The author of नव्यमिमांसā does not mean that there was a one-to-one correspondence between the social group and the language variations listed against them. Nor is it possible to give a clear cut linguistic hierarchy, as a certain degree of social mobility has to be allowed. Moreover, people of various occupational classes lived in the same settlement—such as a grāma, nagara, etc.—and this led to some dialect mixture. In such situations it is impossible to maintain any rigid control over communication. None of these social groups monopolized a socially superior status throughout history. Therefore correlating the social groups with language variations leads us nowhere.

In a hierarchical patterning of speech variation, language should be related to identity and purpose of interactions, and such variations include caste, religion, linguistic medium, subjective attitudes, and so on.

It is impossible to speak of caste dialects of the period under review because written records do not provide us with information as to who spoke which dialect and to whom. However, one can describe the variations of ēlite versus non-ēlite. The ēlite are generally taken to be the speakers of the high variety and all the others as speakers of the low variety. Who then were considered ēlite? The first three varṇas of society appear to be considered as such.⁵

There is a reference to the ēlite in an interesting discussion of Patañjali in his Mahābhāṣya. He defines śīṣṭa, ‘ēlite’, ‘linguistic ēlite’, in a discussion relating to the speakers of standard Sanskrit. Patañjali excludes in this discussion the lower castes, the kṣatriyas, and illiterate brāhmaṇas from the ēlite group. According to him, śīṣṭas (ēlite) were the literate brāhmaṇas residing in the geographical area south of the Himalayas, east of the Ādaṛśa mountain and west of Kalakavana.⁶

---


of Pāṇini. Patañjali’s definition of élite, however, relates to the
speakers of standard Sanskrit of the contemporary period.

Religion played an important role in the period under discussion.
The language of the dominant religion was powerful and presti-
gious. Before the rise of the non-Brahmanical religions, there existed
only the Brahmanical religion without any viable rival. There was
indeed a major shift in religious thought during the Upaniṣadic
period (i.e. from the sacerdotal to the highly speculative enquiry
into the relationship between the individual and the universal soul,
Ātman and Brahman). Yet there was no change in relation to
language. The reason was that the proponents of this new line of
enquiry were mainly the brāhmaṇas and the kṣatriyas, who belonged
to the upper class in the social structure. The Upaniṣads are acclaim-
ed as the highest intellectual attainment of the age and such
philosophic thought must naturally have appealed only to the highly
literate. Therefore the question of choosing a popular speech form
does not arise in the case of Upaniṣadic thinkers.

A significant social change occurred with the rise of the non-
Vedic religions. The brāhmaṇa caste was relegated to the second
position in the social hierarchy of the Buddhists; this was headed
by the kṣatriyas. The merchants became economically more power-
ful. Some śramaṇas among the parivrājakas also became influential
through their public discourses.\(^{27}\) Linguistically also, various Prākrit
dialects obtained ascendency.

The rise of non-Vedic religions, the political support they received
from rulers such as Aśoka, the preference given to Prākrit dialects
by religious propagandists, and the appeal they made to the com-
mon people had affected considerably the exclusively high status
enjoyed by Sanskrit until then. Prākrit had virtually eclipsed Sans-
krit in this period. This picture of the decline of Sanskrit is
supported by the evidence of inscriptions. Prākrit was the lingua
franca of the Mauryan empire. There was no major inscription in
Sanskrit until the second century AD.

Despite the opposition and loss of encouragement, Sanskrit
remained the medium for literary and scholastic discussion among
orthodox brahmanical circles and was also retained as a ritual
language.

\(^{27}\) Rhys Davids, 1970; Narendra Wagle, Society at the Time of the Buddha,
MIA speech forms, with the exception of the north-western dialect, were not mutually unintelligible during the pre-Christian era. That was also a reason for the absence of Sanskrit in administrative documents before the second century AD. When the dialects of the north-west and west became sharply differentiated from the central and eastern dialects, the rulers of the north-western region introduced Sanskrit for the first time for administrative purposes. Rudradāman’s Girnar inscription was the earliest major Sanskrit inscription.

The high status assigned to Sanskrit as a literary medium remained undisturbed in the succeeding period as well. The linguistic situation of this period in north India is represented in Charts II and III.
Chart I

Linguistic Changes from OIA to Classical Sanskrit
(Literary Variety)

I. Phonological Level

(a) Indiscriminate use of $r$ and $l$:  
   e.g. rupya\textit{ti}: lumpati (Vedic),  
   RV. r\textit{aghu}: AV. l\textit{aghu}.

(b) Formulation of strict sandhi rules:  
   (i) Avoidance of hiatus in Cl. Skt.:  
       e.g. Vedic v\textit{\ddot{a}}\textit{\r{r}}i-a-n\textit{\r{a}}-\textit{\r{a}}m: Cl. Skt. v\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{r}}y\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}m,  
       Vedic \textit{tan}u\textit{\dot{a}}\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}: Cl. Skt. \textit{tan}u\textit{\dot{a}}{

   (ii) Regularising by analogical extension:  
       Change of final -\textit{n} of accusative plural masculine marker into an  
       \textit{anuv\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}ra and insertion of s after this final -\textit{n}, \textit{n} before a word  
       beginning with $l$- was restricted only to the accusative plural of  
       vowel ending stems in the Vedic, as \textit{sv\r{a}\r{a}n t\textit{n}a} \textit{\r{a}} - \textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}ms t\textit{n}a. This  
       rule has been extended to all final -\textit{n} in Cl. Skt. such as \textit{abhavan}  
       3. impf. pl.

(c) Change of pitch accent to stress accent.

II. Morphological Level

1. Nominal System—Dropping of the following older forms of declension:

   (a) Instrumental singular -\textit{\r{a}} of -\textit{a} stems:  
       pri\textit{\r{y}}\textit{\r{a}} beside pri\textit{\r{y}}\textit{\r{e}}\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}.  

   (b) Nominative plural -\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{s}}\textit{a}s of -\textit{a} stems:  
       pri\textit{\r{y}}\textit{\r{\ddot{a}}}{\textit{s}}\textit{a}s beside pri\textit{\r{y}}\textit{\r{\ddot{a}}}{\textit{s}}.  

   (c) Instrumental plural -\textit{\r{b}}\textit{h}is of -\textit{a} stems:  
       pri\textit{\r{y}}\textit{\r{\ddot{e}}}{\textit{\r{b}}\textit{h}i}{\textit{s}} beside pri\textit{\r{y}}\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{i}}{\textit{\r{a}}}{\textit{\r{a}}}{\textit{\r{a}}}{\textit{\r{a}}}{\textit{\r{a}}}{\textit{\r{a}}}{\textit{\r{a}}}.  

   (d) Nominative plural -\textit{a} of neuter -\textit{a} stems:  
       pri\textit{\r{y}}\textit{\r{a}} beside pri\textit{\r{y}}\textit{\r{a}}\textit{\r{a}}.  

   (e) Vedic peculiarities of the first and second personal pronouns, \textit{mahya}  
       (dative singular), tv\textit{\textit{a}} (instrumental singular, 2nd person), tve (2nd  
       person, singular, locative), asme (1st person, locative, plural), are  
       dropped.

2. Verbal System

   (a) Loss of subjunctive mood.

   (b) Dropping of 1st person, plural, present tense marker -\textit{ma}s\textit{i} and  
       third person, singular, present tense \textit{\ddot{a}}\textit{\r{m}}\textit{a}nepada -\textit{e}.  

   (c) Dropping of the gerund tv\textit{\textit{a}} and tv\textit{\textit{a}}\textit{\textit{a}}.  

   (d) Loss of dative and ablative-genitive and locative infinitives.

   (e) Increase in the use of participles in place of finite verbs.
Linguistic Changes from OIA to MIA
(Spoken Variety)

I. Phonological Level
(a) Assimilation of consonant clusters:
   e.g. agni > aghi, bhakta > bhatt.
(b) Vocalic:
   \( \text{ri} \) as in mrīga (Skt. mrīga),
   \( \text{ru} \) as in vrūdhesu (Skt. vrūdhesu),
   \( \text{ra} \) as in nāṭa (Skt. nṛta).
(c) Diphthongs to monophthongs:
   \( al > e, \) e.g. vaira > vera,
   \( au > o, \) e.g. pautra > potra.
(d) Shortening of long vowels:
   \( rātri > ratti. \)
(e) \( l \) for \( r, \) e.g. lāja for rājā.
(f) Voicing of intervocalic voiceless consonants:
   \( hita > hida. \)
(g) Voiced aspirate to \(-h-:
   \text{laghu} \rightarrow \text{lahu.} \)
(h) Cerebralization: e.g. \( vrddhi \rightarrow vaddi. \)
(i) Dental \( \rightarrow \) palatal/\(-y: \) e.g. apatya \( \rightarrow \) apacca.
(j) Loss of final consonants:
   e.g. \( vāc \rightarrow vāca \) (Pali), sarit \( \rightarrow \) saria (Pkt.), marut \( \rightarrow \) maru (Pkt.).
(k) Devoicing of voiced consonants:
   e.g. \( danda \rightarrow tanda, \) vīrāgaḥ \( \rightarrow \) viraku.
(l) Deaspirating the voiced aspirate:
   e.g. bhūma \( \rightarrow \) buma ‘land’.

II. Morphological Level
1. Nominal System
(a) Loss of dual number.
(b) Reduction of rich declensional system of OIA to the vowel-ending type only. The stems are reduced to masculine and neuter in \(-a, -i, -u\) and feminine in \(-a, -i, -u, -ū\).
(c) Reduction in the number of cases. Dative merges with genitive; complete fusion of instrumental, ablative and locative.

2. Verbal System
(a) Loss of dual number.
(b) Dropping of perfect.
(c) Merger of imperfect and aorist.
(d) Replacement of finite verb by the past passive participles in denoting past.
(e) Loss of ātmanepadām.
(f) Accusative infinitive \(-tum\), the only infinitive in Cl. Skt. is a rare feature. Dative infinitive which was entirely lost in Cl. Skt. occurs throughout in MIA \(-tave\).
(g) MIA has both inherited forms of gerund (\( tvā, ya, tvāya \) and \( tvī\)) and innovation (\( tu \) and \( tvāna\)).
**Chart II**

*Linguistic Variation*

Religious and Ritual Forms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Early Vedic (early phase)</th>
<th>Late Vedic (late phase) upto Pāṇini and early Buddhist</th>
<th>Mauryan</th>
<th>Post-Mauryan (early phase) period of Patañjali and Indo-Greek</th>
<th>Post-Mauryan (second phase) down to the second century AD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I North-Western India</td>
<td>Vedic</td>
<td>Vedic</td>
<td>Vedic, and Prākrit</td>
<td>Vedic, Epic Sankrit and Prākrit dialects.</td>
<td>Vedic, Epic Sanskrit and Prākrit dialects, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Upper and Middle Ganges region</td>
<td>Vedic</td>
<td>Vedic, Ardhamāgadhi</td>
<td>Vedic and Prākrit dialects such as Ardhamāgadhi</td>
<td>Vedic and Prākrit dialects, Epic Sanskrit</td>
<td>Vedic, Pāli and Prākrit dialects, Epic Sanskrit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III East</td>
<td>Vedic</td>
<td>Vedic, Pāli and Prākrit dialects</td>
<td>Vedic, Pāli and Prākrit dialects</td>
<td>Vedic, Pāli and Prākrit dialects</td>
<td>Vedic, Epic Sanskrit, Pāli and Prākrit dialects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV West</td>
<td>Vedic</td>
<td>Vedic</td>
<td>Vedic, Pāli and Prākrit dialects</td>
<td>Vedic, Pāli and Prākrit dialects, Epic Sanskrit</td>
<td>Vedic, Epic Sanskrit, Pāli and Prākrit dialects, Classical Sanskrit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Vedic includes *Samhitās, Brāhmanas, Āranyakas, Upaniṣads* and Śūtras.

**Remarks:** A few changes in the phonological and grammatical level can be observed. However, they are not significant enough to corrupt the purity of the ritual dialect.

*Ritual forms are those which were used in performing sacrifices and other rituals. Religious forms are those which were used in the discourses of the Upaniṣadic thinkers and also in the preaching of the Buddha and Mahāvira.*
Chart III

Linguistic Variation

Secular Forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Élite</th>
<th>Non-élite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High variety of IA with traces of Prakritisms (I—1 and 2)</td>
<td>Low variety of IA (I—1 and 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High variety of IA with higher percentage of Prakrit forms (II—2 and 3)</td>
<td>Low variety of IA showing greater influence of Non-Aryan (II—2 and 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pāṇini (I—3)</th>
<th>Popular Sanskrit e.g. Epic (III—3)</th>
<th>Pidgin (Aryan-non-Aryan) (I, II and III—3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patañjali (II—5)</td>
<td>Classical Sanskrit (I, II, III, IV—3, 4, 5 and 6)</td>
<td>Prākrit dialects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Canonical (I, II, III, IV—3–6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inscriptional (I, II, III, IV—4–6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1. Regions and period indicated in brackets by Roman and Arabic numerals as in Chart II,

2. Greek and Aramaic are not indicated here, as they fall outside IA.

Remark: The élite speech showing the influence of Prākrit and non-Aryan dialects indicates the movement of local people into élite status in major social changes and the importance of the non-élite in society.
Society and Historical Consciousness: The Itiḥāsa-Purāṇa Tradition

ROMILA THAPAR

The expression of historical consciousness, it has often been assumed, takes the form of historical writing, clearly recognizable as a genre of literature. More frequently, however, the geological analogy of a particular vein embedded in rock seems more apposite, in that such consciousness is not always visible and has to be prised from sources which tend to conceal it. Within the vein lies information purporting to relate to events of the past, and enveloping this vein is the commentary which arises from concerns of the present. The form it takes tends to reflect the kind of society from which it emanates.

