ultimate purpose of kingship."¹⁷ We know that, unlike all later writers on dharmaśāstra or arthaśāstra, Kautilya upholds the supremacy of rājadharmā (the king's own edicts) over the precedents of the dharmaśāstras, whenever a conflict between them occurs. (III.150) In this sense Kautilya does emancipate politics from theology, despite Varma's warning to the contrary.¹⁸ It is also clear that the varnaśrāmadharma system, with its protection of Brahmanical

privileges, is upheld in the Arthaśāstra text. But this would appear to be more for political than for ethical reasons: no other system could possibly provide the basis of a strong empire at that time. Furthermore, by comparison, Kautilya reduces the special positions of the Brahmins, by withdrawing their immunity from criminal penalty and enforcing capital punishment upon them. (IV.229)¹⁹ Outcastes are however excluded from inheritance, and the lands of heretics are the first targets for appropriation in times of need, all of which is perfectly orthodox.

In these and other ways we can agree with Drekmeier that the Arthaśāstra "should not be taken to imply a repudiation of orthodoxy."²⁰ Yet the rationalism and materialist ethics of the text are hardly Vedic, either, even if any direct conflict is veiled with qualifications. Certainly we cannot agree with the view that "the distinction between 'secular' and 'religious' does not exist for the Hindu." All branches of knowledge are part of a vast aggregate, which has its root in God."²¹

Kautilya's brilliance, on the contrary, lay precisely in the establishment of a delicate balance between the demands of the acquisition of wealth on the part of the state, and the need of preserving the value-structure and social hierarchy which were the principal cement in human interactions. This is probably why the more extreme views of Uśanas and Brihāspati are rejected; their substance (the preponderant pursuit of territory, wealth, and power) remained

the same, but their form was altered in order to satisfy the demands of a powerful class. But this is a political rather than an ethical position. Thus when Kautilya discusses means of securing additional revenues, he abjures from seizing the lands occupied by high-born persons "less the owner cause troubles." (VIII.334)

In one sense, then, it can be said that Kautilya was orthodox: his policies sought the preservation of the state, upon which the social order depended. Thus varnaśrāmadharma was maintained, and good karma collected by all who followed preordained paths. In the means required to effect this end, however, Kautilya apparently cared as little for Brahmanical rights as for any others if they stood in the way of the protection of the state. Here the rājadharmā was dandanīti, not subservient but independent and ultimately superior, because a priori, to other moral requirements. In this duty the clarity of the king's intellect least required the intrusion of spiritual thought.²² This was on the whole the main contribution of the Arthaśāstra to the Indian political tradition.

Before examining the general relation of arthaśāstra to the rise of the state and of class society, we will briefly examine one more aspect of Kautilya's thought and recommended practice. Can it be said that Kautilya represents a progressive force in the evolution of human relations?

Here we must rely upon the biases of our own age in inferring a capacity to form a moral judgement. In terms of the use of

torture, spies, assassination, widespread use of the death penalty, etc., Kautilya is as modern (though far less efficient) as the repressive regimes, 'socialist' and capitalist, of the twentieth century. Beyond despising these techniques we cannot comment any further here. In his social policies, however, many of Kautilya's recommendations were far more humane than anything India has since produced. Śūdras were accepted as āryās, and allowed as witnesses in court, which had never occurred before. Hereditary slavery was abolished, and the private property of slaves recognized. Physical and verbal abuse of women was legally prohibited, and divorce was liberalised, while widows were permitted to remarry. Profits and usury were controlled.²³

In all of this protection (and creation) of the dignity of the individual, especially for those most oppressed, is wholly evident. Since Kautilya was himself a Brahmin, it is tempting to say that the materialist heritage of his own studies, rather than the simple expediency of policy, led him to implement such innovations.²⁴ This can of course only remain a speculative matter, but it is still true that when the Arthaśāstra was written the treatment of the lower classes was probably better than at any time since, though a comparison of ancient slavery to modern debt-slavery in India would leave neither with any human advantage. This is due, however, less to the theoretical inclinations of the Magadhan minister of his monarch than to the fact that the Brahmanical counterrevolution had not yet set in.

III. Empiricist Materialism and the Origins of State and Classes

There is yet another level of analysis which provides a dimension of historical understanding of the process before us. This is an area which remains largely unexplored, yet which provides one of the more important linkages between the study of the past and our use of this knowledge in the conscious determination of the future. It concerns the relationship between the evolution of instrumental rationality and the decline of public morality, and the depersonalisation of roles in the political sphere. Indignant moral proscriptions tend in particular to ignore considerations of this nature.

Our main argument consists in the conviction that arthaśāstra represents the unified philosophy of both class society and the state. In the formulation of this combination a duality of roles set forth whose essence is the deprivation of the public realm of sincerity in human action, such that the mistrust of political actors became the expected norm of behavior. At the heart of this genesis of social schizophrenia is the transferral of two metaphors into public life: that of the game, and that of the role. Thus we will argue that the original loyalties of the tribe were not extended to a wider area when the state was formed. They were rather maintained at the lower levels of family, kin, caste, and guild, while the state was allowed to assume its own standard of conduct, wherein actions that would never be undertaken by individuals in nonpolitical and noneconomic capacities become wholly acceptable in both of these areas,

/in the interests of the state and of economic gain.

Although collective well-being was certainly a notable feature of RigVedic tribal society, the emphasis upon the acquisition of wealth alone could only occur where money became the standard by which other values are judged, when 'money will get you anything'. The reductionism of social relations to the profit motive by no means reaches the apogee whose product is our own milieu. It is doubtful that any ancient king endorsed a commodity in return for a percentage of its sales. But there is adequate evidence that instrumental rationality - a mode of thinking which treats human beings as means to ulterior gain rather than as ends in themselves - first arises in this context, and was furthermore recognized as a departure from traditional communal roles.

The empiricism demanded of the political powerbroker was initially more military than economic. Traditionally the military came to be known as caturanga (four-limbed), after its main components, the infantry, cavalry, chariots, and elephants. This is the same term for the game of chess, whose modern version originates in India at this time. A late nīti text is even called the Hari-Hara-Caturanga.¹ With the introduction of 'game' as a (if not the) political metaphor, instrumentality became the presumed mode of activity at the level of the state. Hence in The Signet Ring of Rakshasha of Vistrakadatta the character of Bhagruvayana says that "It is well-known . . . that ministers and politicians do not treat men and women as people, but as pawns, always

keeping in mind the first aim, not the immediate methods."²

With this understanding came the degeneration of public life, and the typification in the popular lexicon of politics as an inherently corrupt activity, which remains its most common definition. This mode of being did not however remain confined to the actions of the leaders of the state. Ludwig Sternbach points out, in reference to the maxims of Cānakya (Kautilya), that they "could be profitably followed by all men in their dealings with others in the conduct of wordly affairs."³ Hence in the pursuit of wealth economic roles could be modelled upon those provided by the original military empiricism, and from here on the two develop codeterminately. This became an important part of mass culture, as we saw in the section before last. Mātsyayāna, the doctrine of the bigger fishes eating the smaller, which provides Kautilya with the strongest metaphor for his understanding of the state of nature, enjoyed a similar status in economic activity. A confirmed notion of anarchy (pralaya) thus guided the development of social realtions at both of these levels. This bifurcation of roles marks the end of public morality in the ancient world. Richard Sennett remarks on the west, that from Plato onwards man comes to be seen as a creature of masks in a theater called life.⁴ Machiavelli accepted the position of persona (masks) in public life. For Rousseau this falsification of relations was the epitome of insincerity and the root of the moral dilemma of modern man. In its essence this duality is rooted in a lack of trust in

the public sphere. Hence the Śāntiparva (138.196) says that the essence of all nītiśāstras is aviśvāsa, not putting trust in anybody.⁵ With the negation of the common bond public activity is transformed from a heroic right to a duty, which in Rome begins to occur after Augustus.⁶

In India this process is completed when Arjuna is urged by Kriśna to kill his kinsmen in a manner equivalent to an actor performing his duties on a stage. Consciousness of the inhumanity of such actions is transferred into the devotion to an ideal. In this sense of a 'higher ideal', a duty to be followed, is encapsulated the core of the problem of the relation of means to ends. Its origins, we believe, lay in the individualist empiricism spawned of the confluence of the rise of the state and class society. In the crucial matter of the destruction of the ancient ethic it seems that both are equally responsible, having played alternately central and supporting roles in the drama of cultural evolution.

IV. Hedonism, later Tantra, and the fate of Arthaśāstra

Between the fourth century BC and the eighth century AD, when the Vedānta school begins a prolonged diatribe against it, Indian materialism undergoes a number of fundamental alterations. It has been a common practice simply to collapse several movements together with some comment similar to the following: "Extreme freedom gave birth to licentiousness . . . the elevated teachings of Brihaspati were metamorphosed into the wicked teachings of his followers."¹ An age less imbued with the fixations of Victorian prudery

might provide a more objective judgement upon the cult of the erotic in India. We will accordingly refrain from insisting that sensuality represents a degenerate form of materialism.

Despite their apparently common sexual orientation, the Kāmasūtra (book of pleasure) and the practices associated with Tantrism diverge greatly in their practical significance. An appreciation of the central role of sexuality in human life binds them, but the resemblance largely ends there. This is a function of the class backgrounds underlying each, and the resultant attitudes taken about the precise meaning of sexual activity. To reduce the two into their formally mutual characteristics would be precisely to miss the point that the former represents the orthodox incorporation of kāma into the ends of life, while the latter continues ancient practices of goddess-worship, fertility rites, and the search for immortality. The latter thus incorporates the nuances, curiosity, and scientific outlook of alchemical materialism. Kāmasūtra is materialist only in its love of classification and its hedonism. These remain, however, divorced from most of the interests which we have seen to be concerns of the various materialist schools.

Vātsyāyana, the author of the Kāmasūtra (c. 400 AD), was a medical doctor who consciously modelled his work on the Arthaśāstra of Kautilya.² He specifically denies the Lokāyata view that religious practices should not be followed. The Vedas, sacrifices, and varnaśrāmadharma are rather upheld.³ Following the technique of a summation of previous literature

followed by a refutation upon points of disagreement, Vātsyāyana attempts to do for sex what Kautilya did for politics, but in a manner even more orthodox, such that we are left few doubts as to the author's political inclinations. The elevation of kāma was ancient, and may be traced to the Artharvaveda, where it is said that "Kāma was born the first. Him neither gods, nor pitri, nor men have ever equalled. Thou art superior to these and forever great."⁴

In the hands of the skilled doctor, however, the book is not so much a praise of pleasure as a manual for its exercise by the nāgarakas or "young men of fashions".⁵ It is also to be studied by women, especially courtesans, as it describes not merely an exhaustive variety of sexual practices, but also singing, dancing, poetry, magic, languages, and the teaching of rhymes to parrots and sparrows, as well as 58 other pastimes to be enjoyed by those of adequate leisure.⁶ It is clear that prostitution as described in the work was a highly respected cultural activity, in which sex itself plays a major but not preponderant role. The book in this way is most appropriate to the period of enhanced mercantile activity, following the establishment of serious trade with the Roman empire.

