A Note on Method and Chronology

The subject of this work was suggested by Professor N. K. Sinha in 1965. He was then trying to organise a team of young researchers who were expected to work on new topics of Indian history. What we learnt at Calcutta University at that time was the value of hard work on archival material. That was the basic method. The most desirable thing was to get hold of a heavy chunk of archival material and then to follow a flexible strategy of collecting other material. Field work, exploration of myths and even of hearsay reports might be part of the strategy.

Social history is really a nebulous concept unlike political or economic history. The primary task of a researcher is to make a vague thing as concrete as possible, though ambiguities are bound to remain. Some interesting areas of social history would remain unexplored if we adhere to a rigid chronology. Events in the orthodox sense do not necessarily determine the course of social history. In this study the chronological focus is on the period from the mid-18th to the mid-19th century. Almost the entire archival evidence and the greater part of other material relate to this period. But since the approach is at least partly one of reasoning and exploration of trends, some references occur to earlier and later periods.

A bibliography has not been appended because it might have been misleading. Except for the archival sources the materials are extremely scattered. Only footnotes can give an idea of what has been used in particular cases.
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Abbreviations

MCSCR — Mayor’s Court and Supreme Court Records
CPC — Calendar of Persian Correspondence
HCOS — High Court, Original Side
O.W. — Old Wills