Historical consciousness, therefore, can change over time. Historians tend to view historical writing as conforming almost entirely to the format and pattern familiar from the last couple of centuries, or from models borrowed from particular societies such as ancient Greece and China. The more important but neglected aspect is the search for historical consciousness, irrespective of how immediately recognizable or evident it may be, in its literary form. This perhaps requires a distinction between what might be termed ‘embedded history’—forms in which historical consciousness has to be prised out—and its opposite, ‘externalized history’—which tends to bring embedded consciousness into the open, as it were, and to be more aware of its deliberate use of the past. The need for such a deliberate use suggests a changed historical situation. This distinction

I am grateful to my colleagues Satish Saberwal and B. D. Chattopadhyaya for comments on an earlier draft of this essay.
can be apparent not only between societies but also within the same
society as it undergoes change. The attempt in this essay is not to
analyse historical consciousness in relation to society as a whole,
but in relation to a more restricted view of its expression among
those who successfully aspired to power. It relates therefore only to
changing forms in the perception of power.

Each version of the past which has been deliberately transmitted
has a significance for the present, and this accounts for its legiti-
macy and its continuity. The record may be one in which historical
consciousness is embedded: myth, epic and genealogy; or alterna-
tively it may refer to the more externalized forms: chronicles of
families, institutions and regions, and biographies of persons in
authority. There is no evolutionary or determined continuum from
one form to the other and facets of the embedded consciousness
can be seen as a part of the latter, whether introduced deliberately
or subconsciously. The degree to which forms change or overlap has
a bearing on dominant social formations. Similarly, major social
and political changes influence the form of historical consciousness
ev en though there is no mechanical correlation between the two.

Evident historical texts such as chronicles of families, institutions
and regions often incorporate mythical beginnings which act as
charters of validation. The tracing of links with established lineages
through genealogical connections, and frequently with epic heroes,
plays the same role of drawing upon embedded history. I shall con-
sider some forms of embedded history, such as the prevalent myths
in the *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition, which encapsulate features of what
might be seen as historical experience; the eulogies and hero-lauds
which were gradually expanded into epic literature; the genealogical
sections or *vamśānumcarita* of the Puranic texts which, by implication,
carry a commentary on the social status of ruling families.

In contrast to these the more externalized forms draw upon the
embedded but have other primary concerns and carry a different
type of historical information. Thus historical biography or the *carita*
literature has as its germ the hero-laud and the epic hero. Family
chronicles and *vamśavalīs* assimilate myth and genealogy to other
events. Chronicles of institutions and regions maintain a variant
form of mythology and genealogy, and are aimed at recording the
history of the institution or the area. The distinction made between
the two forms is not arbitrary; I am arguing that the embedded form
is closer to what have been called lineage-based societies and the
externalized form to state systems incorporated in monarchies. Or, to put it in another way, the existence of the state requiring its own validation encourages the creation of an externalized historical consciousness.

In the articulation of historical consciousness in early north-Indian society the truly embedded forms are evident in the literature of the lineage-based society characterized by an absence of state formation, and the more free-standing or externalized forms emerge with the transition to state systems. The terms ‘lineage society’ and ‘state systems’, used here as a short-hand, represent not merely a change in political forms but in the totality of a society. Thus the term ‘state’ would refer to a society registering political polarities, an increasingly vertical hierarchy of authority, social inequalities, differentiated economies and distinct ideological identities; not that these characteristics are completely absent in lineage societies, but there are endemic differences between the two. Sometimes these differences are blurred in the texts. Lineage society derives its validity from different sources of authority as compared to state systems, with which we are in any case more familiar.¹ The central role of lineage in the earlier society has reference to more than just the ordering of kinship for it dominates virtually every aspect of activity.

The deepest layer of the embedded form is myth. Events are assumed to have happened, and time is almost proto-chronos since it involves gods and the supernatural in an active role with humans and animals. The significance of myth to the historian lies more in its being the self-image of a given culture, expressing its social assumptions. The role of myth in this context is often explanatory. Origin myths are concerned with cosmogony and the start of events such as the Flood myth.² The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa version of the Flood

¹I have discussed these differences as they pertain to early Indian society, specifically to Vedic and post-Vedic times prior to the rise of the Mauryan state, in From Lineage to State (Delhi, 1984). The term ‘lineage’ is used in preference to the more commonly employed term ‘tribe’, as lineage is central to such societies, is more precise and points to the crux of such societies where descent and birth are in fact the major focus of social ordering.

myth carries obvious traces of association with the Sumerian Flood myth. Manu, when performing his morning ablutions, finds a fish in his cupped hands and rears the fish until it reaches an enormous size. The fish explains the intention of the gods to drown the earth in a deluge and, wishing to save Manu and the seven ṛṣis (in whom vests all knowledge) from this disaster, it orders Manu to build a boat for this purpose. This is tied to its horn and it swims through the deluge. The boat and its passengers remain safely on a mountain until the flood subsides, after which they return. By means of sacrificial rites Manu creates a series of sons for himself and one androgynous daughter, his children being the founders of the various lineages. The eldest son, Ikṣvāku, establishes the Sūryavāṁśa or Solar lineage, and the androgynous daughter, Ilā, establishes the Candravāṁśa or Lunar lineage.

The Matsya Purāṇa version links the fish with the incarnation of Viṣṇu, thus bringing the gods more directly into the story, and at the same time using what was obviously a familiar myth to demonstrate the power of the new god, Viṣṇu. Manu, as the name suggests in its association with mānava (mankind), is the primeval, archetypal man who is the eponymous ancestor of all the lineages. The emphasis on origins is again stressed in the deluge, where the flood is seen as a time-marker. Floods tend to wipe away earlier conditions and society can start afresh. The survival of Manu and the ṛṣis links the new creation with the old, in spite of the deluge washing away the old, since Manu is the seventh in a succession of pre-Flood Manus. The link is important to the genealogical records. The status of the earlier Manus is conveyed through it to the new lineages. All the eponymous ancestors of the lineages are the children of Manu.

Other myths provide social sanctions, one such being the Puruṣa-stūkta story in the Rg Veda describing the origin of the four castes. The Puruṣasūkta hymn occurs in a late section of the Rg Veda and describes the sacrifice of the god Prajāpati, from whose body the four varṇas are said to have sprung: the brāhmaṇas from his mouth, the kṣatriyas from his arms, the vaiśyas from his thighs and the śūdras from his feet. The symbolism of each bodily part relates to the ritual status and function of the particular varṇa. That the origin and hierarchy go back to a ritual occasion underlines the

---

4 Rg Veda, x.97.
nature of the ranking. The evolution of varṇa stratification is rooted in the lineage-based society of Vedic times. In a sense the brāhmaṇa and the kṣatriya varṇas were to evolve as distinct lineages with their separate rules of marriage and descent: exogamy in the brāhmaṇa gotras and the more frequent endogamy of the kṣatriyas. The śūdra varṇa is excluded by its very origin, which is a denial of lineage since it is said more often to include groups identified by the status of the two parents.

Some myths legitimize a changed social and political condition, as is apparent from the much repeated story of Pṛthu. The various versions of this story begin by referring to the wickedness of Vena who had to be killed by the ṛṣis because of his unrighteous rule. From his left thigh they churned a successor, Niśāda, who was inadequate and was expelled to the forest as a hunter-gatherer. From the right arm of Vena they churned another successor, the righteous rāja Pṛthu, who introduced cattle-keeping and agriculture and bestowed so many benefits on the earth, Pṛthvī, that she in gratitude gave him her name. Vena was wicked because he ceased to perform the sacrificial ritual and had to be killed by the ṛṣis (and not expelled by his subjects), who alone had the right to depose a ruler. The dark, short, ugly Niśāda became the prototype of all forest-dwelling people. The myth sought to legitimize the expulsion of such groups when land was cleared and settled by agriculturists.

In each of such cases an attempt is made to explain social origins and assumptions which are significant to historical reconstruction. Myth was transmitted orally in its earliest phase. With the evolution of a more heterogeneous and stratified society, myths were questioned and explanations sought. Some myths were replaced with new or different versions and others added to and embellished, often to such a degree that the original myth became almost opaque. That myths in some ways mirrored society was not their sole function, but for our purposes this aspect is significant.

Myths of descent often serve to integrate diverse groups by providing common origins. Among competing groups a myth can be used for the reverse process of distinguishing one from the other. Origin myths posit beginnings authoritatively and are therefore central to embedded history. The degree to which myths reflect different social assumptions can be demonstrated by a comparison

5Mahābhārata, Śāntiparvan, 59: Viṣṇu Purāṇa, i.13; Matsya Purāṇa, x.4–10.
of origin myths from the *Rg Veda* and from Buddhist sources, a comparison which also demonstrates the degree to which historical consciousness is embedded in myth. The origins of the Śākyas, Licchavis, Mallas and Koliyas are all described in stories which have a common format, which format suggests a tradition deviant from the brahmanical origin myths. The clans are of the Ikṣvāku lineage, are said to be of the families of rājās (which could mean royal descent but more likely refers to families of lineage chiefs) and are often the exiled children of such families, thus suggesting a lineage migration or fission. The new settlement is in a forest clearing with a town as its nucleus. The name of the lineage is frequently associated with an object such as the kol or šaka tree. More interestingly, the original founders have a system of sibling marriages and in each case sixteen pairs of twin children are born: it is from these that the lineage expands. Sibling incest, since it is never actually referred to as prevalent, would point to a symbolic concern with purity of lineage, a demarcation between the families of the rājās who owned land and the rest of the people, by the assertion of origins otherwise taboo; or perhaps an endorsement of cross-cousin marriage, which, because it was prohibited by brahmanical codes referring to northern India, may have been seen as a form of sibling incest. That the origin myth was of some consequence is evident from its inclusion in the history of every lineage and by the considerable emphasis given to it in the biographies of the Buddha. There is an absence of any reference to ritual status.

II

Apart from myth, other embedded forms are associated with various fragments of literature moving towards the emergence of the epic. The evolution is traceable via the dāna-stuti (eulogies on gift-giving), gāthā, nārāśamśi (eulogies on heroes) to the ākhyāna and the kathā (cycles of stories generally involving heroes). The dāna-stuti hymns scattered throughout the *Rg Veda* are eulogies on chiefs and deities who act as would chiefs bestowing generous gifts on grateful bards and priests. The prototype of the gift-giver

---


7 *Rg Veda*, vi.63; v.27; v.30; vi.47; viii.1; viii.5; viii.6.
was the god Indra. The Indra-gāthās express the gratitude of the jana (tribe) whom he has led successfully in a cattle-raid and subsequently in distributing the wealth bestowed, much of it on the priests. The same was expected from the ideal rājā (chief) in a society where raids were a major access to property and where wealth was computed in heads of cattle and horse, in chariots, gold and slave girls. The dāna-stutis mentioned the names of their patrons, who were doubtless actual chiefs, but, equally important, the hymns indicated the purpose of the gift and the items of wealth. They were not only eulogies of past actions but also indicators of what was expected from the chiefs.

The ākhyānas,\(^8\) commemorating rājās and heroes, were the cycles of stories recited at the time of the yajñas (sacrificial rituals). Some heroes underwent a metamorphosis in time and came to be remembered for reasons quite different from those of the earliest stories. Thus Purūravas in the Rg Veda is a mortal who loves a celestial woman, Urvasī; in the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa he is shown as aspiring to become a celestial being himself in pursuit of his love; and finally in the Mahābhārata he is not only a celestial being but is among the more important ancestors of the Candravansha lineage.\(^9\) The protagonists in these stories are members of the chiefly families (rājanyas and kṣatriyas); the stories narrate their lives and activities and incidentally provide information on the lineages as well. An example of the latter is the transformation of single lineages into confederacies of tribes—the Bharatas and the Purus of the Rg Veda confederating with others into the Kuras of later times. The genealogies tend to be shallow and activities centre around the lineages rather than the succession of hereditary status.

A common feature of these many embedded forms is that they are linked to the ritual of sacrifice, the yajña. This imparts sanctity to the story and ensures it a continuity coeval with the performance of the ritual; it also imbues it with what were believed to be transcendental powers associated with the accurate and precise performance of the ritual. Even if the events were limited to the activities of the

---

\(^8\)Both the terms ākhyāna and kathā have the meaning of recitation or oral narration, and the purpose of the form is clear from these words. Some of the bardic fragments in the form of stories are also to be found in the Jātaka literature.

\(^9\)Rg Veda, x.95; Satapatha Brāhmaṇa, xi.5.1.1ff.; Mahābhārata, Ādiparvan, vii.70-71.
kṣatriyas, the audience was much wider and incorporated the entire tribe. Apart from the obvious ritual and religious function of the yajña its relevance also lay in its being the occasion for the redistribution of wealth, both from cattle raids and from agricultural production. Up to a point certain rituals had elements of a potlatch in which wealth was not merely redistributed but was also consumed. Both the redistribution as well as the destruction of wealth were directly concerned with claims to status.\textsuperscript{10} When the ritual was enlarged to include representation from other janas, either in the form of honoured guests or as tribute bearers, its function as a potlatch gradually gave way to its symbolizing status on a grander scale. The claims of individual lineages or their segments as descent groups could be established on such occasions, as for example the famous rājasūya sacrifice of Yudhiṣṭhira\textsuperscript{11} which raises a complex set of problems concerning the status of various lineages, not least among them that of Kṛṣṇa as the chief of the Vṛṣṇis. The yajña therefore stated, as it were, the ranking order of the lineages. The stories which related to these lineages became social charters recording status vis-à-vis other lineages, or changes of status, as for example from segment to confederacy, or the migration and fissioning off of a segment from a lineage, as in the case of the Cedis migrating from the western Ganga valley to central India.\textsuperscript{12} The record of such migrations was crucial not only to territorial claims but also to genealogical links with established lineages by those newly formed. The yajña was a conduit of gift-exchange as well where the wealth of the lineage brought as bali or tribute (initially voluntary and later less so) by the viś (clan) to the kṣatriya or the rājā, or else the wealth captured in a raid would be ceremonially used in the ritual and what remained of it would be gifted to the brāhmaṇas performing the yajña. The exchange was at many levels. Wealth was offered to the gods in return for the success and well-being both of the kṣatriya and the viś, the well being guaranteed by the brāhmaṇas. Tangible wealth moved from the household of the kṣatriya to that of the brāhmaṇa. Such a limited exchange was economically non-productive in the sense that it was self-perpetuating with little chance of breaking through to new social

\textsuperscript{10}Romila Thapar, ‘Dāna and Dakṣina as Forms of Exchange’, in AISH, p. 105ff.