During the Indian middle ages the main evolution in popular religious life was the formation of the Śaivite and Vaiśnava sects. Both are linked to the replacement of karmamarga and jñānamarga (salvation through deeds and knowledge) by Bhakti, the principle of personal emotional

devotion to and immersion in a single god.⁷ The elevation of monotheism is at least partially an effect of the strength of Vedānta and its Brahmanical supporters. Despite frequent popular variance, the texts of these sects at least attempted to maintain this exclusivity.⁸ Both schools, in addition, tried to claim the god of the other as a servant of its own. Śaivism especially tried to fill the vacuum created by the decline of Buddhism, and altered its own nature necessarily as a result.⁹

Buddhism had long since incorporated many Tantric aspects into its own practices, especially in those regions far removed from the main urban and monastic centres. When the former began to recede, the latter assumed new forms. Foremost among these was the worship of the goddess Kālī (the dark one), as a śakti (consort) of Śiva.¹⁰ Śakti as an idea is described as the "active energising will of a god, personified as his wife."¹¹ Chattopadhyaya has written at length on the elevation of and respect for women demonstrated in the later Tantra. The roots of this view (not shared by the majority of Hindus) lay in the respect for the fertility of women in their propagation of society, and was probably originally derived from their central role in the inception of agriculture.¹²

Tantra was to come, however, to have a profound influence on the rituals of the everyday Hindu religion, particularly in the south and in Bengal. Of the latter it has been said that "two-thirds of our religious rites are Tantric,

and almost half 'our medicine.'¹³ The Tantras were classified as either vaidika or avaidika according to their acceptance of the supreme authority of the Vedas, and we noted earlier their attempt to claim a direct Vedic heritage for the core of their beliefs and customs. As the new sects gained in strength, Tantra gave them śaktis: Sarasvatī for Brahma, Lashmī for Viśnu, and Kālī for Śiva.¹⁴ An elaborate syncretism began which still produces new cults as well as combinations of the old.

It was within the broad confines of these new cults that the two extremes of Indian inclination - asceticism and eroticism - were fairly successfully, if contradictorily, reconciled with each other. Śiva was worshipped as the patron god of all ascetics on the one hand, and as perhaps the most sexually active of the gods on the other. Kriṣṇa played a similar role after his popularity began (c. 400 AD).¹⁵ In this balancing of the 'pendulum of extremes', Tantra played a central role through its emphasis on the female principle. Tantra thus

"maintained the identity of the two extremes of asceticism and sensuality, control and release, and the devotee (bhakta) believed that any action of the god or his worshipper could be justified in performed in a spirit of absolute and compelling love." (16)

In this manner new rituals and priesthoods sprang up. While the Lokāyatikas, as we have seen, were active at least from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, there is no evidence that their heretical declamations of gods and sacrifices made any inroads on the spread of the popular

cults. The acute impact of social criticism was doubtless broken by deliberate Brahmin policies, and what remained were scientific exploration and a popular materialism resigned to the empirical determination of economy, and immersed in the sacerdotalised and remystified unity of the realization of pleasure and the liberation of the body. With its political awareness severed, materialism became/reduced to its lowest common denominator, hence 'vulgar' not in its beliefs but in the loss of memory of its previous skeptical role. We must emphasise, however, that the apparent paucity of such judgments may well be due to our lack of knowledge of materialism in this period. The mere fact that Madhāva and Śāṅkara devote arguments to the refutation of Lokāyata arguments tends to indicate that this was not merely a scholastic activity, but rather constituted an ongoing debate. Nonetheless, the amputation and cooptation of materialist beliefs of which we have spoken still occurred in the manner indicated.

In the theory of politics, also, the triumph of orthodoxy was everywhere evident. The clearest representation of this was the codification of custom and prior dharmaśāstras known as the Laws of Manu, which dates from about the second century AD.¹⁷ Manu states that "The whole Veda is the first source of the law, next the tradition and virtuous conduct of those who know the Veda further . . .", and goes on to demand that all those who treat these sources with contempt "relying on the institutes of dialectics" (eg. the Buddhists and Cārvākas) "must be cast out by the

virtuous, as an atheist and scorner of the Veda."¹⁸ Much of the text tightens the injunctions upon the lower castes, and the death penalty is specifically said never to apply to a Brahmin, "though he have committed all possible crimes." (VIII.380)

In the matter of the king's duties many fundamental arthasastra principles are accepted:

"Punishment alone governs all created beings, punishment alone protects them, punishment watches over them while they sleep; the wise declare punishment to be identical with the law. . for a guiltless man is hard to find. Through the fear of punishment the whole world yields the enjoyments which it owes." (VII.18, 22)

While this repressive basis of arthasāstra is maintained, any liberality with respect to the lower orders was wholly eradicated. Servitude is held to be biologically innate to the Śūdra order (VIII.414) Property rights are also altered here:

"A wife, a son, and a slave, these three are declared to have no property, the wealth which they earn is acquired for him to which they belong. . A brāhmaṇa may confidently seize the goods of his Śūdra slave, for as that slave can have no property, the master may take his possessions." (IX.416-17)

Śūdras are also prohibited from partaking in the legal process (VIII.21). All of this is based upon the principle that one should "not make that equal, which is unequal." (IV.225) Especially in relation to the lower classes, it is said that "if these two castes swerved from their duties, they would throw this whole world into confusion." (IX.418).

The extent of full Brahmanical power over the lowest parts of society is wholly evident in the injunction that goods may be seized for sacrifices from any Vaiśya who does not perform the proper rituals, and from any Śūdra whatsoever. (XI.12)

From here on whenever a conflict occurs between dharmaśāstra and arthaśāstra the former must necessarily prevail.¹⁹ Although arthaśāstra strongly influenced the evolution of dharmaśāstra, particularly with respect to the formation of royal policy, the balance of power by the time of Manu has shifted from the state towards the social order as determined by the Brahmanical codes. In several instances, as we have seen, there were in fact Brahmin lineages, who doubtless established the framework within which it became possible to desecularise those aspects of public life which had earlier tended towards innovation in the state-administered systems. In this way the king, rather than standing independently of society, was to act in his capacity as a member of the Kṣatriya varna, whose sole duty was the protection of the established social order. This led, ipso facto, to an extraordinary positivism in Indian legal and political philosophy, with an "undue emphasis on the status quo, and on current beliefs and practices as the ideal."²⁰

It cannot wholly be said that the Brahmanical counterrevolution altered the conception of kingship as presented in Kautilya's Arthaśāstra. As we have seen Kautilya believed in the maintenance of the varna schema and its various duties, yet his conception was doubtless more

egalitarian and less prejudiced in favor of an elevated status for the Brahmins. The king was advised to behave as an independent actor, to take the advice of his ministers, study the past, and then implement his policies. As law these then were primary, not mitigated by religious custom and class interest. In the later dharmaśāstras the king acts rather foremost out of svadharma and varnadharma. It is not the conception of kingship per se which has altered. Nor is it, as many have claimed, the superiority of ethics to politics, unless we take these terms as euphemisms for class power.²¹ What has rather been transformed is the understanding of the means which may be taken in order to preserve social well-being. All creativity as social actor is thus removed from the role of the king. Hence the formal aspect of kingship remains, though its content is now aligned to the new order.

In this sense the decline of state intervention as a means of effecting public welfare also meant the relative demise of the philosophy of the state in relation to the religious order, as might be expected. By the time of Manu or somewhat later, there was a virtual "wholesale incorporation of the arthaśāstra in the dharmaśāstra."²² The smritis now reflected a much stronger concern with the tenets of arthaśāstra than ever they had previously, but the result was the deprivation of an independent existence for arthaśāstra as a school of thought. The late Śukranīti defines arthaśāstra as a science which deals with the rational acquisition of kings in ways harmonising with the scriptures.²³

At about the same time (c. 1100) Lakṣmīdhara goes so far as to classify arthaśāstra as the sixth Veda (the Mahābhārata being the fifth). This certainly demonstrates the extent to which its heterodox propensities and origins had been purged, while the vital core of political philosophy was maintained.²⁴ Most of the later nīti texts, in fact, are unusual only in the sense in which they lack references to the earlier artha tradition.²⁵

There is little evidence that any of the later Lokāyatikas were students of, or practitioners of, arthaśāstra, although future research may yet reveal this highly reasonable possibility. In the popular literature Kṛiṣṇa largely comes to take the role of the friend and advisor of princes, while the legend of Cānakya/Kautilya receded and became overlain with mythology.²⁶ In the constant struggle for supremacy between the gods and the demons (the Brahmins and their enemies) it is in this period that the demons bled most freely. It would be wrong to assume that in the popular religions there was any great love for the Brahmins and their doctrines and sacrifices. One of the main hallmarks of the sacrifices of the various cults is the fact that no officiating Brahmin was required, although this varied according to region and economic circumstances.²⁷

In terms of their philosophy and ideology, however, the Brahmins were omnipresent, and it is here that a further means was provided for securing their enduring presence in Indian life. India is often termed the most tolerant of

countries, but we have seen that this did not extend to those advocates of secularity whose views did genuinely constitute a threat to the established order. With other minor religious cults, cooptation proceeded at a gradual pace, usually via the simple technique of claiming that a local god was an aspect of the One God, and hence inferior. Needless to say, without social power such inclusions and demotions could not have occurred with equal regularity.

In terms of the evolution of Indian materialism, the doctrine of māyā (the world as illusion), which epitomises the ultimate rejection of the world of the flesh, acted in direct antithesis to the doctrines we have considered here.

In reference to China, Joseph Needham comments that "It would seem impossible to overestimate the importance which the doctrine of māyā had in Chinese Buddhism; it was this which . . . helped to inhibit the development of Chinese science."²⁸

The insidious compartmentalisation of caste also prevented the further flow of information relating to scientific explorations, as did the injunctions against the study of texts which might have aided and encouraged this pursuit. This is not to say that scientific thought simply stopped. Rather it was retarded in such a way that, despite the backwardness of the technological level and the inadequate development of a market economy, even the discoveries of individual genius became less likely, and would have received little social acclaim in any event.

Manu's declaration that sea-trade constituted a

source of ritual impurity²⁹ helped to further cut any outside influences which might have altered the predominance of religious superstition in Hindu India. Where trade continued and foreign doctrines were known, speculation continued. But the possibility of any further impact upon the whole of society was thwarted by the isolation of the vast majority of the population, and by the rigid dogmatism even of many well-read and cosmopolitan persons. Early Vedanta had adhered to the primacy of the soul, seemingly such a noble sentiment, but had not denied the reality of the external world.³⁰ In Śāṅkara's māyāvāda (doctrine of illusion), however, the identity of Brahman and ātman precluded the cardinal recognition of matter, and with such an outlook the cultivation of instrumental techniques for the alteration of nature to the service of people became a very unlikely area of general concern.

In a very real sense medieval Vedanta captured the spirit of its age. For the majority no external world did exist, merely a scattering of individuals fixed in their duties, whose knowledge of the past was largely mythological and hence unreal even if originally grounded in history. In the religions of Śiva, Viṣṇu, Kriṣṇa, and the Tantras māyā was present in varying degrees. Thus in a dialogue Kriṣṇa is able to say to Śiva: "there is no difference between thee and me"³¹, and in several senses be completely accurate. The time had passed when a challenge of orthodoxy became socially possible. There were no further immense breaks with the past

to throw all values into doubt. Recurrent invasions touched the lives of many, but these were by non-Hindus who could be expected to act in inferior ways, and thus they contributed little to the modification of the idealist view of the natural and social worlds. The social basis of Indian culture had been formed, and that which was antagonistic to it politically only managed to survive tangentially, without being able to alter the primary facets of existence, which were perpetually reinforced by the sedentary self-sufficiency of the peasants and the ideology of their masters.

There are thus a number of dimensions in which materialist thought was important in early Indian life. On the other hand, we have seen that there were particular schools formed around materialist ideas, although these varied greatly in their 'purity' and corresponding orthodoxy. At least some of the naturalists, the hedonists, and the political philosophers were originally anti-Brahmanical and suffered severe oppression as a result. Gradual cooptation later sufficed to undermine the critical basis of these positions. In the long term view the independence of materialist views was thus greatly dissipated.

On the other hand, however, the primacy of matter was upheld in a number of very significant ways. Scientific exploration was greatly fettered but continued nonetheless, and in medicine and astronomy especially attracted considerable prestige. Empiricism in political economy became the accepted mode of comprehending the activities of the state, but this

knowledge was transformed into a servant of the established social order. Sensuality was admitted as a valid end of life, provided that the duties of caste and life-stage were first properly fulfilled. Economic activity itself was deliberately curtailed, but remained of course a universally-acknowledged pursuit, again provided that it did not dramatically interfere with the traditional hierarchy.

Anti-Brahmanical tendencies were obviously drastically curtailed in their most easily manifested forms. Yet the attitude of skepticism remains profoundly rooted in the recognition of the determinant value of wealth in life. This is an implicit criticism of the dogmas of Brahmin virtues and their efficacy. The intermediary status of the Brahmin as priest was rejected in many of the popular sects. Māyā could never gain prominence as an operant principle of everyday existence, for the two are mutually exclusive. Lacking other doctrinal alternatives, many members of the lower class did perhaps believe that their actions in a previous life accounted for their present perilous existence.

But this view was interlaced with the crude but fundamentally correct understanding that it is largely wealth, hereditary or cunningly accumulated in a short time, that confers social status. The rise of low-caste rulers and the presence of many ill-natured and immoral individuals among 'high society' doubtless reinforced this view. What was left of its content, however, lacked the qualities of a systematic critique of social conditions. Wealth might be

seen as overdeterminant, but this was in turn viewed as an 'innate', 'natural' phenomenon. When there were few to link this substantively to the 'ideology' of the varnaśrāmadharma ideal, and the true history of the mechanism of social control was lost in myth, empirical recognition of economic importance failed to produce a correspondent normative set of counter proposals, hence the philosophical fate of this, the most widespread effect of the materialist thought, was stationary inertia in the positivism of resignation. Protest henceforth more often took the form of appeals to gods and goddesses than to the rational critique of human society.

FOOTNOTESINTRODUCTION

- 1) See the discussion of N.P. Anikeev, "Modern Ideological Struggle for the Ancient Philosophical Heritage of India", Soviet Indology Series, No. 1, Indian Studies: Past and Present (Calcutta: R.D. Press, 1969), pp.2-13.
- 2) See the texts edited by P.J. Marshall under the title The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century, (Cambridge: University Press, 1970).
- 3) Romila Thapar, "Interpretations of Ancient India History", History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1968), pp. 325-30.
- 4) Cf. F.A. Lange, History of Materialism, Vol.I (London: Trübner and Co., 1877), pp. 6-7.

PART ONE: THE NATURALIST HERITAGE AND ITS EVOLUTIONI. Vedic and Tantric Origins

- 1) D.D. Kosambi, Culture and Civilisation, op. cit., p. 78.
- 2) A.C. Das, RgVedic Culture, (Calcutta: R. Cambray and Co., 1925), p. 451.
- 3) Tara Chand, op. cit., p. 19.
- 4) Lokāyata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism, (Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1959), pp. 534-37. K. Damodaran disagrees with Chattopadhyaya on his interpretation of the Vedas; finding them to be rather more religious and spiritualistic. In addition he classifies the Vedic gods into three main types: the celestial, the atmospheric, and the terrestrial. See his comments in Indian Thought: A Critical Survey, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1967), pp. 33, 77.

C.K. Raja writes that "Brihaspati is essentially a man who was deified on account of his superior talents and achievements." See his Poet-Philosophers of the RgVeda (Madras: Ganesh and Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1963) p. 51.

- 5) R.C. Majumdar, ed. The Vedic Age (London: Geo. Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1952), p.227.
- 6) A.A. MacDonnell, Hymns From the RigVeda (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), pp. 77, 90. (Rig Veda I.92; IV.50).
The second set of verses clearly indicates an advanced division of labour, and is therefore likely an interpolation from the sedentary period at the end of the Vedic age. Its relative lack of antiquity, however, would seem to indicate a consistency of expression in this regard.
- 7) See F. Max Müller, Origin and Growth of Religion (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1878), p. 239.
- 8) Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p. 628.
- 9) See Max Müller, op. cit., p. 240; also Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p. 608.
- 10) See the discussion on this point by C. Chakravarti, in Tantras: Studies on their Religion and Literature (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1963), pp. 4-12.
- 11) Chattopadhyaya, op. cit.
- 12) R.C. Majumdar, ed., op. cit., p. 233. This description is somewhat of a tautology, however, since the varna ideal had not evolved beyond the most rudimentary classification when the Vedas were first composed. The point still remains valid, however.
- 13) Louis Renou urges caution in the establishment of this connection. See his The Destiny of the Veda in India (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965), p. 6.

- 14) Chakravarti, op. cit., p. 29.
- 15) op. cit., p. 45; also see Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p. 330.
- 16) Agehananda Bharati, The Tantric Tradition (London: Rider and Co., 1965), p. 281.

II. Science and the Emergence of Systematic Naturalism

- 1) Paul Deussen was among the first to hold to this interpretation, in his Philosophy of the Upanisads (New York: Dover Books, 1966). Radhakrishnan also tends in this direction in his many works. Even the Concise History of Science in India (p. 22) assumes this uniformity: D. Bose, S. Sen, and B. Subbarayappa, eds., (New Delhi: Indian National Science Academy, 1971).
- 2) I am here following the discussion of B. Subbarayappa, in the Concise History, op. cit., pp. 450-57.
- 3) Taittiriya Up. II.2.1; in S. Radhakrishnan, ed. The Principal Upanisads (London: Geo., Allen and Uwin, 1969), p. 543.
- 4) Subbarayappa, op. cit., p. 456.
- 5) See Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., pp. 375-415.
- 6) Cf. George Sarton, Introduction to the History of Science, Vol. I: Homer to Omar Khayam (London: Williams and Williams, 1953), p. 351.
- 7) Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p. 410.
- 8) Subbarayappa, op. cit., p. 459. Needham discusses this process in many sections of his Science and Civilisation in China (Cambridge: University Press, 1968).

- 9) See Stephen Mason, A History of the Sciences (New York: Collier Books, 1967), p. 93.
- 10) Needham, op. cit., Vol. 5, Part, 2, p. 117.
- 11) Katha Up. II.1.10 (Op. cit., p. 634). Elsewhere it has been said that "Particular consciousness is due to association with elements." (Radhakrishnan's interpretation of Brhadāranyaka Up. IV.5.13, op. cit., p. 285.) The Buddhist Mahasudassana-Sutta notes that "By suppressing reflection and investigation he (the Buddha) entered into... a state of joy and ease." T. Rhys Davids, transl. Buddhist Suttas (Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XI) (New York: Dover Books, 1969), p. 272
- 12) Brhadāranyaka Up. I.3.26 (op. cit., p. 162). See also Needham, op. cit., Vol. 5, Part. 2 p. 118.
- 13) Brhadāranyaka Up. II.4.2. (op. cit., p. 195).
- 14) Taittirīya Up. I.4.2, cited in the commentary by Sankara; op. cit., p. 531.
- 15) See Needham, op. cit., Vol. 5, Part 2, p. 119.
- 16) A.L. Basham, The Wonder That Was India (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 498.
- 17) George Sarton, op. cit., p. 66
- 18) See B.M. Chintamani, B. Subbarayappa, "History of Science in India: Pali Sources", Indian Journal of the History of Science, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1971), p. 103, for the opinion on the influence of Buddhism on the practice of medicine.
- 19) Sarton, op. cit., p. 409.
- 20) Basham, op. cit., p. 491.

- 21) Sarton, op. cit., p. 428.

III. The Formation of the Epistemological Shift in the Buddhist Period

- 1) Engels writes that in the future there will be a "revival in a higher form, of the liberty, equality, and fraternity of the ancient gentes." The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, op. cit., p. 237. While this comment remains somewhat obscure, its intention is clearly to draw the connection between the study of behavior in preclass society, much of which is done by anthropologists, and the formation of an ideology which will attempt to encourage such intimacy and humanity in the future. One of the most important aspects of the study of ancient history is also indicated here. Nonetheless, this issue is exceedingly complex and remains virtually untouched by Marxists.