\textsuperscript{11}Mahābhārata, Sabhāparvan, 30ff.; 34ff.

\textsuperscript{12}Mahābhārata, Ādiparvan, 57.
forms. But its actual significance lay in its being the operative process in maintaining the lineage society.

III

It was doubtless these fragments of eulogies (praśastis) on the heroes and the cycles of stories which led to the first gropings towards epic forms in India, referred to as the kāthā. Both the Māhābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa had their earlier and perhaps more truly epic versions in what have been referred to as the Rāma-kāthā and the Bhārata or Jaya. In their later forms, as we have them now, each of the two epics has a distinct locale and the narrative is woven around one of the two main lineages. Thus the Mahābhārata focuses on the western Ganga valley, referred to as madhya-deśa in the literature, and is concerned with the Aila lineage. The Rāmāyaṇa as the epic of the Ikṣvāku lineage has its nucleus in the middle Ganga valley, in Kośala and Videha, and is concerned with migrations southwards into the Vindhyan region, with Dakṣina Kośala perhaps providing the clue to the area of exile.

The epic continued to be recited, initially on ritual occasions; the Mahābhārata is said to have been recited at the yajña in the Naimiśa forest and the sarpa-yajña of Janamejaya, the Rāmāyaṇa by Lava and Kuśa in the Vālmīki-āśrama. But it also became the stock for court poetry, the kāvya, in the newly emerging courts of the monarchies of the late first millennium BC, or for that matter in more elaborate literary fashions in the courts of the various kingdoms of the first millennium AD.

The epic form carries within it the germs of a more conscious and less embedded historical tradition. Its historicity lies in the

---

13V. S. Sukthankar, On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata, Bombay, 1957; ‘Epic Studies’, ABORI, xviii, pp. 1–76; C. Bulke, Rāma-kāthā, Allahabad, 1972; H. Jacobi, The Ramayana (trans. S. N. Ghoshal), Baroda, 1960. It is a moot question as to how much of the original epic persists in the now heavily inflated and interpolated versions, which, despite the critical editions of both texts, still require substantial pruning to be brought anywhere near the original. The interpolations have been both of substance and form: hence the reference to the Rāmāyaṇa as a kāvya or literary poem and to the Mahābhārata as itihāsa, more closely approximating history, although the historical content remains internalized.

14This is in part reflected in the perennial search by archaeologists for ‘epic ages’. The financially flourishing ‘Ramayana archaeology’, even though with-
fact that it is a later age reflecting on an earlier one, the reflections frequently taking the form of interpolations interleaved among the fragments of the oral, bardic tradition. When epic literature ceases to be a part of the oral tradition and is frozen into a written form, reflections begin to tail off. The pastoral-agricultural society of the world of the heroes structured around lineage gives way to the more clearly agrarian societies and to the rise of urban centres controlled by what is visibly emerging as a state system—which in the Ganga valley at this time was mainly monarchical.

Many of the seeming contradictions in the stances and configurations characterizing the epics can perhaps be explained by these texts (and particularly the Mahābhārata), reflecting something of a transitional condition between two rather different structures, the societies of the lineage-based system and that of the monarchical state. Idealized characters are seldom the gods but rather the heroes who occupy the centre of the stage and the gods remain in the wings. Sometimes the earlier deities even come in for a drubbing.\(^\text{15}\) The importance of the heroes is further endorsed by their being almost the terminal descendants in the major lineages of the past, a matter of some despair for their death is seen as the wrapping up and putting away of the lineage society, which, in certain areas, was being replaced by monarchies. However, some elements of the lineage society did persist and among them was the continuation of varṇa ranking. In many areas outside the madhya-deśa, lineage society continued for longer periods and the transition to monarchical states was a gradual process. Nevertheless the change to


\(^\text{15}\) The treatment of Indra in the epics, for example, records a sea change from the Indra-gāthās of the Rg Veda. Indra is now subservient not only to the rising status of Viṣṇu but is unequal even to the superior power of the rṣīs. Leaving aside the deliberate incarnating of Viṣṇu as the epic heroes Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, there is little doubt that the heroes are now more central than the older gods.
monarchy meant a substantial alteration of social configurations.

Unlike myth, epic does not attempt to explain the universe or society. It is sufficient that the problems of society are laid bare, and even solutions are not sought since the ultimate solution is the dissolution of the system. Societies experiencing greater stratification require an overall authority to maintain the cohesion of lineage and strata. When such an authority comes into being and is eulogized, that eulogy becomes the dirge of a truly epic society. In laying bare the conditions in the transition from lineage society to state systems, a number of bi-polarities are reflected in the literature which give an added edge to the image of the past and the contours of the present. Thus grāma (settlement) is contrasted with āranya (forest), the kingdom with exile; the orderliness of the grāma is opposed to the disorder of the āranya; the kingly ethic arises out of governing a people and claiming land, the heroic ethic emerges from war and confrontation. The monarchical state is seen as the superior and is the successor to lineage society, irrespective of whether this is clearly spelt out—as in the conflict between the kingdom of Kośala and the rākṣasas in the Rāmāyaṇa—or whether it is left more ambiguous—as in the diverse assumptions of the narrative and didactic sections of the Mahābhārata where the Sabhāparvan, encapsulating the essence of a lineage society, stands in contrast to the Śāntiparvan with its rhetoric on the monarchical state. The new ethic is sustained in part by the popularizing of new sources of authority. Among them and significant to the political arena were the king, the brāhmaṇa and the rṣi. None of these were entirely new in that the chief, the priest and the shaman were dominant figures in lineage society. But it is the tangible authority of the king based on land as the source of revenue, or of the brāhmaṇa as the sole performer of and manual on rituals, and of the rṣi and saṅnyāsi as symbolizing an intangible moral authority almost as a counterweight to that of the first two, which gives a fresh dimension to their role and their interrelations. The changed situation is reflected in a shift in the kind of authority exercised. From a more diffused, equitable authority there is a movement towards a hierarchical, vertical authority. This was mitigated somewhat by the countervailing presence of the renouncer and the charisma attached to renunciation.

The epic as the literature of one age looking back nostalgically on another can become a literature of legitimation. Interpolations are often the legitimation of the present but are attributed to the heroes of the past. The bards were perhaps providing the models of what patrons should be like. But, more important, it is the kingdoms looking back on an age of chiefships: where recently founded dynasties were seeking ancestry from the ksatriya lineages through actual or, more often, imagined genealogical links; where such ancestry would also bestow social legitimation and validate kingship. That legitimacy and validation are essential to the epic is clear from the central event of the narrative, namely the legitimacy of succession, involving elder and younger sons and the problems of disqualification.\(^17\) Legitimacy also relates to using the past to explain the present. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this is the series of explanations in favour of accepting the strangeness of Draupadi marrying five brothers, fraternal polyandry not being a commonly practised form of marriage. Among the explanations is predictably a reference to an earlier birth of Draupadi.\(^18\) Fortunately the doctrine of transmigration, referring to events and situations in a previous birth, makes the use of the past more plausible. The interplay of the past and the present is thus not only part of the implicit epic idiom but is made more explicit by recourse to the theory of transmigration. At another level the past validates the present in the long discourses on what constitutes good government or the correct functioning of the ksatriya as king: perhaps best exemplified in the dying Bhishma delivering the lengthy moksadharma orations, lying on his bed of arrows. Legitimacy makes the claim to historicity more feasible and the association with myth is weakened.\(^19\)

\(^{17}\)J. A. B. van Buitenen refers to the problem of the ‘disqualified eldest’ in his introduction to the translation of the Adiparvan. *The Mahâbhârata. The Book of the Beginning*, Chicago, 1973, p. xviii. The problem goes back to earlier antecedents. Thus the Candravânsa lineage starts with the replacement of Yadu, the eldest son of Yayati, by his youngest son, Puru. The Mahâbhârata war, which involves virtually all the ksatriya lineages and becomes the last heroic act of a lineage society, is again motivated by the problem of succession where physical ailments further complicate the question. The exile of Râma is over the issue of succession, which, in spite of the heavier emphasis on primo-geniture, is still subject to the whims and wishes of the parents.

\(^{18}\)Mahâbhârata, Adiparvan, 189.

The gradual prising of historical consciousness becomes visible in the compilation of what came to be called the *itiḥāsa-purāṇa*. The phrase remains difficult to define, veering between the perceived past and historicity. It is described as the fifth Veda but was an oral tradition for many centuries until it was compiled in the form of the *Purāṇas* in the mid first millennium AD. The genealogical sections of the *Purāṇas* were a reordering of the earlier material in a new format. The lesser and multiple *Purāṇas* borrowed the format of the earlier major *Purāṇas*, although their contents differed. The *Purāṇa* was to become a recognized literary form. To the extent that it recorded history, it was initially transitional from embedded to externalized history. It was linked to the bardic tradition, where the *sūta* and the *māgadha* are said to have been its earliest authors. In the Vedic texts the *sūta* has a close relation with the *rāja* and was of high status, but by the time of the *Manu Dharmaśāstra* the *sūta* had been reduced to the level of a *sankīrṇa-jāti* or mixed caste. Doubtless by now the tradition had been appropriated by the literate *brāhmaṇas* who had also seen the potential value of controlling oral information on the past and recording it in a literary form relevant to emergent contemporary requirements.

There is evidence to suggest that the Puranic texts were translated from the oral Prākrit to the literate Sanskrit. The structure of the *Purāṇas* was an attempt to provide an integrated world view of the past and present, linking events to the emergence of a deity or a sect, since each *Purāṇa* was dedicated to such a one, the *Viśnu Purāṇa* being regarded as the model. The historical epicentref of the *itiḥāsa* tradition was the *vaṃśānucarita*, which, as the name suggests,

---

20 The *itiḥāsa-purāṇa* is referred to in the *Arthaśāstra*, i.5. Its literal meaning is 'thus it was'—*iti-hi-āsa*. The events of the past were to be so related as to link them with the goals and purposes of the brahmanical tradition.

21 The *sūta* and the *māgadha* are said to have arisen from the sacrifice of Prāthu, and immediately on appearing began a *prāśasti* of the *rāja*. *Atharvaveda*, v.3.5.7; *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, ii.4.1. In texts such as *Gautama*, iv.15; *Manu*, x.11, 26; *Nārada*, 110, the status of the *sūta* has changed. This change is made explicit in the *Mahābhārata*, *Ādiparvan*, 122.4ff. and 126.15ff., in which the *sūta* is inferior to the *kṣatriya*.

was the genealogy of all the known lineages and dynasties upto the mid-first millennium AD. It was not a parallel tradition to the earlier kathās and ākhyaṇas since it incorporated many of these forms of embedded history. The genealogical core pertaining to those who were believed to have held power in the past was carefully preserved after it had been worked out into a systematic pattern. This was because it not only purported to record the past but was also later to become essential to future claims to lineage status, and was therefore linked with historical writing. Evidently there was a need for a recognizable historical tradition at this time. In the transition from lineage to state, which was occurring in many parts of north India, monarchy had emerged as the viable political form.

The major dynasties recorded in the Purāṇas upto the mid first millennium AD start with descendants of recognized kṣatriya lineages, but by the mid-first millennium BC begin to refer to families of non-kṣatriya origin. Some are specifically said to be śūdras, such as the Nandas and possibly the Mauryas. Others, judging by their names, were brāhmaṇa, such as the Śuṅgas and Kāṇvas. The lesser dynasties dating to the early centuries AD are stated to be vrātya-dvija, śūdra and mleccha, and this is explained as the result of the inevitable degeneration in the Kaliyuga of all norms. Successor dynasties are frequently referred to as the bhṛtyas or servants of the previous ones, suggesting that the founders of dynasties may often have been administrators high in the hierarchy of office who overthrew weak kings. This may well account for the rise of brāhmaṇa dynasties. The gradual increase in references to śūdra rulers would indicate that political power, although in theory restricted to kṣatriyas, was in fact open to any varṇa. It required force and administrative control to establish a dynasty. Claims to territory were established through strength of arms. Legitimation through brahmanical ritual was evidently not required since some dynasties are described as not conforming to Vedic rites. This may well have been due to the influence of Buddhism and Jainism at this time. The Brahmanical refusal to bestow kṣatriya status on such families may have been in part due to their being patrons of non-brahmanical religious sects. Buddhist and Jaina literature on the other hand insists on the kṣatriya status of some of these dynasties. Thus the Mauryas are not only listed as kṣatriyas but are linked to the clan

11Mahāvarhaṇaśāṭikā, p. 180ff
of the Buddha, the Śākyas, which would automatically have related them to the prestigious Sūryavamśa as well.\textsuperscript{23} The absence of proper status in the brahmanical sources did not detract from the importance of these families. If anything it points to the relative independence of the state as a political form from the clutches of traditional validation during this period. The need for legitimation through lineage status was apparently not required at this time.