- 2) To romanticise the past is one of the major aspects of nostalgia. In India, as in the myth of the garden of Eden in Christianity, this tendency was incorporated into social and political theory through the theory of the yugas (epochs of the cyclical movement of time. Each of the four major ages involves different duties for the castes, thus giving a relative elasticity to the Brahmanical codes of conduct. The four ages, in the supposed temporal order in which they descend from prehistory, are (1) the Kritayuga, in which dharma was full and only the Brahmins practised austerities; (2) the Tretāyuga, when there is three-fourths dharma, one fourth adharma (unrighteousness), because the Kshatriyas also undertake austerities, and the distinction between castes becomes a legal one; (3) the Dvāparayuga, when Vaiśyas also begin to practise austerities. The fourth age (Kaliyuga) is sometimes supposed to be in the present, at other times in the future. This is when the Sudras also undertake austerities, and the greatest amount of unrighteousness is therefore present. The names of the yugas apparently originate in the names of the sides of the die used in popular dice games from the Vedic period on. (Sūtrakritāṅga I.2.23, in Hermann Jacobi, transl., The Jaina Sūtras (Sacred Books of the East Vol. XLV) (New York: Dover Books, 1968), p. 256. Damodaran quotes a passage from the Śāntiparva to the effect that "At that time, i.e. in the kritayuga, there was no

state, no king, no punishment, no punisher. All men used to protect each other by dharma." (op. cit., p. 57). That even the Brahmins found that it was class society which altered the earlier relations is indicated in the following passage from the ViṣṇuPurāṇa: "...the man who owns most property and lavishly distributes it will gain dominion over others; noble rank will give no claim to lordship; self-willed women will seek their pleasure, and ambitious men fix all their hopes on riches gained by fraud. The women will be fickle and desert their beggared husbands, loving them alone who give them money. Kings instead of guarding will rob their subjects, and abstract the wealth of merchants under plea of raising taxes. Then in the world's last age the rights of men will be confused, no property be safe, no joy and prosperity be lasting." (quoted in H.H. Gowen, A History of Indian Literature; New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1931, p. 454). The tension between the earlier consanguinary relations and the new loyalties demanded by class and state is most clearly manifested in the evolution of the kshatradharma, the duties of the warrior in the protection of the social order. Here the introduction of the transmigrating soul probably played a central part. The Sūtrakṛitāṅga (I.3.3), for instance, emphasises that "Famous warriors, leaders of heroes at the time of battle, do not look behind them thinking, what if all end with death?" (Jaina Sutras, Vol. II, op. cit., p. 266). See also the comments of K. Damodaran, op. cit., p. 186.

- 3) Jacobi, op. cit., pp. 322, 301 (I.13.16; I.9.3)
- 4) The two extremes and the middle way are given in the Dhammakakkapavattanasutta I.2, in Rhys Davids, op. cit., p. 146.
- 5) See the Concise History of Science in India, op. cit. pp. 28-9, and the comments of M.N. Roy in his Materialism: An Outline of the History of Scientific Thought (Calcutta; Renaissance Publishers, 1940), p. 97.
- 6) M.N. Roy comments that "Nirvana contradicted the entire system of Buddhist philosophy." (op. cit., p. 98). Since only the sanskaras (activities, impressions) are held to have any degree of reality in early Buddhism, logically their annihilation would leave nothing in its place. The doctrine of the Bodhisattva (who returns to the world in order to help others rather

than leaving the cycle of births and deaths) helped to partially fill this vacuum in the later Mahayana schools. See also the discussion of Damodaran, op. cit., pp. 110-13.

- 7) See Damodaran, op. cit., pp. 50-51..
- 8) See Paul Deussen, op. cit., pp. 17-18, 61-64.

IV. Cārvāka/Lokāyata: 'Common Sense' as Empiricism

- 1) Cf. Dakshinaranjan Shastri, A Short History of Indian Materialism, Sensationalism and Hedonism (Calcutta: The Book Company, 1925), pp. 34-35. A slightly edited reprint of this work is available in the Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Volume entitled The Cultural Heritage Of India, Vol. I, pp. 473-89 (Calcutta: Modern ART Press, 1938).
- 2) Mahābhārata, Śāntiparva XII.1.414; quoted in J. Muir, "On Indian Materialists", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. 19 (1862), pp. 309-09.
- 3) Both comments are from Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles Moore, editors of A sourcebook in Indian Philosophy (Princeton: University Press, 1973), p. xxiii. Neither is it necessary to go to the other extreme (although in defense of spiritualism nonetheless), as Nivedita and Coomaraswamy have done: "The Aryan mind is essentially an organising mind, always increasingly scientific, increasingly rational in its outlook on things." It is unclear by what means such a conclusion could be reached. See the Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists (New York: Dover Books, 1967). p. 16.
- 4) Shastri, op. cit.
- 5) RigVeda VIII.89.3 and I.164.4.17.18. Quoted in Radhakrishnan and Moore, op. cit., pp. 34-35.
- 6) Chāndogya Up. VIII.8.9; op. cit., p. 504.
- 7) Mundakya Up. I.2.3; op. cit., p. 675.

- 8) Katha Up. II.2.4-5; op. cit., pp. 637-38.
- 9) Maitri Up. VII.9; op. cit., p. 856.
- 10) H.P. Shastri held that there were three possible Brihaspatīs, one a philosopher, another an economist, a third a 'law-giver'. See his Lokāyata (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, Dacca University Bulletins, No. 1, 1925), p. 4. See also Max Müller, op. cit., p. 123. C.K. Raja, however, holds that "We do not know of another Brihaspati in the Indian tradition, and the one Brihaspati whom we know in later times has become the teacher of the gods, and it is the same Brihaspati who is the originator of the Cārvāka system". (op. cit., p. 79).
- 11) R.A. Schermerhorn, "When Did Indian Materialism Get Its Distinctive Titles?", Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 50 (1930), p. 137.
- 12) Śāntiparva XII.19.23; quoted in loc. cit., p. 134.
- 13) loc. cit., p. 133.
- 14) D. Shastri, op. cit., p. 6; S.N. Dasgupta, History of Indian Philosophy (Abridged Edition (Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1969), p. 144; S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. I (London: Geo. Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1929), p. 283.
- 15) S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, op. cit., p. 283.
- 16) op. cit., pp. 277-78, where the author maintains that materialism arises prior to Buddhism.
- 17) Giuseppe Tucci, "A Sketch of Indian Materialism", Proceedings of the Indian Philosophical Congress, 1925, p. 40.
- 18) Brihaspati is quoted in Erich Frauwallner's History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. 2 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), p. 225. The quoted opinion is of the same author, at op. cit., p. 215.

- 19) M.N. Roy, op. cit., p. 79.
- 20) F. Max Müller, The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899), p. 130.
- 21) Chattopadhyaya (op. cit., pp. 1-3) also presents arguments for the meaning of 'those who clear the fields for agriculture.'
- 22) K.K. Mittal furnishes these additional possibilities in his Materialism in Indian Philosophy (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1974), pp. 33-34.
- 23) Cf. Tucci, op. cit., p. 41.
- 24) Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p. 1.
- 25) Cf. Mittal, op. cit.; pp. 40-41.
- 26) M. Hiriyanna, Outlines of Indian Philosophy (Bombay: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1973), p. 187.
- 27) Tucci, op. cit., p. 41.
- 28) The date is given on p. ix of Jacobi, op. cit., Vol. 1.
- 29) Sūtrakritāṅga II.1.19, in op. cit., Vol 2, p. 342 (cf. note 1).
- 30) Cf. op. cit., Vol. k, p. xxiv, plus Sūtrakritāṅga II.1.22 (op. cit., p. 343).
- 31) See Sūtrakritāṅga I.12.4 and II.1.17, op. cit., pp. 316, 341,
- 32) Ākāraṅgasūtra III.2.3; op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 19.
- 33) Cf. Uttarādhyaṇa III.19 (op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 17). for the 'four causes of pleasure'. The quotes are from the Sūtrakritāṅga I.3.4 (Vol. 2, p. 270), and the

Ākāraṅgasūtra I.5.4 (Vol. 1, p. 48).

- 34) Dhammakakkapavattanasutta II.6; cf. note 4, op. cit., pp. 148-49.
- 35) Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p. 35.
- 36) Mittal, op. cit., p. 30.
- 37) D. Shastri holds that the term 'Cārvāka' was not used until after the Buddhist period. (op. cit., p. 29). For a discussion of the definition, see Mittal, op. cit., p. 31, and Damondaran, op. cit., p. 96, as well as Paul Masson-Oursel, Helena de Willman-Grabowska, Philippe Stern, Ancient India and Indian Civilisation (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1934), p. 143.
- 38) See the descriptions provided by Buddha Prakash, in "Materialist Philosophy and Social Revolt in India in the Sixth Century BC", Kurukshetra University Reserve Journal, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1968), pp. 5-9.
- 39) Mitta, op. cit., p. 39.
- 40) See D. Shastri, op. cit., pp. 12-21, and Dale Riepe, op. cit., p. 6.
- 41) See Mittal, op. cit., p. 47.
- 42) Swami Prajñanananda, Schools of Indian Philosophical Thought (Calcutta: Firma Mukhtopadhyay, 1973), p. 61.
- 43) P.R. Raju, The Philosophical Traditions of India (London: Geo. Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 92.
- 44) One example of the orthodox attitude states that the man should first buy the woman presents, and "If she still does not grant him his desire he should beat her with a stick or his hand and overcome her saying with manly power and glory, 'I take away your glory'. Thus she becomes devoid of glory." (Bṛihadāraṇyaka Up. VI.4.7, in op. cit., p. 323. The Lokāyata attitude is to be found in D. Shastri, op. cit., p. 28.

- 45) See Jacobi, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. xxxvii.
- 46) Quoted in J. Muir, loc. cit., p. 313.
- 47) Even those who concentrate upon the exegesis of materialist philosophy tend towards this view. See, for example, D. Shastri, op. cit.
- 48) J. Muir, loc. cit., p. 313.
- 49) H.P. Shastri, op. cit., p. 3.
- 50) B.A. Saletore, "Historical Notices of the Lokāyata", Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Baroda, Vol. 23 (1942), pp. 389-92.
- 51) Cf. M. Rāṅgacārya, ed., The Sarvasiddhāntasamgraha of Sankarachārya (Madras: Government Press, 1909), Chapter 2, pp. 5-6.
- 52) E.B. Cowell and A.E. Gough, translators, The Sarvadarśanasamgraha (London: Kegan Paul, Trech, Trubner, and Co., n.d.), p. 2.
- 53) op. cit. pp. 10-11.
- 54) This view is admittedly contrary to much accepted opinion. Ninian Smart, for example, writes that "By the middle ages materialism virtually disappeared from the Indian scene." See his Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), p. 70.
- 55) Cowell and Gough, op. cit., p. 3.
- 56) Cf. Saletore, loc. cit., p. 386.
- 57) Damodaran comments on this at op. cit., p. 90.
- 58) P. Lal, ed. Great Sanskrit Plays (New York: New Directions Books, 1964), p. 82.

59) op. cit., p. 224.

60) Arthur Ryder, transl., The Pañchatantra (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1972), pp. 65, 254, 263, 434-35, 460, 467.

PART TWO: ARTHAŚĀSTRA AND THE ORTHODOX COOPTATION

I. Materialism in Political Philosophy

- 1) In the western world this term apparently is first used in 1589, in order to describe the violation of common law for the end of 'public utility'. As a mode of argument for policy it originates much earlier, however. See Samuel Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). p. 102.
- 2) Pandurang Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, Six Volumes (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968), Vol. 3, p. 10.
- 3) op. cit., Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 152.
- 4) op. cit., p. 158.
- 5) op. cit., p. 149.
- 6) M. Winternitz, "Kautilya Arthaśāstra", Calcutta Review, Vol. 11, No. 1 (April 1924), p. 1.
- 7) See the discussion of B.K. Sarkar in "Hindu Politics in Italian", Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. 2 (1926), pp. 152-56.
See also S.C. Banerji, Dharmasūtras: A Study in Their Origin and Development (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1962), pp. 7-13; also F.D.M. Derrett, Religion, Law and the State in India (New York: Free Press, 1963) pp. 75-97.

- 8) Aitreya Brahmana 40.2; quoted in Kane, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 117. See also Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 249, where the purohita is described as "half the self of the Kshatriya."
- 9) Tucci, op. cit., p. 40.
- 10) Arthaśāstra I.7; R. Shamaśāstry, transl. Kautilya's Arthaśāstra (Mysore: Printing and Publishing House, 1967), p. 5, for example.
- 11) Quoted in Kane, op. cit., Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 288.
- 12) Arthaśāstra I.7, op. cit., p. 5.
- 13) Quoted in Kane, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 48.
- 14) F.W. Thomas, transl Brihaspati Sūtra, Le Museon: Revue D'Etudes Orientales, Paris, 1916, pp. 149, 154.
- 15) Ruben states directly that "this materialism of Brihaspati represents natural science." See his Studies in Ancient Indian Thought, op. cit., p. 27n5.
- 16) Kane, op. cit., Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 246.
- 17) Arthaśāstra IV. 210, op. cit., p. 239.
- 18) Eg. Thomas Trautmann, Kautilya and the Arthaśāstra: A Statistical Investigation of the Authorship and Evolution of the Text (Leiden: E.E. Brill, 1971), pp. 21, 32, 68. Also see Joseph Needham, op. cit., Vol. 5, Part 3, p. 164.
- 19) Cf Ludwig Sternbach, Cānakya-Rāja-Nīti (Madras: Vasanta Press, 1963), p. 4.
- 20) See K.V. Rangaswami Aiyangar, Indian Cameralism (Madras: Vesanta Press, 1949), p. 23. A verse in the Parasurāmapratāpa even recommends the use of alchemy to replenish the treasury. See Kane, op. cit., Vo. 3, p. 189.

- 21) Quoted in Kane, op. cit., Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 265.
- 22) op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 40.
- 23) See Walter Ruben, "Fighting Against Despots in Old Indian Literature," Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Baroda, Vo. 48-49 (1969). Ruben states here that it was often single Kshatriyas or Brahmins who fought despots. This does not necessarily mean that these individuals could not be termed 'demons' by their enemies, however.
- 24) Cultural Heritage of India, op. cit., p. 476.

II: The Arthasāstra of Kautilya

- 1) R. Choudhary, Kautilya's Political Ideas and Institutions Varanasi, Vidyavikas Press, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Vol LXXIII, 1971), p. 7.
- 2) Wittfogel, op. cit., eg. pp. 133, 144, etc.
- 3) Eg. Choudhary, op. cit., p. 45
- 4) See Trautmann, op. cit., p. 176.
- 5) Kane, op. cit., Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 200.
- 6) Trautmann, op. cit., pp. 174, 187.
- 7) Arthasāstra I. 1, in op. cit., p. 1
- 8) I.7; op. cit., p. 5.
- 9) Walter Ruben, "The Beginning of Epic Sāṃkhya", Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Baroda, Vo. 37 (1957), p. 182.

- 10) M.V. Krishna Rao, Studies in Kautilya (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1958), p. 45.
- 11) Shamaśastry, op. cit., p. 5.
- 12) I. 7; op. cit., p. 6.
- 13) Max Weber, The Religion of India, op. cit., p. 146.
- 14) R. Choudhary, op. cit., p. 49.
- 15) Angelo Maria Pizzagalli, Cārvāka, Nāstika e Lokāyatika: Contributo alla storia del materialismo nell'India antica (Pisa), p. 65, quoted in B.K. Sarkar, "Hindu Politics in Italian", loc. cit., Vol. 1, p. 550.
- 16) V.P. Varma, Studies in Hindu Political Thought and Its Metaphysical Foundations (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), p. 65.
- 17) E.H. Johnson, "Two Studies in the Arthaśāstra of Kautilya", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, (1929), p. 79.
- 18) V.P. Varma, "Theology and Ethics in Kautilyan Political Thought", Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Vol. 41, (1955), p. 579.
- 19) See the discussion of R. Choudhary, op. cit., pp. 259-60.
- 20) Charles Drekmeier, Kingship and Community in Early India (Stanford: University Press, 1962), p. 190.
- 21) K.V. Rangaswami Aiyangar, op. cit., p. 45.
- 22) See R. Basak, Some Aspects of Kautilya's Political Thinking (Burdwan: University Press, 1967), p. 47.
- 23) See Choudhary, op. cit., p. 259.

- 24) Whether the materialist social critics ever formulated an alternative form of political economy or not is a moot point. We do know, however, that such criticisms were present. A valuable example is in the Srimadbhāgavata VII. 14.5, where Narāda (who if he is the same individual was strongly influenced by arthasāstra but remains orthodox in the Narādadharmasāstra which we possess) says to Yudhisthira: "men have a right to ownership of only as much as is enough to fill their bellies, and whoever aspires for more than that is a thief deserving of punishment." See R. Shamaśastri, "Economical Philosophy of the Ancient Indians", Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Baroda, Vol. 12 (1930), pp. 27-28.

III. Empiricist Materialism and the Origins of State and Classes

- 1) Thomas Trautman, op. cit., p. 54n3.
- 2) P. Lal, op. cit., pp. 235-36.
- 3) Sternbach, op. cit., p. 6.
- 4) Richard Sennett, The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 34.
- 5) Quoted in Kane, op. cit., Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 159
- 6) See Sennet, op. cit., p. 3.

IV. Hedonism, later Tantra, and the Fate of Arthasastra

- 1) D. Shastri, The Cultural Heritage of India, op. cit., p. 485.
- 2) See Kane, op. cit., Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 182.
- 3) Sir Richard Burton; Transl. The Kāmasūtra of Vātsyāyana (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1964), p. 65.

- 4) Quoted in H.B. Gowen, A History of Indian Literature (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1931), p. 191.
- 5) M. Krishnamachariar, History of Classical Sanskrit Literature (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), p. 889.
- 6) Kamasutra, op. cit., pp. 69-72.
- 7) Gowen, op. cit., p. 151.
- 8) See J. Gonda, Visnuism and Śivaism: A Comparison (London: Athlone Press, 1970), p. 93.
- 9) N.N. Bhattacharya, Ancient Indian Rituals and Their Social Contents (London: Curzon Press, 1975), p. 134.
- 10) J.N. Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967), p. 200.
- 11) M. Krishnamachariar, op. cit., p. 78.
- 12) Lokāyata, op. cit., pp. 270-300
- 13) Gowen, op. cit., p. 462.
- 14) op. cit., p. 460.
- 15) Farquhar, op. cit., p. 143.
- 16) W.D.O'Flaherty, Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva (Oxford: University Press, 1973), p. 317.
- 17) Georg Böhler, transl. The Laws of Manu (New York: Dover Books, 1969), p. cxiv.
- 18) II. 6.11; op. cit., pp 30-31

- 19) Eg. Yajñavalkya II.21, Narāda I.29; see Kane, op. cit., Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 152, and Vol. 3, pp. 868-71.
- 20) op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 240.
- 21) See, for instance, U.N. Ghoshal, "The Relation of the Dharma Concept to the Social and Political Order in Brahmanical Canonical Thought", Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Vol. 38 (1952), p. 201. Also see Charles Drekmeier, op. cit., p. 222.
- 22) R.K. Gupta, Political Thought in the Smriti Literature (Allahabad: Leader Press, 1952), p. 61.
- 23) Quoted in K.V. Rangaswami Aiyangar, op. cit., p. 36.
- 24) op. cit., p. 30.
- 25) See R.K. Gupta, op. cit., p. 65.
- 26) See, for example, Coomaraswamy and Nivedita, op. cit., p. 217.
- 27) Thus Śiva advises that no Brahmin is required at his sacrifices. op. cit., p. 289.
- 28) Needham, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 405,
- 29) See the comments of M.N. Roy in this regard, at op. cit., p. 111.
- 30) See Damodaran, op. cit., p. 183.
- 31) Coomaraswamy and Nivedita, op. cit., p. 240.

CONCLUSION

I. The 'Asiatic Mode of Production'

Our intention in this thesis has been the dissection and representation of both the form and content (theory and historical basis) of Marx's concept of the 'Asiatic Mode of Production'. In so doing we have sought to assess the validity of this model in terms of modern knowledge of the evolution of Indian history, within the framework of analysis first suggested by Marx and termed by him the 'materialist conception of history'. In utilising this method we have also tried to determine several aspects of the effects of social history upon the development and presentation of philosophical reflections.

Marx's analytical method provides, mutatis mutandis, for a more comprehensive and humane rendering of history, in particular because its use makes possible avoidance of the distortive partiality of analyses which either ignore or are supportive of the general continuation of exploitation. In this sense of science Marx's analytic method can be indubitably superior to the vast majority of analytic paradigms offered in the contemporary world. It becomes 'mythological' only when this is drastically misunderstood, but nonetheless this error in comprehension forms in many ways the dividing line between what is useful in Marx's work, and what mainly constitutes excess historical baggage, to be jettisoned as a waste of available fuel.

Because a means of analysis can claim greater object-

ivity through an enhanced freedom from the bias of class does not mean that it should implicitly share as strongly the ideological advantages of the falsification procedure in natural experimentation. This is the point of departure of the social from the natural sciences, and hence the beginning of the domain of fictitious truth-claims within the Marxist tradition. Because of the political authority of Marxism in the modern world, there is as grave, if not a worse, danger in this tendency of omniscience as in its manifestation in the modern variant of behavioralism to which Marxism often finds itself in opposition.

For this reason we have deemphasised any rigid causal conclusions in this work, preferring the sequential treatment of materials in the historical assessment which has been presented here. But disavowal of an exclusive agency of origination reinforced by 'conclusive' logic should not be interpreted here as a rejection of either a primordial or a strongly derivative influence of economy upon both the structure and process of social life. One does not generally accept a methodology without being persuaded of its fundamental veracity, although corroboration is at issue in the examination of every empirical case. While we have been critical here of both Marx and Engels and many of their subsequent adherents, this still remains within the understanding that Marx provides the most incisive basis of explanation of those aspects of social life that we have examined here.