The encroachment of foreign rulers in the post-Mauryan period led to some indigenous families having to recede into the background. Claims to power and to actual status were conceded to the Indo-Greeks, Śakaś, Parthians and Kuśānas, but claim to varṇa status was denied them and they continued to be called vrāṭyakṣātriyas (degenerate), having no indigenous land-base in the subcontinent nor being able to claim kinship links with earlier established lineages.\textsuperscript{24} This was despite the fact that some among them did claim kṣatriya status in their own inscriptions.\textsuperscript{25} The lack of genealogical connections was a form of exclusion, effective in a society where ritual status still drew heavily on the values of a lineage-based social organization and where genealogical links had played a crucial role.

Although dynastic status was not confined to any particular varṇa, those who succeeded to kingship from the mid-first millennium AD onwards often observed the formality of claiming kṣatriya status, or at least of participating in a common kṣatriya past as embodied in the itihāsa-purāṇa tradition. The question may well be asked as to why such a practice becomes more necessary during this period, and the answer covers a range of possibilities. The making of land grants to brāhmaṇas and the consequent spread of Sanskritic culture provides an obvious reason. But it would be as well not to overlook the reality on the ground, as it were, and examine the actual process of state formation at a time when it related to secondary (if not tertiary) states, or new states emerging from association with established states. Land grants of a substantial size to non-religious grantees would have provided the base for the grantee establishing a network of political control over the area through his lineage connections.\textsuperscript{26} The partial brāhmaṇā ances-

\textsuperscript{23}Viṣṇu Purāṇa, iv.21–4; Manu, x.43–5.


try of some ruling families as given in their genealogies would suggest that even brahmana grantees were not averse to participating in this process. Where unoccupied land was still available and the migration of peasants feared, political control would be less effective if dependent on force and more effective if drawing its strength from legitimacy. The expression of power in the sense of controlling resources and seeking compliance through persuasion, influence and support\textsuperscript{27} would be better achieved by legitimacy than by force. The legitimation of lineage origins therefore became a necessity.

The granting of land, apart from its other functions, served also to incorporate areas under lineage systems into the society dominated by the state. Lineage-based agrarian activity was assimilated into the new economy and erstwhile clansmen or else their chiefs were converted into tax-paying peasants. Lineage traditions continued up to a point and could be adjusted to the varna framework, which acted as a bridge between the earlier society and its later form.

It would be worth investigating whether the process of state formation in the late first millennium AD provided a different emphasis from that of the earlier period. The overlap between lineage and state continued, but the political form was perhaps not so reliant on institutions of the state and included a more substantial dependence on lineage. Would it then be correct to argue that the post-Gupta state did not attempt to uproot the ksatriyas (to use the phrase of the Pur\'\=anas) and reduce the importance of lineage societies, but rather that it attempted to encourage the emergence of a new role for lineages through which it sought to extend its control?

With the kaleidoscopic formation of states in the post-Gupta period, new ruling families relied heavily on genealogical links, fabricated genealogies providing them with claims to being ksatriyas: claims which were carefully stated in the then legal charters, i.e. the inscriptions recording the grants of land by these families to brahm\'anas and other grantees. Such claims became even more crucial in a situation of competition for status among such families, where attempts were made to reinforce status by horizontal marriage alliances among the ‘new’ ksatriyas. Matrimonial links sealed the claims to status. Thus the possible tribal Gond and Bhil associa-

\textsuperscript{27}See Miller.
tions of the Candella and Guhilot ruling families did not eventually stand in the way of their claims to kṣatriya status, which were backed not merely by land-ownership but also by claims to genealogical links with the Candravamśa and the Śūryavamśa: the claim being recognized with marriage into other established kṣatriya families.28 The sixteenth-century marriage of a Gond rājā into the Candella family is an interesting example of how the system worked. The acceptance by other competing families of the origin myth and of the genealogy of the family successfully installed in power was largely because political power was relatively open and individual families were concerned with succeeding to power, not with altering the framework within which status was conferred. The narrowing down of legitimation to one family meant that others could aspire to the same power in changed circumstances.

The earlier states from the Mauryan to the Kuśāṇa tended to develop administrative structures in which local regions were left relatively untampered as long as they provided the required revenue.29 When revenue requirements became oppressive, peasants could threaten to migrate from the state and establish new clearings in the forest and on waste land. Migration was the alternative to peasant revolt and kings are cautioned against oppressive taxes lest peasants migrate. From the Gupta period onwards there was a gradual and increasing tendency to intensify the revenue demands and tie down the peasantry.30 The economic restructuring of the local region was regarded as part of the state's legitimate right to revenue. The ability of the peasant to migrate was hampered, and even though there is little apparent evidence of peasant revolts the earlier flexible relationship between peasants and the state would have changed—with the intermediate grantees playing the difficult role of keeping

28J. N. Asopa, Origin of the Rajputs, Delhi, 1976, pp. 102ff., 208ff.; J. Tod, Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, vol. i, London, 1960, p. 173ff. Asopa argues that 'Guhila' means a forest and that it is to be located in the area between Guhila-bala and the Mahi river. See also B. D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Origin of the Rajputs: The Political, Economic and Social Processes in Early Medieval Rajasthan', The Indian Historical Review, July 1976, vol. III, no. 1, pp. 59–82. Claims to kṣatriya status were also made by ruling families and politically powerful groups in south India. Thus the Colas claimed to be Śūryavamśi, the Pāṇḍyas Candravamśi, and the vel chieftains sought Yādava descent.


30R. S. Sharma, Indian Feudalism, Delhi, 1980.
the peasants tied since it was not only the revenue demands of the state but also their own revenue rights which were at stake. This points towards an urgent need on the part of grantees and landowners and clan chiefs, the potential ruling families, to not only insist on their high status but to be able to prove it whenever necessary. An emphasis on status, with the insistence on service by the lower orders inherent in the formulation of varṇa, became in some areas an adjunct to coercion by those who had succeeded in rising to higher levels of political power. The itihāsa-purāṇa tradition became one of the means of legitimizing status and the vaṁśānucarita sections had to be carefully preserved.

Lists of succession (vaṁśa)—whether of teachers as in the Vedic texts, or of Elders in the saṁgha, or of descent groups as in the case of the Sūryavarmśa and the Candravarmśa, or of dynasties—encapsulates the perception of the past. Genealogy as a record of succession lay at the core of the epic tradition and linked epic to embedded history as well as to the itihāsa-purāṇa and later historical forms. Genealogy is used by new groups in the descendant to legitimize their power and claim connections with those who were earlier in power. Links were therefore sought in the post-Gupta period by new ruling families with the Sūryavarmśa and the Candravarmśa, and the epics embodying the stories of these lineages were thus assured continuity, quite apart from the infusion of a religious dimension through the theory of epic heroes being avatāras of Viṣṇu. The less obvious information from genealogical data indicates kinship patterns, marriage forms, geographical settlements and migration.\textsuperscript{31}

The pattern or structure of a genealogy is often indicative of social integration where competing groups are shown through a listing of descent. Among these the successful ones claim a larger share of the genealogical structure, parallel to their claim to inheritance and power. In the Aila genealogy, for example, the Purus and the Yādavas claim the major part of the genealogy and the lines of Turvaśa, Anu and Druhyu peter out fairly soon. The ideological function of the genealogy is to legitimate those who have succeeded to power or to subvert the claims of those who for various reasons are unacceptable. That genealogy was of considerable consequence is indicated not only by the Purāṇas but also by

\textsuperscript{31}Romila Thapar, ‘Genealogy as a source of Social History’, AISH, p. 326ff.
other sources.32

The vamsānucarita section has three distinct constituent parts.33 The first is the mythical section of the rule of the seven Manus, which is wiped away by the action of the Flood. This is followed by the detailed listing of the generations in each of the two major lineages. The Ikṣvāku is the senior and more cohesive one. Descent is recorded only from eldest son to eldest son with a tight control over a well demarcated territory, indicative of a stronger tendency towards monarchy and primogeniture. The Aila lineage is more akin to the pattern of a segmentary system with a wide geographical distribution involving Northern, Western and Central India. Possibly it reflects a more assimilative system in which the segments are less the result of branching off or migrating away from the main lineage and more a record of alliances with existing clans. The spread of the Haihaya group in central India would suggest this. It might also be the result of an element of the ‘tidying up’ of lineages by the authors of the Purāṇas. Two sub-lineages among the Candravamsa are given pre-eminence, those of the Purus controlling the western Ganga valley and the more diffused Yādavas migrating to western and central India. The segments are all treated as ksatriyas, even though at times this status conflicts with the status assigned to some of them in other sources.34 Thus the genealogy was a method of legitimizing all those who had held power. However, they had to have performed the brahmanical sacrificial ritual in order to be included in the itihāsa-purāṇa, for those who were lax in this matter were either dropped altogether,


34 Romila Thapar, ‘Genealogy...’.

3Pargithr, The Ancient Indian Historical Tradition, p. 109ff.; Manu, x.8, x.23 refers to the Āndras and Sātvats as śūdras. The Āndras are identified with the Andhaka of the Andhaka-Varṇi group and the Varṇis married the Sātvats. Pāṇini, ii.2.95 and vi.2,34, refers to the Andhaka and the Varṇis as being ksatriya gotras. The events of the Mahābhārata suggest that the Varṇis were of a lower status, judging by the objection of some of the ksatriyas present to giving Kṛṣṇa the status of the honoured guest. Sabbhāparvan, p. 30ff.
such as the Licchavis, or like the Śākyas were merely mentioned en passant.\textsuperscript{35}

The *Mahābhārata* war acts as another time-marker and brings to the battlefield virtually all the lineages of the Candravamśa, and a few others as well, and marks the death of the lineages. That it was a terminal event is reflected in the switch to the future tense after the war, suggesting a prophetic form, and is followed by details on dynastic succession in the kingdom of Magadha, an area which emerged in fact as the most powerful kingdom of the Ganga valley. Descent lists now become king lists mentioning historically attested dynasties—Nandas, Mauryas, Śuṅgas, Kāṇvas, Āṇdhras, and so on, as well as the regnal years of kings. The genealogical record thus indicates a change to monarchies during this period, a change which was of considerable historical importance. Those dynasties which did not claim links with earlier descent groups such as the Indo-Greeks, Śakas, Kuśāṇas and Kṣatrapas receive short shrift at the hands of the genealogists. The Yavanas as a generalized term are described as the descendants of the Turvāsa, who, as a segment of the Candravamśa, become relatively insignificant fairly early in the genealogical listing.\textsuperscript{36} The entry of śūdras as kings, be they Indian or foreign, was of course seen as the inevitable consequence of social imbalances foretold for the Kaliyuga. The *vaṃśānuvarita* section therefore becomes a preservation of the record of social and political relations as perceived at a crucial historical moment, and incorporates much of what was believed to be historically accurate. This is put together in a distinctive structure which not only gives form to the past but also becomes a charter of sanction for existing social institutions as well as a potential charter for future claims to legitimacy and status.

Purāṇic literature, in the sections other than the *vaṃśānuvarita*, reflects facets of change which impinged upon the historical tradition. It comprises essentially assimilative texts where the Sanskritic tradition and the local tradition are sought to be intermeshed. This was inevitable in a situation where those of a Sanskritic cultural milieu received grants of land and settled in areas where the exposure to Sanskritic culture had been relatively sparse, if at all. Some degree of mutual interchange was required, even if for no other purpose than that of establishing dominance. The Purāṇic texts

\textsuperscript{35} *Viśnu Purāṇa*, iv.22.

\textsuperscript{36} *Mahābhārata*, Ādiparvan, 80.1ff.
with their various sub-categories are facets of this development. The culture of the dominant and of the subordinate remained distinct, but proximity and some degree of absorption smoothened the edges of an otherwise angular relationship in many areas. The rhetoric of the Great Tradition and the systematizing of substratum cultures, both of which are reflected in the Purāṇas, made the literature acceptable to the audience and useful in mobilizing social and political action.\textsuperscript{37}

V

A more clearly recognizable historical tradition is evident in the post-Gupta period, linked in part to the historical changes of the early and mid first millennium AD. The states of this period were territorially not as large as the Mauryan and the Kuśāna, for example. There was a multiplicity of state formation, particularly in areas hitherto regarded as peripheral or marginal and often characterized by a linage society. Many of these new states emerged as a consequence of the changes in agrarian relations in the earlier established states, when the system of making grants of land became current. These changes required new processes of authority, law and revenue collection in areas which earlier were either outside the state system or on the edge of it. The change was not limited to the political arena but also introduced new forms of a wider social mobility. There was a growth of sectarian religious groups, some of which professed a doctrinal cult (bhakti), narrowing in on an individual’s devotion to a particular deity; others which attempted to systematize more earthly cults of fertility and magic; and still others which remained loyal lay supporters of the Buddhist and Jaina sanāgha. It was also perhaps in part a reaction to this last group which motivated the increasing interest in an itihāsa-purāṇa. Both the Buddhists and the Jainas had shown a sense of centring their sects in avowedly historical events which imparted a certain

\textsuperscript{37}Examples of such adjustments extend even to the literal Sanskritization of non-Sanskrit names, and to the story which relates the event, e.g. the Śailodbhava dynasty in its origin myth relates the story of how a brāhmaṇa was requested to create a man out of chips of rock, and thus the ancestor of the Śailodbhavas was created, the story evidently explaining the Sanskritization of a non-Sanskrit name. R. G. Basak, History of North-eastern India, Calcutta, 1967, p. 211ff.
historicity and added to the intellectual strength of their institutions. The historicity of the Buddha and Mahāvīra was emphasized, major events in the history of the respective saṅghas were linked to political events and personalities, chronology was often calculated on the basis of the date of the death of the Buddha and of Mahāvīra. This point was not missed by other groups and in the latter half of the first millennium A.D. When Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva sects competed for royal patronage, they not only established monastic institutions but also introduced a historical dimension into the discussion on the evolution of the sect. It can be argued that Buddhist and Jaina sects arose as a part of counter-culture and therefore as groups in dissent had a clearer sense of their historical purpose. This is a partial explanation of a far more complex question: why Buddhism has a more recognizable sense of externalized history—a question which cannot be discussed in this brief essay. Be it said in passing that apart from considerations of eschatology and epistemology, all of which have their own significance, it is as well to consider also that Buddhism and Jainism were quite early on institutionally based and moved fairly soon to becoming property holders on a considerable scale. As such the records of their evolution did not merely narrate the life of the Buddha and the history of the saṅgha (with its various divergent sects, each claiming status and authenticity), but also described the building of monasteries, the amassing of property and the rights to controlling these—rights which became complex and competitive with the fissioning off of sects from the main stems. The sense of the historicity of the sect becomes evident even in Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects when they begin to locate themselves in āśramas and maṭhas and become immensely wealthy property holders, and when intensified competition for patronage has to be supported by claims to legitimacy—which require a substantial input of historically phrased argument.

Implicit in the genealogical form is the notion of time and chronology. The arrangement of events in a chronological order is less precise for earlier times and only when sequential causation becomes important does chronological precision enter the focus of history. Genealogical generations indicate time periods, as also do regnal years. The latter move from fanciful figures to more credible ones.

as the dynastic lists approach historically attested time. Thus the
cronology given for the Śiśunāga, Nandas, Mauryas and other
dynasties is feasible. The arrangement of chronological order
becomes more important as historical memory becomes less
embedded. The cosmological time of the mahāyuga and the
start of the Kaliyuga gives way to historical time.39 The accuracy
of historical time increases by the reference to dateable eras—the
Kṛta (58 BC), Śaka (AD 78), Gupta (AD 319–20), Cedi (AD 249),
Haṛsa (AD 606), and so on: and by the very precise dates recorded
in era, regnal year, season, month, lunar fortnight and day in
the inscriptions. The era, apart from commemorating an event,
can also be seen as a capturing of time, symbolic of an articulation
of power in a context where time is viewed as part of an eventual
point of destruction. The word for time is kāla from the root kal.
‘to calculate’, which suggests a meaning indicative of measurement.
Perhaps because of the cyclical theory it was also associated with
destruction in the sense of the end of time.

The inevitability of time is strengthened by the use of prophecies
in genealogies, for time is the ultimate destroyer, mahākāla. Cos-

39Cosmological time moves in the Mahāyuga of 4,320,000 years and the
complete cycle is then divided into four yugas; the Kṛta of 1,728,000 years; the Tretā
of 1,296,000 years, the Dvāpara of 864,000 years and the Kaliyuga of 432,000
years, the size of the yugas declining in arithmetical progression. The Kaliyuga
is crucial and there is a regular reduction by subtracting the length of the
Kaliyuga from each preceding yuga, an orderliness which is basic to the con-
cept. The numbers used are quasi-mathematical, a mixture of magic and astro-
nomy. Numbers such as 3, 7, 12 and 72 are considered magical and constitute
the fractions in the figures. Thus 432,000 = 60 × 7200, and this further intro-
duces the sexagesimal unit of 60, frequently used in ancient West Asia as well
as in South Indian astrology. The Babylonian tradition also uses 72, 1,200 and
432,000 for its chronology (J. Campbell, The Masks of the Gods, vol. II, New
York, 1959, p. 128ff.) and the Jyotiṣa-vedāṅga shows a familiarity with Baby-
lonian astronomy and mathematics. (D. Pingree, ‘The Mesopotamian Origin of
Early Indian Mathematical Astronomy’, Journal for the History of Astronomy,
1973, iv, pp. 1–12.) The figure of 72 years is taken to calculate the processional
lag moving over one degree and 432,000 is the basis of calculating the epicycle.
Was cosmological time the earlier and more popular astronomical knowledge
which was deliberately preserved in this manner, as distinct from the mathe-
matics and the solar-based astronomy of the period reflected in the more
formal writings of scientists such as Āryabhaṭa? As a contrast to these majus-
cule dimensions there are also the minuscule fractional parts of time listed in
Jaina texts of the late first and the early second millennia AD. Interestingly, the
description of the yugas and kalpas is spatial, e.g. Saṃyutta Nikāya, xv.1.5–8.
mological time is distinct from historical time not only by its mathematical pattern and the spatial form in its description, but also by its total orderliness, an orderliness which emphasizes its unreality. This in part might also explain the marginality of chilia-

stic and millenarian movements in such a pattern as compared to the Judaeo-Christian tradition in which they play a distinctive role. The coming of Viṣṇu as Kalkin arises out of an anxiety relating to the present—the wish to terminate the inequities of the Kaliyuga through Viṣṇu yet again being incarnated as a saviour figure. But such a termination is predetermined by the length of the cycle and will in any case lead to the ultimate ending of the cycle. It is more to the weakness of the eschatology that the marginality of millena-

rian movements can be attributed. The interplay of cosmological and historical time in the brahmanical tradition can perhaps be explained partially by the yajña and varna requirements which were part of the process of legitimizing families and cults. Cyclical time, it has been argued, goes counter to an eschatology which would point to a historical change towards a directed goal. Yet within the mahāyuga there is an emphasis on change. It is change rather than repetition which is inherent in the concept, and within this the explanation of change is also implicit.

The notion of change is even more central to the Buddhist concept of time. Because of the claim to the historicity of the Buddha there is a single, central point to which all events relate chronologically, namely the Mahāparinirvāṇa, the death of the Buddha. Buddhist eschatology envisages the extinction of consciousness in nirvāṇa, which, although seemingly negative, is the aim of human endeavour since it is a release from rebirth. Change within cosmological time is emphasized further by the cyclic movement of time taking the form of a spiral, in that the cycle never returns to its point of origin: and a spiral if fully stretched can become a wave, if not a linear form. The rise and fall within the cycle purports constant change and even the fall carries within it the eventual upward swing of the cycle, and this is conducive to the idea of a coming millennium, an idea envisaged in the Buddha Maitreya. This in turn is paralleled by decay carrying within it the seeds of the regeneration.

41Kalhaṇa, Rajatarāṅgini, v.21.
The precision of historical time as recorded in inscriptions probably derived from the more widespread use of the solar calendar from the first millennium AD. But it also had to do with the legitimacy of the individual in authority, for the inscription was frequently a legal charter. Not only was the authority of the king time bound in such charters, but so also was his claim to the property which he was donating inasmuch as later kings could revoke these grants in spite of the insistence in the inscriptions that they were given in perpetuity. An additional factor was the influence of the idea that all actions are conditioned by the auspiciousness of the moment when they are carried out, and in the case of donations and grants this would be particularly apposite. The multiple use of historical time focused on the individual and gave sharper definition to the individual as a figure of authority: an idea by no means unfamiliar by now in the historical consciousness of the period. A fuller exposition of this idea had come from Buddhist sources. Aśoka Maurya, as a patron of Buddhism, acquired an accretion of legends, some of which were gathered into the Aśokāvadāna. The attempt was to give historicity to the Buddhist saṅgha by linking it to a powerful political personality, a notion which was not alien to the emergence of much of the other non-Buddhist carita literature. The need to write the biography of the Buddha, buddha-carita, had been felt since the time of the early monastic movement and the first missions. It changed from being a part of the canonical texts to a separate genre of literature. Gradually the idea of biography was extended to the ‘hero’ in a wider context. A historical background is also helpful to organized missionary activity in new areas where antecedents have to be explained; this was useful to the entry

43 Some of the dates for inscriptions were provided by astrologers, and these include astronomical details. However they are not always correct. D. C. Sircar, Studies in Society and Administration of Ancient and Medieval India, vol. I, Calcutta, 1967, pp. 171–2. It is worth noting that apart from the legal charters, another sphere of life in which time was very precisely recorded was the horoscope. As a corollary to this it is interesting that an almost exact counterpart to the careful record of time in inscriptions is to be found in discussions on the precise time for conducting a yajña, where the time is again indicated in terms of the year, season, month, lunar fortnight, constellation, date and time of day.

44 This change is reflected in the difference between the Suttas and the Vinaya, where the life of the Buddha is part of canonical scripture, and Aśvaghoṣa’s Buddhacarita, which is a biography per se.
of Buddhism into Asia, as indeed it was useful to brahmanical centres in the more remote parts of the Indian subcontinent. The carita tradition doubtless also drew on the praśastis incorporated in a number of early inscriptions, such as that of Khāravela at Hāthigumpha and Rudradāman at Junagadh; a style which became more elaborate in time as evidenced by the Udaipur rāj-praśasti.45

VI

Those in authority seek validation from the past, and this validation was the starting point of a new category of texts, the vanīśāvalīs and the caritas of the post-Gupta period. The vanīśāvalīs were the histories of the ruling families in specific geographical regions, the latter often coinciding with the new kingdoms and states in areas previously either unoccupied or settled by groups of tribes. As a genre they lay between the lineage lists of the Purāṇas and the historical biographies of individual rulers. The carita or historical biography was a complement to the vanīśāvalī and focused on the king, who was seen as the centre of authority in a more radial state system. Bāṇabhaṭṭa’s Harṣacarita led off the biographical form and was followed by a large number of others.46 Most of the better known ones were written between the eighth and twelfth centuries AD, but as a form carita literature continued into later times, in each case commemorating the rise of new kings. The carita was unashamedly the eulogy of the patron, but the persons chosen were those who had a special status and function in the ruling family and were contributors of a more than ordinary kind, not only to their own families but also to the consolidation of kingdoms and kingship. The rhetoric of eulogy when deconstructed would doubtless reveal multiple relationships within a courtly edifice of norms and actions, and despite the ambiguity in presenting hard historical data much of the subtlety of historical nuance can be gathered from these biographies. Carita literature also focuses on other aspects of

46Such as Vākapiṭha’s Gauḍāvahō on Yaśovarman of Kannauj; Bilhaṇa’s Vikramāṅkadevacarita on Vikramādiya VI, the Cālukya king; Sandhyākaranandin’s Rāmacorita on Rāmapāla; Jayānaka’s Prthvīrājaviṣaya; Naya-candra Sūri’s Hammīra-mahākāvyā; Someśvaradeva’s Kīrtikaunudi, a biography of Vastupāla, who, although not a king, was a person of great political importance; and Hemacandra’s Kumārapālacakarita.
the individual in society. Cyclic time carries a certain inevitability but the individual can opt out of it, and on a lesser level this is demonstrated in biographies where the *karma* of the individual may play a larger role than the inevitability of the time cycle: and the individual *karma* and its historic role was central to the doctrine of Buddhism as well as the ideology of the *bhakti* tradition.

On occasion the subjects of the biographies were younger brothers who had come to rule (as for example, Harṣavardhana and Vikramāditya VI), and their legitimacy over other claimants had to be established. The royal patron was linked with the major lineages of the *itihāsa-purāṇa* or with a new lineage which had acquired status since then, such as the Agni-kula among Rajputs or the Nāga-vamśa among certain central-Indian dynasties. The *carita* was essentially a literary form in origin and thus a far cry from the bardic fragments of epic times. The most sophisticated courtly tradition found expression in this literature and the courtly values of chivalry, heroism and loyalty were at a premium. Two obvious characteristics of this form were the depiction of the king as the focus of the court and a clear awareness of a well-defined geographical area which constituted the kingdom and was identified with the dynasty. Obeisance is made to the lineage but it plays a secondary role in relation to the king who is now most clearly the figure of formal political authority in both state and society.

Political decentralization inherent in the granting of land on a large scale encouraged a competition among families aspiring to dynastic status. Dynasties survived through an assertion of power, legitimacy and recourse to marriage alliances with ambitious feudalatories. Attempts to restructure the economic potential within certain areas of the state and to balance the intricate relationship between royal power, brahmanical authority and the dominant religious cults of the region become a further support to power. The emphasis on territory had again to do with the jostling of new states and with the legitimizing of the economic and administrative changes which the system of land grants introduced into the kingdoms.

The *vamśāvalī* was the chronicle of a dynasty, and inevitably also the chronicle of the territory controlled by the dynasty. The *vamśāvalī* therefore used as source material the various local *purāṇas* as

well as the oral tradition. It became the characteristic literature of the new states in various parts of the subcontinent in the early second millennium AD. This is indicative of some elements of similarity in historical change, which in turn reflects a degree of cultural uniformity. These elements do not indicate the influence of one dominant regional culture over the others, but rather the expression of a similar historical situation, which, formulated in a certain kind of literature, was common to many regions.