In what sense, then, does the materialist method demonstrate an explanatory capacity here? It is difficult to resist finding at least a partial conspiracy among the Brahmins, as a caste and class, in their actions in maintaining their own privileges at the expense of the majority. This is at best a simplistic hypothesis, however. In its worst sense it obscures the very basic fact that men and women very frequently act in ways, and for reasons, completely unknown to them.

No matter how deep and naked the suffering inflicted, the exploiter is never directly at fault unless an alternative is made consciously possible and then offered as such. This is why Marx never confused (and therefore mistreated) individual members of the bourgeois owners of the means of production, with their activities as actors on behalf of that class.¹ Much caution is necessary that an overzealous displacement of categories not be extended to the creation of individual hatreds so deep that they can only impede, rather than facilitate, the process of human liberation.

In terms of the category under discussion, we noted in the first chapter the existence of several major problems common to many Marxists who have considered the 'AMP'. The most profound of these is the attempt to innovate theoretically at the direct expense of historical investigation. The root of this problem, we believe, lies in the tendency to treat the writings of Marx, Engels, and a number of their successors, as received doctrines.

ready for instantaneous application. This is clearly in complete contradiction to the historical relativism used with devastating clarity in Marx's own analyses.

In the second chapter here we thus tried to indicate the basis for a chronology of the evolution of the history underlying the 'AMP', since it quickly became clear that the entirety of Indian history prior to the British could not be included within its parameters. Concurrently we examined some of the accepted aspects of the theory of the 'AMP' in order to assess the degree of their coincidence with the results of modern research. We found a number of inaccurate and hence thoroughly misleading characteristics in the theory. The chronology of the development of the village community has been frequently misunderstood, and still requires much further examination. The relation of caste to class is nowhere as simple as is often supposed, and we have only been able to touch upon some of the many complex issues raised by this question. Among these, the evolution of property relations and the categorisation of the origins and extent of private property in relation to communal, family, and state property control and ownership, constitutes the central problematic.

How do these considerations affect the general category of the 'AMP'? The full validity of the concept has not been of distinctive significance to our researches here, yet it is true that India formed the ground for Marx's generic conception of Asian societies, and it is

thus possible to offer some comments in this regard.

We have noted that Marx may have contemplated the replacement of the 'AMP' by the more historical 'archaic mode'. Possibly this was an attempt to distinguish between 'primitive communism' and the 'AMP', the lack of specificity between which we have seen to be the most underdeveloped aspect of Marx's analysis. Certainly, as V.G. Kiernan points out, Marx tends to use 'Asiatic' or 'oriental' as a synonym for 'primitive' generally.² Only long-term comparative researches, however, will elaborate the discrete and the similar elements in the societies described in these terms. To what extent has our exposition of the history behind the 'AMP' concept indicated some of the problems of this typology?

The role of the state remains obscure, and constitutes probably the single weakest area in Marxist analyses generally. Despite the more complex theories offered by Morgan and others in Marx's lifetime, and since surpassed by many modern anthropologists and others, reductionism remains frequent. In particular the relation of state power to localised political authority and of both to agencies of social control has been grossly oversimplified and therefore greatly misunderstood.

Two stereotypes - the 'despotic and omnipotent state' and the 'state as military camp' were examined. Both tend to underestimate the legitimated role of political institutions, with a corresponding misplacement of, and overemphasis upon, the nature of the repressive

functions. In particular, the position of the state as an agent of class alliance and manipulation has been fairly consistently ignored, largely because of its extreme reification in the liberal theory of 'pluralist politics'. What an analysis must provide here is the ability to distinguish between periods of relative homogeneity within the ruling class, and conjunctures in which contradictions exist either between various fractions internal to this class, or between several classes or portions thereof seeking the ruling position in a given society. In the Indian case the 'despotism' of the political form was balanced by tribal custom, caste regulations, śrenidharma (corporative law), and past dharma-sāstra usage. The strength specific to the centralised forces, however, varies (as we have seen) from one period to the next. In the general sense of a capacity and demonstrated willingness to kill large populations rather than exacting tribute, however, the modern state is infinitely more 'despotic' than anything to be encountered in ancient Indian history.

In all of this, perhaps the greatest single weakness in Marxist studies of India and similar societies is the lack of a solid relationship between native historians and European and north American methodologists. (The reverse is true to a lesser extent since we are speaking of the history of the Third World and not of Europe). Each group has an enormous amount about which to inform the other, yet the linkages are tenuous and often seem-

ingly not expressed in theoretical developments. Overall, however, it seems that Indian historians are more familiar with the materialist method than European theorists of the 'AMP' are conversant in Indian (or any other Asian) history. In this sense a great deal of credit is due to modern Indian historians who accompany their historical investigations with self-conscious methodological reflections.

The question of the relation of agricultural production and commodity exchange to the rise and decline of commerce and trade is perhaps the most difficult problem considered here. In this matter there are very few conclusions, only indications of appropriate models of analysis and directions for historical examination. Exchange does in some periods appear to have altered the productive structure of the villages (cf. infra, pp. 33-34, 55). In addition, the general stagnation of Indian life after c. 500 AD (one of the defining characteristics of the original 'AMP') would appear to be less a function of the dominant mode of production (relatively self-sufficient agriculture) than to the inability of a centralised state to maintain and extend its power at the expense of that of other social forces. Why this did not occur is a complex question beyond our purposes here. In the predominance of the relations of production over the specific form of production, however, the decline of external trade is crucial, since this reduces the status of the urban centres to one of greater dependency, and

circumvents the further possible use of mercantile capital in urban industry. Hence in this case the mode of production allowed sufficient latitude for several forms of relations of production, which we attempted to schematise in Figure Two (*infra*, pp. 59-60). In the most direct sense, it can be argued, it is the predominance of caste relations of production which virtually guarantees the relative stagnation of Indian life, through the mutual exclusivity of its hierarchy. This is based, however, on the failure of other forms of the division of labour to become predominant in this context, such that the combination of industrial enterprises and the continuation of both state and social support for increased economic activity might have taken place.

Hence political conditions and the determination of production 'in the last instance' must be more carefully examined in terms of their mutual influences. Where the forces of production are not owned, but are subject to disposal through political control, this question is less clear. Here the relation of the political form to the maintenance of the social order is of especial importance, since it is precisely the social forces which undermined the interventionary aspects introduced in the early Mauryan state, that led to what was earlier referred to as the potential 'predominance of tradition' in early India (*infra*, p. 58).

What, then, is the relationship of the specificity of early Indian social formations to Marx's method³ as

a whole? Is it true that "Marx belittled the primary character of exchange in human society" in inferring the transferral of the overdetermination by production in capitalism to the prehistory of the industrial revolution?⁴ Is the concept of a 'Mode of Production' in the larger sense hence an 'ethnological reduction' in this case, such that

"capitalist society does not illuminate primitive societies . . . starting with the economic and production as the determinate instance, other types of organisation are only illuminated in terms of this model and not in terms of their specificity or even, as we have seen in the case of primitive societies, in their irreducibility to production." (5)

In treating of this argument we should first emphasise again that Marx's concern with precapitalist societies was predominantly an attempt to demonstrate the historicity of capitalism. The inner logic and empirical growth of such formations occupied only a very narrow range of his concentration. This admission in itself indicates that Marx could not possibly have explored the implications of the application of his own method to societies much earlier than his own. Thus this procedure begins in an atmosphere of very considerable doubt.

Our concern, however, is not abstractly with 'primitive societies' in general but with early India in particular. Was it a 'primitive society'? The period of our discussion is largely one in which the extension of class society (introduced in post-Harappan India by the Aryan conquest and its enslavement of the native population) to the majority of social groups occurs. Caste as an

institution stands midway between tribe and class, and is the mode of assimilation of the former to the latter. After the decline of its slave basis caste becomes a system of considerable complexity. Both the state structure and the market system of economic interchange also achieve periods of peak influence and strength. But the majority of the populace throughout this period were engaged in self-sufficient agriculture, itself rather an advanced form of human society, subject to a tributary relationship to regional overlords.

In terms of agricultural production we may distinguish five periods:

- (1) the nomadic 'hunting and gathering' stage, in which settlements by the Aryans and the conquered peoples were rare, and consistent cultivation both haphazard and abnormal;
- (2) the period of the rise of sedentary farming within small communities still generally constituted on a tribal basis;
- (3) the Mauryan era, when state development of production reached its greatest extent, both through the dispersion of new techniques (eg. the iron plough) and through the deliberate organisation of the relations of production, especially on state lands and in new settlements;
- (4) the 'exchange' period, where national and international commerce develop their strongest connections with rural commodity (and indirectly agricultural) production, with a corresponding decline in state intervention;
- (5) the stage of the predominance of the village-system proper, when trade (now mainly regional) had little impact upon the social and productive system. Here tributary obligations are divided between the political forces above, and the mutual demands of a reciprocal but hierarchical division of labour within the caste system of the villages.

In this last stage, in particular, the means of social

control in both political and social forms do not rest especially on the control over the land, the most fundamental element of the natural side of the productive process. Land revenue was not ground rent, but a tax upon the crops produced, in other words upon the use-values of the land. Hence control over people (who are also means and forces of production in their economic roles) was the decisive question, which is why the most frequent form of revolt was the simple abandonment of a given region, since land was plentiful enough to permit such migration. Hence the pressures of population growth are central to the transmutation of a political into an economic relation. Unlike modern capitalist production, here we have demonstrated what Meillassoux terms a priority of relations between people over relations to things.⁶ Control over land was in other words less important than the right to extract a proportion of the produce of the population.

Hence, whereas in the modern era demographic imperatives suffice to translate economic ownership into political power fairly easily, this was not the case in early India, nor probably in many similar precapitalist societies. Within the village economies market exchange (aside from the surrender of surplus to the local political authority) was comparatively rare. A hierarchical reciprocity rooted in the dharmaśāstras was the standard mode of economic interchange. Jakubowski writes of this admixture of roles that

"Class relationships, too, first appear in a clear form in this capitalist context, whereas previously they had been concealed as estates, castes, and other social groupings which grew and consolidated as a result of legal and state privileges. Since basic, verifiable economic states of fact still do not exist in clear form in these earlier forms of production, they cannot always be exactly 'expressed' in legal or religious categories; rather, the latter are intertwined with them." (7)

Here without a doubt, the relations of production substantially inhibited the growth of the forces of production, technique most especially.⁸ The relations of production - here caste and political dependency - play an overdeterminant role upon all other aspects of social and economic life, including the principal mode of production, subsistence agriculture, once other prevailing forces have exhausted themselves or been deliberately curtailed in the struggle of the various contending classes and portions thereof.