The structure of the vaṃśāvalī was almost identical in all these regions. The earliest section narrated the origin myths pertaining to the region and the dynasty. In this there was a recording of local lore as well as a borrowing from the itihāsa-purāṇa tradition. Attempts were made to link local history with themes from the Purāṇas incorporating the myths and the genealogies of the Great Tradition with local persons and places. The Purāṇas were the prototypes and local personalities were the protagonists. This required the continued availability of the Purāṇas as sources from which the vaṃśāvalīs could draw. The major part of the text, how-

"The sources drawn upon by the authors of the vaṃśāvalīs included the sthala-purāṇas, upa-purāṇas, tīrtha-purāṇas, caste purāṇas and mūhātmyas, all of which were texts recording the past and the evolution of places, sects and deities, locations of pilgrimage, dominant castes and local history. Such texts were part of the larger Purānic tradition and, although conforming to the major Purāṇas in spirit if not in form, included a large amount of local and regional data. The oral sources consisted of bardic fragments and ballads on local heroes and events of significance, not to mention the genealogies and marriage alliances of land-owning families, for the bardic tradition was still alive, as it remains to this day. It has been argued that Kalhaṇa’s Rājataraṅgiṇī, a fine example of a vaṃśāvalī, was a unique document in that it was the only genuine piece of historical writing from India (A. L. Basham, ‘The Kashmir Chronicle’, in C. H. Philips, Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon, Oxford, 1961, p. 57ff.) Yet the vaṃśāvalī form occurs in various parts of the country—from the neighbouring Chamba vaṃśāvalī (Vogel, The Antiquities of Chamba State, Calcutta, 1911, A.S.I., vol. 36) to the most distant Mūṣakavaṃśa or chronicle of the Ay dynasty in Kerala. Gopinath Rao, ‘Extracts from the Mūṣakavaṃśa ...’, Travancore Archaeological Series, 1916, ii.1, no. 10, pp. 87-113; See also M. G. S. Narayanan, ‘History from Muṣakavaṃśa-kāvyā of Atula’, P.A.I.O.C., Jadavpur, 1969. Curiously in both cases the founder is born in a cave (guhā) and is associated with a muṣaka-vaṃśa (literally: 'mouse lineage'). A better-known cave association is of course that of the Guhilots of Mewar (J. Tod, i, p. 173ff.). For further lists of vaṃśāvalīs see A. K. Warder, Introduction to Indian Historiography, Bombay, 1972, and J. P. de Souza and C. M. Kulkarni (eds.), Historiography in Indian Languages, Delhi, 1972.
ever, dealt with more contemporary events, and a history of the ruling dynasty was narrated giving its genealogy and referring to important events associated with the dynasty. The veracity of this information can often be ascertained by comparing it with the evidence of inscriptions, since many of the grants of land were recorded on copper plates or on temple walls. Whereas the need for a vamsāvalī was motivated by the acquisition of power, the historically authenticated section would appear to coincide with the constitution of power, often articulated in the taking of royal titles such as mahārājādhirāja. Concomitant with this was the acceptance of responsibilities of power by the family. The authors of the vamsāvalīs were court poets and officials and were therefore familiar with political and administrative concerns. The vamsāvalīs would also be important to those who received grants of land in vouching for the legitimacy of the granting authority.

The vamsāvalī differs from the earlier tradition in that it legitimates a particular family and not an entire lineage, and to that extent the legitimation of lineage is indirect. The family was not seen merely as a household of agnatic and affinal kinsfolk but was the hub of power. It drew its strength both from claims to high descent as well as to property. Marriage alliances were controlled because dowry and inheritance were a part of the property structure. Such forms of the legitimation of families in power and of regions was of more immediate necessity to newly risen families in small states. The vamsāvalī therefore was by its very nature not a record of expansionist states. The major dynasties of the past, such as the Nandas and Mauryas, were not the models and only the very early lineages were considered possible sources of status. The appeal was not to the political system of the state but to sources of power which could back up the economic reality of aristocratic families with visions of dynastic ambition. It is significant that the caritas and the vamsāvalīs take up the narrative, as it were, from where the major Purāṇas leave off. The Purānic accounts of the ruling dynasties come to a close soon after the Guptas. The dynasties listed prior to these are mainly of the core regions of the Ganges valley and western and northern India. That the account was not continued in these Purāṇas was probably because there was a bigger distribution of centres of power in the post-Gupta period, and in each of such areas local purāṇas and chronicles of various kinds began to be maintained. These texts often incorporate both the
Purānic tradition and the local tradition, as is exemplified in those cases where legitimation is sought by reference to local myths of descent—as in the case of the Agni-kula Rajputs and the Nāgavamsīs of central India.

As a form the vamsāvali was not restricted to dynastic chronicles and was adapted to the history of other institutions as well. Some of these were monastic institutions where not only was the succession of elders chronicled but also their relations with political authority. This dynastic and political information pertained either to royal patrons of the institution or recorded relations between the institution and political authority, generally in the context of the institution establishing its own legitimacy. An early expression of this relationship is evident from the Buddhist tradition where monastic chronicles were a regular part of the historical tradition.49

In attempting to establish the legitimacy of the dynasties or institutions whose history they are recording, chronicles stress the uniqueness of historical events relating to the origin and history of the subject of the chronicle, with indications of its growth and change. Actions are directed towards a goal, often resulting in the success of the subject. Chronicles are therefore compiled when a dynasty or institution has established itself and is recognized as powerful. The chronicle helps to establish its claims to authority over competing groups, especially those which are politically important. The borrowing from the itihāsa-purāṇa tradition suggests continuity and also stresses legitimacy, for the new group is seen as being related to those who were in power in the past and can also claim antiquity by maintaining these connections with earlier lineages. The chronicle is again the statement of the successful group

49The Mahāvaṁśa, as the chronicle of the Mahāvihāra monastery in Sri Lanka composed in the mid first millennium AD, is primarily concerned with establishing its legitimacy both as the fount of the pristine teaching of the Buddha as well as in its interaction with political authority. Thus the Theravada sect, which was established in the Mahāvihāra monastery, is said to have originated from the schism at the Council of Pātaliputra, called at the initiative of Aśoka Maurya, and was established in Sri Lanka largely through the patronage of Devānampiya Tissa. Buddhist chronicles do tend to show a greater degree of historical determinism. Sri Lanka is predestined for the establishment of Buddhism. Events move towards proclaiming the primacy of the saṅgha. L. S. Pieris, ‘The Pali Chronicles of Ceylon’, in C. H. Philips. p. 29ff. This is further emphasized by the notion of causality and contract so central to Buddhist ethics, and by the historical role of the missionaries who propagate Buddhism in new areas.
and manages to deflect if not erase the presence of competitors. This becomes a particularly useful aspect of the chronicle in a society where not only dissent but even protest often takes the form of opting out or migration away, in preference to confrontation.50

If changing forms in the expression of historical consciousness symbolize historical change, and if changes in the political forms of society are reflected in the nature of historical expression, then the *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition would point to three phases in the unfolding of early Indian history. Initially, in lineage societies, historical consciousness was embedded and recorded the perception of the ordering of lineages. With the evolution of states in northern India the second phase was inaugurated, focusing on dynastic power and the supremacy of the state as a system which in the political arena seems to have overridden caste ordering. The post-Gupta period saw a change in the structure of the state, accompanied by the need in many cases for the legitimation of status of ruling families.

Historical consciousness in early India took a form which grew out of embedded history. Part of the explanation for this may lie in the fact that the *varṇa* ordering of society, which never fully coincided with a clearly defined socio-economic stratification, carried a large element of the lineage-based structure and therefore also the embedded history of that structure. Where *kṣatriya* legitimation became necessary, the *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition was strengthened with a drawing upon embedded history for origins. In such cases the past in relation to political power became a *kṣatriya* past. But at the same time it did not remain embedded. Although the origin myths of the dynasties recorded in the *vaṁśāvalīs* become something of a *mantra* or a formula, this should not hide the fact that despite the continuing idiom from the past there is a substantial historical core in the *vaṁśāvalī* which is distinguished from the embedded section, and which is therefore a break from the past and takes the form of historical consciousness expressed as externalized history.

---

Psychoanalytic Approaches to the Study of Ancient Indian Myths

KUNAL CHAKRABARTI

The theme of this essay is the psychoanalytical study of myths in general, which involves a certain detour into the theoretical apparatus employed, as well as a closer look at the psychoanalytical interpretations of myths of ancient India. I have chosen to review the debate on the nature of Oedipus complex—the paradigmatic myth of psychoanalysis—in the ancient Indian tradition. It is beyond the scope of this essay to question the feasibility of the use of psychoanalytic techniques for an understanding of myths, itself a still debatable point. I have taken this for granted in view of the fact that the flexibility of the psychoanalytical method can accommodate the limitless thematic constellations and the symbolic freedom of action in myths. I am therefore concerned only with opinions on the theoretical issues already in vogue, an assessment of the application of these to the myths of ancient India, and finally with tying these up with the historical perspective.

Myths became particularly amenable to psychoanalytical explanation after Freud recognized in his *The Interpretation of Dreams* that myths and dreams often work in the same way. A general connection had already been suggested by E. B. Tylor,¹ but Freud pushed it further and related the symbols of myths to those of dreams.² With the interpretation of dreams psychoanalysis took shape;

²Some of Freud's followers went far beyond their mentor in their enthusiasm to draw an absolute parallel between myth and dream. Rank and Abraham virtually echoed one another: 'myth... [is] a dream of the masses of the
similarly myths acquired a wider variety of meaning, with their symbols now interpreted in terms of the mechanism of the unconscious. Since then psychoanalysis and myth have come a long way together and most subsequent amplifications of psychoanalysis have shed light on, and thus enriched, the interpretation of myths.

The similarity between myth and dream holds the key, as it were, to an understanding of the processes through which psychoanalysis came to discover covert meaning in both. These similarities can be traced in three major areas of the functioning of the psyche. In myths, as in dreams, there occur (a) splitting of the personality into several figures, all of whom represent its characteristics, (b) duplication, where all the participants represent, in various situations and with changing nuances of significance, the principal characters, and (c) displacement, in which the affective treatment is transferred from the important to the unimportant.3

Thus in both these varieties of an involuted perception of reality4 the rebellious hero often expresses his hostility—which is really directed to his father—against a hated tyrant, and the image of the mother assumes multiple representations.

Yet myth and dream are not identical. The most striking point of departure for our purpose is perhaps that while dream is the concern of an individual, myth is a communicative message. It involves and reflects the norms and expectations of culture more explicitly than does the dream. The dream provides the model for the myth,5 but unlike the dream it sees the light of day. Myths


4Reality as an essential attribute of myth is recognized by most of the important authorities on the subject. However, for Malinowski this reality is cultural, for Jung psychological, and for Eliade spiritual. Victor Turner, ‘Myth and Symbol’, in David L. Sills (ed.), International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 1968, vol. x, p. 578.

5Even dream and myth influence each other. Dorothy Eggan refers to an interesting case where Sam, a Hopi Indian, was socially rejected in his community, but visualized himself as one of the heroes of the Hopi folklore, elaborated and distorted in his dream fantasy. This reassured him of a sense of
therefore may be said to occupy a middle position between dream and waking life, close to ‘day-dreams’, where a greater supervision of conscious thought in the ordering of events, choice of material and symbols is maintained. As a result a myth becomes a controlled projection of the unconscious, which is then reworked by the conscious mind to suit the needs of the individual and the demands of the culture.

Thus myths draw inspiration from dreams, they have a comparable structure of narrative form and are yet basically dissimilar. However, both of them converge on one point, i.e. they share a common language of symbols. A symbol is a pictorial substitute for something hidden, in which ‘sensory experiences are used to express inner experiences’. Mental processes fail to grasp reality and in order to represent it they are driven to the use of symbols. But, as Cassirer puts it, ‘all symbolism harbours the curse of mediacy, it is bound to obscure what it reveals.’ A symbol is necessarily difficult to comprehend for it attempts to signify something greater than itself, something ‘more than its obvious and immediate identity with his people and his dreams embroidered the Hopi mythology itself. ‘Here an interaction between mythology and dreams becomes apparent, for the dreamer not only uses myths modified by his own psychology in the dreams, but to the extent that he relates his dreams convincingly, he introduces new emphases and direction into Hopi lore.’ Dorothy Egan, ‘The Personal Use of Myth in Dreams’, Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), Myth: A Symposium, Indiana University Press, 1958, p. 75.


*Despite Malinowski’s reservations in this regard it is now generally accepted that myths express themselves in ambiguous symbols. Malinowski, however, makes his meaning clear: ‘there is but little room for symbolism in his [primitive man’s] ideas and tales’, and ‘Studied alive, myth is not symbolic, but a direct expression of its subject matter’. Bronislaw Malinowski, ‘Myth in Primitive Psychology’, Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays, Souvenir Press Ltd., London, 1974, pp. 97 and 101. In more recent times Leach, being true to the social-anthropological tradition, has denied unconscious motivational significance to public cultural symbols. See Gananath Obeyesekere, Medusa’s Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience, The University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 13.


meaning'. It seeks to portray reality by analogy. This, according to Godelier, is the principal characteristic of mythical discourse and it explains why myths become 'illusory representations of man and his world'. Myths express themselves in metaphors and metaphors are a primary form of discursive thought.

A symbol is therefore multivalent by the very obscurity of its nature and this imparts to the myths a kind of syntactic looseness which invites a variety of interpretations. That is why, assuming that there can be no monolithic theory for the explanation of myths even within the confines of psychoanalysis, one has to be extremely cautious in attributing meaning to a symbol. Caution is necessary in determining the criteria of this attribution. Dream symbols essentially pertain to an individual. A myth on the other hand is impersonal. It is governed by the idiosyncrasies of a culture. Culture is its point of reference; it lends to a myth its specific character and is the ultimate framework for determining the meaning of a mythological symbol. A distinction should therefore be drawn between personal and cultural symbols in terms of the operational significance of the latter. For, although both of these are unconsciously conceived, cultural symbols are subject to continual revalorization and reintegration into the cultural system. As a result, myths are never completed. They are adapted by successive generations to their cultural standards: in psychoanalytic language 'geared to the current


11Maurice Godelier, 'Myth and History: Reflections on the Foundations of the Primitive Mind', Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology, trans. Robert Brain, Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 207. In fact anthropologists have confirmed that the art and method of explanation among the aborigines are to find likeness between the familiar and the unfamiliar and to see and hear this is one of the most commonplace experiences of field work. Layton quotes W. E. H. Stanner, 'I can conceive this process of mind happening in the making of myth... it is an extension of the process by which one subject, an unknown, is likened to another, a known: the liking constituting a type of explanation'. R. Layton, 'Myth as Language in Aboriginal Arnhem Land', Man, vol. v, no. 3, September 1970, p. 494.

stage of psychic repression of the population’.\textsuperscript{13} They undergo changes corresponding to their social and historical context.\textsuperscript{14}

So myth is conditioned by history and has a history of its own. Irrespective of the method, the mythologist cannot dispense with the services of the historian. Yet Malinowski does not approve of the historian’s involvement with myths; he categorically states that it is no ‘branch of . . . history’.\textsuperscript{15} Curiously however his principal objection is that if myths are studied without the context of living

\textsuperscript{13}Patrick Mullahy, p. 90. Even Rank, who explained the remarkable uniformity of the contents of the hero myths all over the world by means of the theory of diffusion, had to concede, quoting Wundt, that ‘the appropriation of mythical contents always represents at the same time an independent mythical construction; because only that can be permanently retained which corresponds to the purloiners’ stage of mythological ideation’. Otto Rank, p. 3. Instances of reinterpretation of borrowed myths to fit pre-existing cultural emphases and superimposition of new sensibility on ancient patterns to meet the demands of a new social movement are amply scattered in the history of all mythologies.

\textsuperscript{14}However, for a proper understanding of the innate significance of both the cultural and the dream symbols, the context is as important, the only difference being that it is the history of the culture in the case of the former and the history of the individual for the latter. I will furnish two examples.

Elia
de, in laying down the methodological principles for the study of religious symbolism, has discussed the variety of meanings that the recurrent cultural symbol of the Cosmic Tree represents. He points out that it has been variously interpreted as \textit{imago mundi} or \textit{axis mundi}, as the centre of the world or its creative potential, etc. Elia
de says that the historian of religions will have to elucidate the reasons why each variety of this symbol reveals with a particular intensity or clarity certain aspects of the symbolism, and ‘in so doing he will be led to penetrate more deeply into the soul of this culture’. Mircea Elia

Hadfield has analysed the common dream of a man who is swimming against a stream and finds it requires all his strength to reach the shore. Hadfield has shown how within the confines of psychoanalysis this simple dream is open to multiple interpretations. For example the stream and water may symbolize the uterine waters to a Freudian, swimming against a stream may represent a masculine urge and the struggle for power and achievement to an Adlerian, and so on. Hadfield writes—‘An arbitrary choice of any of the explanations is obviously possible; for any one of them is a possible explanation. But it is only by a knowledge of the patient’s psychology and of his free associations regarding the dream, aided perhaps by a knowledge of what the symbols usually imply in mythology and in everyday life, that we can discover what the dream signifies in any particular case and for this particular patient.’ J. A. Hadfield, \textit{Dreams and Nightmares}, Penguin Books, 1974, pp. 172–3.

\textsuperscript{15}Bronislaw Malinowski, p. 146.
faith, their actual contention is never revealed. Evidently a historian does not have the opportunity to familiarize himself with his subject matter in the manner of an anthropologist, but even he wishes to achieve within the limitations of his discipline the same objective that Malinowski considers imperative for a proper understanding of myths. In other words the concern of both an anthropologist and a historian—despite the difference in the nature of their source of information—is to identify the socio-cultural context with reference to which the significance of a mythological symbol is finally ascertained. Unless Malinowski suggests that the entire corpus of myths which has come down to us 'from classical antiquity and from the ancient sacred books of the East and other similar sources' be abandoned, it is the historian alone who can meaningfully cooperate with the psychoanalyst in unravelling the ambiguity of cultural symbols enshrined in myths. For, 'ancient or not', as Barthes writes, 'myth is a type of speech chosen by history.' There can be no other explanation why cultures with varying degrees of sophistication have preserved their myths for millennia all over the world, orally or in written accounts. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss characterizes history as a continuation of mythology. He believes that 'in our own societies, history has replaced mythology and fulfils the same function, that for societies without writing and without archives the aim of mythology is to ensure that as closely as possible... the future will remain faithful to the present and to the past.'

Thus the psychoanalyst probes the unconscious motivational significance of mythological symbols and the historian provides him with the context. In spite of criticism to the contrary, psychoanalysts also admit that interpretation of symbols isolated from their context is not a valid exercise. But their subject of analysis is, more often than not, an individual. Therefore for a psychoanalyst this 'context is less cultural than developmental', and for a historian,

16Ibid., p. 100.
19See note 14.
I suppose, it is *ipso facto* less developmental than cultural. In the matter of studying myths, they complement each other.

Hindu experiences are articulated in terms of traditional symbols, and the myths of ancient India\(^{21}\) are replete with symbols ranging from transparent ambiguity to utter incomprehensibility. Unfortunately, despite the richness and abundance of material, studies on ancient Indian myths have remained rather simplistic. The aetiological approach, the method of comparative mythology, and such other prevalent modes of explanation are largely absent. There have been occasional attempts at structural analysis, but even some of these express bewilderment at the ‘intractability’ of Indian myths. Bruce Long, for example, concedes that the mind of the Indian mythographer conforms to neither of the Lévi-Straussian categories of savage or mythological, nor to that of modern or scientific minds.\(^{22}\)

The method most frequently applied to Hindu mythology is what has been described as the ‘text-historical method’,\(^{23}\) by which the earliest known source of a myth is traced out. While a few such studies represent precise textual scholarship, they hardly explain the covert significance of a myth. Some interpretations do recognize the primacy of symbols in ancient Indian myths, but these often attribute arbitrary meaning to them without reference to a system of analysis.\(^{24}\) As a result, such explanations can neither be accepted nor rejected. As regards the use of psychoanalytical insight, even the best scholars of Indian mythology have shown explicit indifference.\(^{25}\)

---

\(^{21}\)There is no equivalent term for ‘myth’ in Sanskrit. Consequently, scholars of ancient Indian mythology do not differentiate between myths, legends and other traditional tales recorded in the epics, *purāṇas* etc. Giorgio Bonazzoli, ‘Seduction Stories in the Brahmanavarta Purāṇa’, *Purāṇa*, vol. xix, no. 2, 1977, p. 321, footnote 1. In the absence of an unanimously accepted definition of the myths of ancient India I have also followed the same usage.


\(^{24}\)Conio, for example, is inclined to give ‘priority to symbols’, but when she equates cosmic tree with lotus, meaning ‘life and knowledge’, she does not explain the method by which she worked out this particular equivalence. Caterina Conio, ‘Relation between Symbols and Myths in the Cosmogonies of Mahāpurāṇas’, *Purāṇa*, vol. xix, no. 2, 1977, p. 281.

\(^{25}\)To cite but one example: Kosambi, in his excellent study of the myth of Urvaśī and Purūravas, writes, ‘Psychologists have maintained that “drawn
Psychoanalytic Study of Ancient Indian Myths

It is not surprising therefore that until recently psychoanalysts by and large completely neglected this rich inventory, although the psychological dimension of Hindu myths was observed by Zimmer as early as 1946. Zimmer’s assertion that the aim of Hindu philosophy is to transcend the limits of individualized consciousness and that the mythic tales—the popular pictorial vehicle of the wisdom of the philosophers—is meant to stir and feed the unconscious, went unnoticed. There appeared from time to time some scattered observations of a psychoanalytical nature on the Indian tradition, but the majority of these failed to combine theoretical rigour and clinical insight with a sensitive perception of the context. Carstairs’ book on the brāhmaṇas as a social group in the 1950s remained an

from the waters” is an old representation of just ordinary human birth. . . . Be that as it may, we do have two other supports.’ (Emphasis mine). D. D. Kosambi, ‘Uṛvaśī and Purūravas’, Myth and Reality: Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1962, pp. 58–9. I understand that for a Marxist of Kosambi’s generation psychoanalysis would be especially difficult to take in, but this attitude of distrust towards psychoanalysis still prevails with many historians of ancient India, irrespective of their ideological convictions. As late as 1975 R. S. Sharma, in his Presidential Address to the Indian History Congress, expressed his satisfaction at the fact that ‘the prospects of applying the psychoanalytical approach to early Indian history do not seem to be bright’, and added, ‘I have however a lurking suspicion that this will not deter the enthusiasts, who might try their hands at interpreting the numerous legends we have. In any case what is needed is not only an awareness of the various models that are being peddled in field but also their careful examination, otherwise we would just become middlemen and paraphrasers. I would rather prefer to be deemed old-fashioned than go in for the latest fad without assessing its analytical validity and social relevance. New terms are needed to express new ideas, but phrase-mongering should not be confused with advance in historical knowledge.’ Ram Sharan Sharma, ‘General President’s Address’, Indian History Congress, Proceedings of the 36th Session, Aligarh, 1975, pp. 3–4. Psychohistory will remain ‘phrase-mongering’ as long as ‘its analytical validity’ is not ‘assessed’, and it can never be assessed unless historians ‘go in for’ it.


26Mason has prepared a list of works that purport to be psychoanalytic about India and dismissed them in a body as ‘unrewarding’. J. Moussaieff Mason, The Oceanic Feeling: The Origins of Religious Sentiment in Ancient India, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980, p. 17, note 4.
isolated instance', followed by Spratt's somewhat disorganized study of Hindu culture and personality a decade later. But sustained psychoanalytic treatment of aspects of Indian mythology and religion began only in the last few years with the writings of Goldman, Kakar and Mason. A major work devoted exclusively to the study of myths is yet to appear, but their books and articles contain sufficient reference to testify to the importance they attach to ancient Indian myths (practically the only surviving indicator of the fears and aspirations of an individual within the social framework of a remote but crucial period) in their quest to discover the psychological roots of Indian tradition. My choice of the psychoanalytic treatment of the oedipal theme in Indian mythic tales is governed not merely by their preference for it, but also by the fact that it illustrates how context-free analysis can lead to a partial understanding of symbolic behaviour, and vice versa.

The fundamental problem with the study of the oedipal theme in Indian mythology is that it does not correspond in every detail with its European counterpart, as typified by the Greek legend of Oedipus. As a result Spratt observed an unqualified repression of the Oedipus conflict in Indian mythological tracts by the 'consistently narcissistic Hindu psyche' which allowed only one variety of the child-parent relationship—bearing a faint resemblance to an oedipal struggle—to surface: the passive son and the aggressive father. Spratt was correct in identifying the dominant and the most typical form of oedipal struggle in traditional India, but he overlooked the fact that the basic emotional content of the complex was more or less similar everywhere. If a rigidly repressive family prohibits its obvious manifestation, it will naturally seek other devious outlets. The processes through which the traditional Indian family came to acquire such a strict hierarchical structure and the reason behind them is a social historian's concern, but an awareness of this context is imperative to understand the diverse expressions of the oedipal theme in Indian myths. Ramanujan, who

31These scholars distinguish themselves from their predecessors in breadth and subtlety of analysis, but more than that in their sustained interest in the subject as reflected in numerous articles and forthcoming books.
characterized the submissive son as the ‘Indian Oedipus’,\textsuperscript{33} missed this too.

However, Georges Devereaux observed ‘a cluster of attitudes and fantasies’ centring round the Oedipus complex in Indian epic literature long before this negative, one-dimensional image of the Indian Oedipus came to be established.\textsuperscript{34} Taking his cue from Devereaux, Goldman undertook a systematic study of the problem and discovered, apart from the culturally sanctioned recurrent form already mentioned, two other closely related but typologically distinct varieties of Oedipus conflict in epic myths.\textsuperscript{35} The fact that scholars had hitherto been oblivious of their existence is, according to Goldman, due to their failure to perceive ‘the projection of most varieties of Oedipus triangle myths onto a quasi-familial, as opposed to a truly familial model’.\textsuperscript{36} Goldman therefore views the numerous struggles between pupils and gurus and the ubiquitous conflicts between \textit{kṣatriyas} and \textit{brāhmaṇas} as ‘displaced oedipal encounters’.\textsuperscript{37}

The first of these types, the one in which the son successfully attacks the father figure and through this achieves maturity and temporal power, closely approximates the oedipal situation in European culture. This variety is most poorly attested by individual myths in ancient India and virtually its only important example is \textit{Krṣṇa}. \textit{Krṣṇa}’s murder of his maternal uncle \textit{Kaṁsa}, a thinly disguised father figure, is in itself a sufficient indication of an oedipal conflict, but Mason has interpreted an episode found in the \textit{Hari-vaiṁśa Purāṇa}, subsequently elaborated in \textit{Viśṇu}, \textit{Bṛhadāvatā} and \textit{Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa}, which furnishes a classic case of oedipal struggle where aggression is directed from son to father and libido from son to mother.\textsuperscript{38} The story is that the adolescent \textit{Krṣṇa} came to \textit{Mathurā} to fulfil his life-task—the destruction of \textit{Kaṁsa}. Before the actual encounter he met an oddly beloved object of \textit{Kaṁsa},


\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 361.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 362.

Kubjā the hunchback. Krṣṇa removed her deformity, which must have given her some value in Kaṁsa’s eyes, and made love to her. Mason suggests that it is ‘not a myth of consummated incest’ but of successful ‘oedipal resolution’. By curing Kubjā of her defect Krṣṇa loosened her ties to Kaṁsa, took possession of her and killed him. This may be considered the only unequivocal instance of oedipal struggle, with all the necessary ramifications, in Indian mythology analysed so far, where the son emerges triumphant.