Is there any 'last instance' in this case? In the common Marxist lexicon the term 'mode of production' includes both forces and relations of production, and it would be possible to ascribe predominance to the caste system of productive regulation, and hence transfer this to the larger 'mode of production', and thus claim some form of 'ultimate economic determinism'. This would be an apologetic exercise in spurious logic, however. But it is precisely this problem in relation to primitive societies that leads many modern Marxist theorists to emphasise that the concept of a mode of production in its empirical application is "structured by the dominance of the relations of production"⁹, which means that no

mode of production would retain its character without its specific 'structuring' system of class relations: the hierarchy of domination.

It is clear that we are not dealing with a predominantly tribal society where kinship forms the basis of economic relations. While caste as we know it now is largely a medieval phenomenon rooted in the evolution of the village system itself, its bases lay in the earlier elaboration of a society more directly confronted by class and economic determination, in the towns and cities of the Mauryan empire, and in the Brahmanical successes thereafter.

If, as we believe is the case, the evolution of caste is grounded principally in the social power of the Brahmins and their class allies, then in what sense may this be described as an economic phenomenon? Certainly we know that the early eclipse of Brahmin power was principally economic: the widespread influence of the heterodox religions was contingent primarily upon the immense donations emanating from the merchant classes. But the Brahmins as well continued to receive financial support from the state and from other sectors of society. As a class their wealth in lands and commodities, when added to their virtual intellectual monopoly and their unmatched social prestige, constituted a viable basis for continued social power. When Puśyamitra seized the Mauryan throne he doubtless had these resources upon which to draw. The establishment of Brahmanical political power in various dynasties then

cemented the power of the social class and guaranteed the continuation of the system of varnaśrāmadharma.

An increase in the economic power of the merchant classes might have offset these political victories. The guilds, however, were unable to combine as political forces, and often in any case had Brahmin investors and high officials within their administrative hierarchies. The decline of trade led directly to the eclipse of Buddhism, and thereafter social customs became increasingly Brahmanical in character. In this way, the evolution of caste has a more directly economic basis - grounded in political successes which however almost never occur without a considerable economic backing - than merely its original establishment according to the simple classification of the later Vedic division of labour.

The Mauryan state, among all those in early India, was probably the most secular (Kautilya and the bureaucracy) and heterodox (Aśoka's Buddhism). Its class basis was however extremely narrow: the bureaucracy and army were cross-cut with considerable fissures of divided interest. The merchants were often hindered by the state and probably turned fairly readily to the patronage of Brahmin monarchs. The other religions either allied themselves with the cause of the merchants, resented the authoritarianism of the state, or, as in Aśoka's case, could not play a central political and military role in the support of even a very highly sympathetic state.

In the period prior to the fifth stage outlined above

the 'relation of people to things' was hence of cardinal importance. The success of the Brahmin ideology was contingent upon the resolution of various structural contradictions (the internal dialectic as well as an external impetus, foreign trade) in favour of the absolute predominance of the system of village agriculture. The basis of Brahmin control was then not merely the legal system but hereditary possession ad infinitum of local tributary obligations. Although caste is thus a form of transition between tribe and class, this mode of production is not 'transitional' except in the sense in which all such forms are ever-changing. Any resolution of the problem of the larger category of the 'AMP' will have to proceed from this consideration.

For our analysis of the relation of social change to economic power, then, it can be said that capitalism provides insights of tremendous importance. Through the examination of the rise of the modern world-system one can see that the interdependence of foreign and domestic trade, usury, political conquest, technological invention, and class consciousness created a particular system through various unique and timely combinations. Had some occurred earlier, later, or not at all, we might still be planting vegetables on the village common under the watchful eye of lord and cleric. Alternately, Asian, African, or Latin American multinationals might be 'developing' the primitive and 'innately retarded' regions of northern Europe and America. An enormous number of routes are possible in

social development, and it must be emphasised that the conditions of the present are of profound significance in comprehending the particular courses of specific regions.

There is yet another meaning of the 'AMP' in Marx's work, to which we have devoted little attention because it relates more closely to the underlying unity of ethics and method in Marx's system. India functions in many ways as the basis of Marx's historical anthropology. In its redaction of all prior renditions of history, the materialist conception presents several axiologies of progress in its theory of normative possibilities. Humankind for Marx can move from an animal-like (but 'vegetative') existence, largely determined by natural necessity, to a condition of freedom in historical (self-conscious) choice, upon the basis of the free time made available to all by technological achievements.

India meant one entire extreme for Marx: it was the original predominantly rural and naturally-determined society, and despite the 'satisfying, agreeable bonds' of its collective communality, its social relations stood in direct opposition to the form of interaction which Marx envisioned for the future, which might be termed 'communal individuality'. In this sense the differences between 'primitive communism' and 'communism', as Marx saw them, are even greater than their formal similarities. Hence India for Marx is not only the analytical opposite of the totalistic determination by the market of social

relations under capitalism. It is also in many senses the moral and philosophical antithesis of socialism in its predominant expression of rural superstition, degradation, and ignorance, in short, in its mere adumbration of human creative potential.

II. Philosophies and Modes of Production

In the third chapter we attempted to extend our examination of the modes of production and their surrounding social history to include an overview of several aspects of the Indian tradition of philosophical and quotidian materialism. This was undertaken with the understanding that a socio-economic formation (which encompasses at least two modes of production and functions as the technical term for 'society' in Marxist analyses) cannot be described, and hence analysed, without some knowledge of its philosophical and ideological expressions. We have also argued that only through such an historically-based investigation can philosophy and those academic disciplines which study it be brought 'back to life' in the two main senses of the phrase. Otherwise intellectual history tends to become a scholastic vivisection of language and logic, ingenious, intriguing, and time-consuming, but very often devoid of social content and hence human purpose, thus eliminating much of the richness and meaning of human experience.

The study of the history of materialism was used because, besides its own independent development, it does function in a dialectical juxtaposition to the philosophies

and ideologies which through the identification of varn-
asrāmadharma and the Hindu religion helped to retard
class mobility and social improvement en masse. Its
history is the chronicle, in many ways, of the rise of
the 'AMP' formation, and the devolution into lethargy
of the majority of creative social energies. It is also
the most misunderstood and deliberately subverted of
India's philosophies, for the fairly obvious reasons
which we have hopefully demonstrated here.

It was however expressly not our intention to establish a monocausal relationship here, as is usually implied in the application of the 'base-superstructure' metaphor. In the larger sense, rather, "What we look for in historical facts is less their material being than their human meaning which, obviously, cannot be known apart from their material being."¹ This holds true even more substantially in philosophical investigations, and here such meaning tends to be irrevocably lost in the reduction of all ideas to ideology (the defense of class interest, or a more specific political position), and of all ideology to a specific relation to economic activity. Ironically, (as with the designation in common language of a materialist as one who is greedy for the possession of objects) such a view often has the disastrous effect, in denying the subtle complexities of human thought, of denigrating the achievements of the intellect, which serves no purpose whatsoever.

The relation of philosophies to modes of production is a peculiarly perplexing one. In terms of the effects

of natural science upon normative theorising, an articulation of the 'laws' of human conduct on this basis can develop no further than the level of technological exploration at a given point permits. There is also a cross-over effect here in terms of the structure, degree of sophistication, and method of presentation of arguments in philosophy. This is readily demonstrated through an examination of the influence of mathematics upon the evolution of philosophy throughout the ancient world. There are additional correspondences between intellectual and economic activity in terms of the type of production that is predominant, ie. mercantile vs. agrarian, and in terms of the class which occupies a determinant position either in society generally or in intellectual activities in particular. Even fractions within a class may view the world in radically dissimilar ways, as a result of the juxtaposition of elements of a past ruling order with those of an ascendant bloc. Ontological, epistemological, and axiological positions vary greatly, for instance, in the coincidental rule of fractions of an agrarian ancien régime with those of a mercantilist, industrial, or financial oligarchy with which power is shared. Hence the general relationship being considered here is of immense complexity.

In one sense of the content of philosophy, however, there can be a correlation to social conditions generally, but not to the mode of production specifically. Because of the intervening factor of human emotional response, overall basic reactions to social movement are finite and

relatively easily categorised into such dualities as affirmation and denial, contemplation and activity, sublimation and sensuality, equality and hierarchy.

Structural alterations which bring fortune and happiness to one group usually mean cataclysm and depression to another. When a social body of sufficient size and resources shares these common characteristics, and has the ability to express its collective state of consciousness, some form of philosophical reflection usually arises therefrom.

We have seen, for example, that out of the crises of conscience of some early Indian thinkers there evolved an attitude of world-renunciation. Formally, this same response was present (and continues) among many of the young (or the pensive) in the western industrial countries in the last several decades. The rapid alteration of the world, and the frequent impoverishment of meaningful human relations in the face of the inherent irrationality of the productive process, underly both of these theoretical reactions despite the historical distance between them. Yet the economic and social milieu which gave rise to them are in many ways as different as we can imagine.

Some, no doubt, would impute a cyclically recurrent historical behavior in this process, and in this formal sense this is most appropriate, for it demonstrates to the highest degree the similarity of desires and shared beliefs about the possible ends of human association held by virtually all peoples. Yet this notion of perpetual

déjà vu lies itself at the root of the social phenomenon of alienated withdrawal. What is common to both epochs is a crisis of values in which an absolute is sought as a 'savior' from the deep dilemmas of ethical relativism - the sense that all moral judgments are either equally right or wrong or equally susceptible to instrumental manipulation in the pejorative sense. The latter form of 'rationality' we have discussed as the theoretical substructure of individual appropriation of wealth at the levels of both economics and politics.

This absolute, however, as Lukacs has written, "is nothing but the fixation of thought, it is the projection into myth of the intellectual failure to understand reality concretely as a historical process."² - It is also, one might add, a primitive expression of the genuine interdependence of all aspects of social and natural life, but reduced exclusively to its unitary description in defiance of the manifold diversity and individuality which occurs throughout nature and society. At the core of the attitude of renunciation is a resignation to the eternity of orthodox modes of interaction at the social level. Thus a more 'meaningful' eternity is sought as a path of escape from the suffocating weight of the first form.

Yet in both ancient India and the modern world a dialectic between the critique of orthodoxy and its defense is present. In both ages

"The materialist is not concerned with absolute reason but with happiness (including its despised form, pleasure), and not so much with so-called

inner happiness, which all-too-often allows itself to be complacent about outer misery, but with an objective condition, in which curtailed subjectivity comes into its own again." (3)

Hence, since it is possible to make such judgments, one can say that ascetics are misguided in their condemnation of desire and 'attachment'. These must be 'properly channelled' (from whence emerges the grave dangers and responsibilities of those who are the educators), but they are life-forces which the majority could never even begin to eliminate anyway. In their functions as moral codes thenceforth, these ideas merely dictate what it is that should not be desired. What is rather required are positive social values which can guide the relativised anomie of our own age.⁴

In their own fashion the Indian materialists attempted to provide such a counterculture. Although their investigations into nature and their cultivation of pleasure are important, a more immediate contribution is provided in their 'discovery' of the cardinal bond of economy and polity. In the recognition of political economy, as it is now called, and despite its obvious misappropriation, we find the roots of much of modern social analysis. This branch of knowledge developed first, and further than elsewhere for many centuries, in India, and it represents in a sense her contribution to the global storehouse of intellectual resources which are the common heritage of mankind.

In terms of the method utilised in our examination

of Indian philosophy, we find that much more than merely the underlying history of materialism is demonstrated in a synchronised exposition of social conditions. The social basis of Indian idealism (taking this term in a descriptive sense and not as an epithet of abuse and contempt) is as well manifested through insights into the formation of the village economic system. From the early warfare between the gods and demons onwards, the majority of social history came to be reflected through the activities of the deities. All of the autochthonous mental and physical objects of worship were eventually incorporated into the Brahmanical pantheon, with many undergoing a form of palinogenesis in their new Hinduised roles.

Marx believed that he recognised the personage of the 'Oriental despot' in the 'overarching unity' presented in certain of the fundamental tenets of the Hindu religion. This correspondence, however, is somewhat misplaced: as an omnipotent force the Judaeo-Christian God is a far closer representative of correlatively ruthless and arbitrary terrestrial rulers. The gods of India's pantheon are so diverse as to be rarely susceptible to a supreme commander, although some of the medieval cults (such as that of Śiva) had begun to achieve this imputed ascendancy in a more widespread area.

Variations in religious form throughout India, in fact, rather tend more to conform to what we now know of the isolation and 'self-governing' aspects of the village system than to what Marx and his contemporaries saw as the

idealised approximation of the powers of the centralised monarchy. Local custom and usage coexisted, and were often more important than, more general social laws, and this is also the case with the hierarchy of deities in any specific locale. Where the idea of unity occurs most strongly, it is in the context of intellectual traditions which were, for the most part, wholly removed from the lives of the vast majority. The idea of māyā - the world as an illusion created by desire - is a seminal illustration of this, as we have seen. This view lay at the basis of Vedantic thought, but had, we would argue, a negligible impact at the level of everyday life. Yet it is as an idea both historically and logically synchronised with the rise of the village system.

Other notions of unity in Indian philosophy share a similar degree of correspondence with the social structure. The theory of time in the yugas was not only a reaction to the inception of class society, but was furthermore quite deliberately adjusted to meet the Brahmanical need of engaging in nonpriestly occupations without the usual subsequent loss of status. The operations of karma were defined specifically to further the varnaśrāmadharma system, on the basis of the principle that it was better virtually to fail at the occupation of one's caste than to seek to emulate (and thence possibly displace) the actions of the higher castes.

After the demise of the materialist political tradition, religious mythology and history became so intertwined

as to render extremely difficult, as we have seen, the accurate exegesis of the ancient period. The light-skinned male gods of the conquerors shared their heavenly abode uneasily with the darker (kṛiṣṇa means 'black'; Kālī is the 'dark goddess') deities of the Dravidians. In the nether regions awaited the demons of materialism and social criticism, and as Ion Banu has written, "the politicisation of the transcendant had as a consequence the 'transcendentalisation' of political protest"⁵, and many further conflicts rooted in social conditions were henceforth expressed in the metaphors of religious adherence.

From the presentation of aspects of the evolution of materialist thought, it was possible to substantially deny the myth of the predominance of spiritualism throughout Indian history at every level of philosophic expression. This myth is the intellectual counterpart of the notion of stagnation in Indian economic and social life. Both delusions are rooted historically: mysticism achieves an unprecedented peak during the most decentralised and isolated years of the Indian middle ages. Much further demystification remains to be done both in India and outside of the region, but the first to set out to accomplish this, who in earlier times fought for a better world, and whose victories, thus, great and small, are our own as well, were the ancient deniers of the Vedas, and the exploitative social system aided by their doctrines.⁶

III. Concluding Remarks

It is now almost three centuries since European travellers began to inform their peers of the wealth, delights, and mysteries of the Indian subcontinent. There have been many results of the impact of the two cultural traditions upon each other. As soon as the European powers were able to do so, they began a fierce competitive struggle for the products and markets of India, eventually using the technique of mass capitalist production to destroy much of her own industry. With the British came the gradual disintegration, still ongoing, of the protofeudal forms of land tenure, followed by the construction of a new ruling class of landowners, manufacturers, and financiers.

As any visitor with a limited knowledge of history and a disinclination to reduce the country to those 'seeking control over their senses' can see, capitalism has not been generous to the Indian people as a whole. Usury has left scores of millions in a position of hereditary debt-slavery. Many more millions live barely at the subsistence level (for an Indian), perched precariously on a narrow tightrope between life and death, waiting to be hurled into the abyss by the wrath of an angry landlord, the caprice of an irregular monsoon, or by nature's greatest wonder, the birth of a child.

The problems of modern India are enormous, and will not be simply solved even if the most humane, bloodless revolution were to occur tomorrow with the full aid and

support of sympathetic nations around the world. It would be inadvisable to use the term 'inevitable' for any future event: the barbarous prospect of nuclear holocaust removes this idea (for the first time in this sense) from our historical vocabulary, even in terms of the survival of the human race. Barring this increasingly likely prospect, however, and despite the impoverishment, factionalism, and other weaknesses of the Indian socialist movement, it is not difficult to feel that the Indian people will someday be managing themselves and their industries in a cooperative, rational, and humane fashion. No doubt many generations will be required for the reeducation of individuals into nonexploitative habits, for deep patience is required in such matters if bloodshed is to be avoided.

When this time comes, however, and during the preparation of the intervening years, the exegesis of ancient life will reveal patterns of mutual support, of a lack of antagonism between social groups, and of the criticism of the degradation of the human being. In both her material and her intellectual history India can provide a rich tradition upon which to base the construction of the future and its social relations. There are two steps in this process: the understanding of the evolution of the present, and the use of aspects of the philosophic traditions of the past as a vehicle, a series of metaphors, for the conscious transformation of the present into the future. In two senses Max Weber was completely wrong in his view

that "There is little or nothing that ancient history can teach us about our own social problems."¹ Firstly, the daily habits of hundreds of millions - perhaps half a billion - are more strongly dictated by the customs of the anterior social formation than by the strictly modern aspects of capitalism. In mass communication, mass education, social movement, enhanced production of virtually everything imaginable, good and bad - and of the imagination itself - India falls far short of the capitalist ideal type. Secondly (since to be fair Weber was speaking of early twentieth century Europe), the problems of the world become increasingly mutual as technology continuously shrinks the barriers of region, ethnicity, and nationality.

Not only is the anatomy of the present the key to the past, allowing us to see what might have happened because the various alternatives are clearer by hindsight. The past, too, is a vital link to the present and future, in determining the broad spectrum of possible actions, and in fighting the old forms of domination, or their replacements in a new guise. Much of this past still remains immersed in mythology and propaganda, the clarification of which yet requires multitudes of patient scholars. The conscious distortion and falsification of history belongs more strongly to the Indian practice of historiography than to perhaps any other culture rooted in the ancient world. It can only be hoped that those of power in the future will not relativistically find this an

equally convenient political tool. For, when all is said and done, only the truth in its richest clarity can serve the cause of the liberation of the dominated and hungry.

FOOTNOTESI. The 'Asiatic Mode of Production'

- 1) Engels wrote that he and Marx "regarded the bourgeoisie only as a class, and hardly ever involved ourselves in conflicts with individual bourgeois." (Selected Correspondence, op. cit., p. 427).
- 2) V.G. Kiernan, Marxism and Imperialism (London: Edward Arnold, 1974), p. 169.
- 3) Lukacs' famous dictum that "orthodoxy refers exclusively to method" is misleading, since (see, infra, p. 11 fn4) Marx can be described as having a method of revolutionary activity, a method of philosophical deduction, and a method of historical analysis. Here we are referring exclusively to the third of these. See History and Class Consciousness (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 1 of the essay "What is Orthodox Marxism?"
- 4) Raymond Firth, "The Sceptical Anthropologist? Social Anthropology and Marxist Views on Society", in M. Bloch, ed. Marxist Analyses and Social Anthropology (London: Malaby Press, 1975), p. 34.
- 5) Jean Baudrillard, op. cit., p. 86.
- 6) Claude Meillassoux, loc. cit., p. 99.
- 7) Franz Jakubowski, Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism (London: Allison and Busby, 1974), p. 106.
- 8) See K.C. Roychowdhury, "Marx's Asiatic Mode of Production and the Evolution of the Indian Economy", The Indian Economic Journal, Vol. 22, No. 1 (July-September 1974), p. 34.
- 9) See, for instance, Hindess and Hirst, op. cit., p. 9.

II. Philosophies and Modes of Production

- 1) Lucien Goldmann, The Human Sciences and Philosophy (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 31. Marx also writes that

"In order to examine the connection between spiritual production and material production it is above all necessary to grasp the latter itself not as a general category but in definite historical form. Thus for example, different kinds of spiritual production correspond to the capitalist mode of production and to the mode of production of the Middle Ages. If material production itself is not conceived in its specific historical form, it is impossible to under-

stand what is specific in the spiritual production corresponding to it, and the reciprocal influence of one on the other." (Theories of Surplus-Value, Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 285).

- 2) Georg Lukacs, op. cit., p. 187.
- 3) Heinz Maus, 'Materialismus', in Zur Klärung der Begriffe, ed. H. Burgmüller, München, 1947, p. 63; quoted in Albert Schmidt, The Concept of Nature in Marx (London: New Left Books, 1974), p. 40.
- 4) Is it possible to judge the moral level of development of a civilisation? Marx apparently thought so, but the criteria given are not what might be expected, eg. the level of surplus-value extracted, etc. Twice (to my knowledge) in his life Marx makes statements in this regard, and in both instances (separated by nearly a quarter of a century) it is the relationship of man to woman which is the sole criterion offered:

(from the relationship of man to woman) "one can therefore judge man's whole level of development." (The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, MECW Vol. 3, p. 296).

"Social Progress can be measured exactly by the social position of the fair sex." (Letters to Dr. Kugelmann from Karl Marx, London: Martin Lawrence, n.d., p. 83 -Letter of 12/12/1868).
- 5) Ion Banu, "La Formation Sociale 'Asiatique' Dans La Perspective de la Philosophie Orientale Antique", in Jean Suret-Canale, ed. Sur Le Mode de Production Asiatique (Paris: C.E.R.M., Editions Sociales, 1974), p. 306.
- 6) I am paraphrasing Helmut Fleischer here; see his Marxism and History (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 71.

III. Concluding Remarks

- 1) Max Weber, The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilisations, op. cit., p. 391.

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