Kakar has also discovered a successful Oedipus in the myths concerning the early life of Krṣṇa, for example the Govardhana myth. In this myth the child Krṣṇa persuaded the villagers of Vṛndāvana to abandon their annual rite to placate Indra, the father god, in favour of a festival to celebrate the mother-earth and the mother-cow, their main source of sustenance. When the villagers accepted Krṣṇa’s suggestion, an incensed Indra let loose torrents of rain threatening to wash away the village. Krṣṇa lifted the mountain Govardhana on his little finger and held it above the earth as a protective roof till Indra’s anger was spent. The oedipal elements in the myth are apparent enough: ‘Krṣṇa survived the paternal menace of being ‘drowned in the urethral flood’ and retrieved his ‘dyadic intimacy’ with the mother.’ Even in the phallic imagery of the little finger, strands of oedipal fantasy of the newly-discovered identity of the male child is unmistakable.

Indeed, these two myths differ in their tonal intensity. The Krṣṇa of Mason’s analysis had already reached puberty, and through the murder of his surrogate father and the first genital encounter with the father’s beloved, assumed independent manhood, while Kakar’s Krṣṇa was still in his latency, eager to retrieve his intimacy with the mother despite paternal interference. The nature and outcome of these conflicts had necessarily to be different. But there is one ultimate point of similarity—Krṣṇa succeeds in his oedipal struggles.

39Mason substantiates his hypothesis that Kubjā’s physical defect enhanced her sexual attractiveness to Kaṁsa through a synoptic discussion of the theory on the nature of perversions. Ibid., p. 117ff.

40Goldman of course has analysed in detail the Arjuna-Babhruvāhana episode, the only unambiguous example of parricide in the entire epic literature. But Goldman admits that the story has been so rationalized that a deliberate aggression on the part of the son is completely denied. R. P. Goldman, p. 329ff.

In fact these two myths should not be treated in isolation; Kṛṣṇa acts as the positive oedipal figure throughout the purānic and the epic lore.

The second major oedipal tale is that in which the son launches an oedipal attack on his surrogate father and/or the surrogate mother and actually succeeds in his endeavour, but in the end is punished with frank or symbolic castration. Given the social context, this is an influential variety of oedipal myth in ancient Indian tradition and a number of such myths have been examined by Goldman. As an illustration I will present a summary of the oft-cited story of Indra’s attack on the chastity of Ahalyā.42

In the Rāmāyāṇa version of the episode it is said that Indra, being aware of the sage Gautama’s absence from his hermitage, adopted the sage’s appearance and approached his wife Ahalyā in order to have sexual relations with her. Ahalyā saw through Indra’s disguise but consented out of desire for him. However, after Indra made love to her, he stood in the relation of a naughty and frightened child apprehending discovery and punishment from his ‘father’. Gautama returned, holding kindling wood and sacred grass, ‘phallic symbols of the ascetic Brahmān’, and cursed Indra that he would be deprived of his testicles. The myth is unusually direct and needs no explication, except that the point of emphasis in the story is on the aspect of punishment, which is almost preordained. Once the sin is committed even Indra, the king of the gods, cannot escape the inevitable wrath of the all-powerful father.

The remaining variety of oedipal myths, in which the son anticipates and avoids a conflict and paternal aggression by submitting to the father’s will and thus in effect castrates himself, has already been mentioned. Sons of this type, such as Bhīṣma and Jāmadagnya, are generally rewarded in various ways, but the reward only emphasizes the dormant threat of punishment under which the submission is offered. It is the commonest of all the varieties of oedipal myths in ancient India and should therefore be understood as the most comfortable cultural solution to the problem. As such it deserves closer scrutiny.

Rāma Dāśarathī, the principal hero of the Rāmāyāṇa, is the axiomatic filial son of Indian tradition. Throughout the epic he shows an extraordinary degree of passivity and even complicity in actions

42R. P. Goldman, pp. 360-1.
decidedly to his own disadvantage, only to satisfy a perverse whim of his senile father. It is not merely that he is unable to manifest any meaningful aggressiveness in the face of his father, he actually displays a masochistic unwillingness to do so.

Goldman, in an article on the psychological and literary aspects of the motif of composite heroes in Sanskrit epics, has made certain observations on the personality of Rāma which help us identify the necessity behind Rama's seemingly inexplicable complaisance. Goldman tells us that Rāma is not so simple a character as he might appear from a superficial reading of the epic. Rather, his apparently uncomplicated devotion to his aged father is tinged with a certain 'ambivalence'. For example, he is not unaware of the discreditable reason for his own banishment and suffers from a sense of having been wronged. Yet he is eager to defer to his father's wish. Lakṣmaṇa, however, in response to the news of Rāma's exile, takes a strongly aggressive stance, the sort of stance that may be expected to underlie at least the unconscious level of the mind of a hero in Rāma's position. Goldman therefore argues that the complementarity of the personality traits of this inseparable pair has been deliberately devised by Vālmīki to contrast the dark and violent drives that Lakṣmaṇa stands for and the magnanimous and moral gestures that Rāma represents, which are but two facets of the same person. However, in traditional Hindu society many of these drives are held to be inappropriate for a heroic figure. Hence, Goldman observes, in the Rāmāyaṇa the promptings of Lakṣmaṇa as 'the spokesman of the unconscious' are, to a marked degree, 'suppressed in favour of the very highly developed superego of the idealised principal hero', Rāma.44 Thus Vālmīki was himself conditioned by the requirements of the society and formulated a culturally favoured model of oedipal resolution—the self-denying son—which in turn


44 Ibid., p. 167. We are reminded of Bettelheim's remark that 'Myths typically involve superego demands in conflict with id-motivated action, and with the self-preserving desires of the ego.' Bruno Bettelheim, 'Fairy Tales Versus Myths: Optimism Versus Pessimism', *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Penguin Books, 1978, p. 37. Bettelheim believes that mythical heroes offer excellent images for the development of the superego of the child, but not his total personality. In fact he cites the myth of Oedipus as a superb example of the inherent pessimism of all myths.
reinforced the social norm.

Thus the more recent psychoanalytic literature on the surviving body of Indian myths from the ancient period amply demonstrates the existence and varied nature of the oedipal theme in much of its richness and complexity. It has also drawn our attention to the source of the convoluted expression of myths. It now remains to be seen if these psychoanalytic findings have any relevance for the historian. Without going into the controversy about whether individual psychology has any social significance, and despite Turner’s interdiction, I believe these cumulative materials help us to understand ‘the modalities of social relationships’, particularly in the area of individual initiative and social control.

We have already seen that the father as the head of a repressive family tried to prohibit the oedipal impulse of the son. Kakar, however, has made an instructive observation on the role of the father in connection with his analysis of the Govardhana myth. He remarks that in Hindu mythology even oedipal legends close with a ‘characteristic gentle benevolence’; neither of the parties to the conflict is blinded, maimed, castrated or killed. Since fathers in Hindu families have never been perceived as terrible avengers, Kakar adds, that final irrevocable act of violence is simply not germane. Obviously it is not true of all cases; fathers did display severe harshness vis-à-vis their sons. But Kakar’s comment directs us to consider one possibility: society, more than the father, as an impersonal institution demanded absolute subordination from the son and tried to inculcate the value of conformity in him from his childhood. This was

44In the era of depth psychology, we must of course be attentive for signs of the Oedipus complex in a love that is powerfully idealised and at its noblest at a distance. Again the Jungians would have much to say about a union with a Great Mother archetype as a symbol of the union between conscious and unconscious components of the mind that precedes the wholeness of “individuation”. But these “depths” may be socially and culturally “superficial” if our focus of attention is upon modalities of social relationships.’ Victor Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, Cornell University Press, 1969, p. 163. But to the extent an individual is influenced by society, the processes through which this individuation is achieved are also shaped by social norms. In that respect the depths are not as superficial as they may appear.
45Sudhir Kakar, p. 152.
46Possibly Kakar’s clinical experience in India helped him to arrive at this conclusion, while the non-Indian psychoanalysts on Indian tradition had to rely more on the didactic version of the textual material.
in order to maintain a social structure which strictly demarcated varṇa and jāti-determined social status and which sought to constrict individual mobility in every conceivable way. The pressure of social expectation operated as much on the father to demand filial devotion as on the son to reciprocate it. The society recognized the aggression of the son and suppressed it as far as practicable. When its expression in the immediate familial context was tabooed, it was diffused and turned to surrogate figures such as kins, gurus and brāhmaṇa’s cows. This, though horrible and potentially as dangerous for the society, could at least be articulated within the culture. This explains why the epics and the puṇyas, the cultural norm-setters, are so obsessed with the fear of brahmahatya (the killing of brāhmaṇa) and gurutalpa (violation of the teacher’s bed).

Obeyesekere has offered an alternative sociological explanation of the myths which pass as oedipal stories, concealed or otherwise. Obeyesekere suggests that it is a ‘powerful historical theme’ of a ‘legitimate’ and ‘popular’ hero. It is not sufficient for traditional societies to have a popular hero born of the people; he must also be legitimate, born of the royalty. This is a biological impossibility. Hence, the second birth must be symbolic, i.e. watery rebirth. The son is banished in order to be reborn from and brought up by adoptive parents who are ordinary people. The hero returns home to retrieve his original position by replacing his royal father. Sometimes the father is killed, but this, Obeyesekere believes, is not required by the plot structure. It is merely a result of ‘psychic overdetermination’. The obvious Indian example of such a situation, and treated as an oedipal hero by Rank, is Karna of the

It is hazardous to generalize on the entire ancient Indian social structure. Apart from a very justifiable objection that avenues of individual mobility were not altogether blocked, even ancient Indian social structure with its myriad micro-level variations can hardly be considered a homogeneous historical category. I have criticized Kakar for using such blanket terms in my ‘Review’ of Sudhir Kakar’s book. See Studies in History, vol. II, no. 1, Jan.–June 1980, p. 144. But I now feel that when the entire corpus of myths of ancient India is being taken into account, such generalizations are unavoidable. The same principle applies to the use of such categories as the Indian or the Hindu psyche. It is valid to argue that there can be only an individual psyche. But if we admit of class or group psyche, then methodologically we are required to accept an Indian psyche as well. It is only a more generalized level of generality.

Gananath Obeyesekere, pp. 48–9.

Otto Rank, pp. 77–8.
Mahābhārata. The fate of Karna, however, does not comply with Obeyesekere’s explanation. Rather it affirms the fact that Karna’s caste and popular character by Obeyesekere’s definition barred him from his natural and moral rights.

It is not the son, not even so much the individual father, with whom the initiative to an oedipal resolution rested; the society controlled and dictated terms. That is why Kṛṣṇa the aggressive and eroticized child and the only positive oedipal figure in Indian mythology became the centre of a devotional cult, while Rāma was posited as the cultural ideal of a dutiful son. Kṛṣṇa’s philosophy of niṣkāma karma has influenced millions, but Hindu tradition has accepted Rāma as its epitome, not Arjuna who acted in accordance with that philosophy through Kṛṣṇa’s urgings in the great war of the Mahābhārata. No wonder then that Kṛṣṇa should have been lulled to sleep with the story of Rāma.51

However, in this analysis there is an implicit assumption which needs clarification. That Kamsa was Kṛṣṇa’s father, in the sense that he was the psychic equivalent of Kṛṣṇa’s father, is easily understood by a psychoanalyst, but a historian may find it difficult to accept this without a tangible explanation. I would therefore like to draw attention to a rather peculiar feature of the traditional Indian concept of authority, particularly at the familial level, i.e. a diffusion of the symbol of authority among relatives of the same generation and among close associates of the father, which together constitute and embody the concept of paternal authority to the son. This happens because of the existence of the joint family and the intimacy of caste neighbourhood in traditional India. The responsibility of the son is to submit to the father, to authority. If however the structure of the family is such that it admits of multiple members to paternal status, all these members enjoy an almost similar authority in the eyes of the child and function as the substitute of the real father as a figure of authority, particularly when the son does not get to know the father as intimately as in a nuclear family. This fact was recognized by the Dharmasāstras, which codified the categories and gradation of paternal status to determine the right to offer the pinda, in the absence of an aurasa son. Thus filial sub-

51 Goldman cites a twelfth-century work, Kṛṣṇakarnāmṛta, which says that Kṛṣṇa was lulled to sleep by his mother with the story of Rāma. R. P. Goldman, ‘Fathers, Sons and Gurus: Oedipal Conflicts in Sanskrit Epics’, pp. 384–5, note 173.
mission is offered to authority, which is collective. The father's pre-eminence is acknowledged not because of his social presence, but for his primary relationship with the child. This is the historical substance behind the mythological examples of father substitution, and it requires further research to realize its actual significance from the social rather than the legal point of view.

Whether these tentative suggestions can be considered depends on a satisfactory answer to the questions raised by Kluckhohn regarding 'how much credence one is prepared to give to psychoanalytic interpretation of latent content [of the oedipal tales] on the one hand, and . . . how many elements of the Greek myth one demands be replicated, on the other'.52 That there is almost no exact replication of the original Greek tragedy of Oedipus is proved beyond doubt not only by the Indian example but also by two other studies cited by Kluckhohn himself: Kluckhohn points out that, the forty-eight oedipal myths in the Euro-Asiatic area analysed by Rank and Raglan do not show a very striking fit in detail, and out of several thousand Oceania narratives of the oedipal variety examined by Lessa none meets all three of his major criteria—prophecy, parricide and incest.

But the question of the interpretation of latent content leads us to a more fundamental criticism voiced by Dorson53 and shared by many in the field of mythology such as Campbell,54 Ruthven55 and


54'The manner of homologizing the personal and the universal, which is a basic method of mythological discourse, has made it possible for Freudian psychoanalysts whose training in the language of symbols has been derived from a study primarily of neurotics, to translate the whole cultural inheritance of mankind back into nursery rhymes . . . But in the reading of the myth such a reductive method commits us to the monotony of identifying in every symbolic system only the infantile sources of its elements, neglecting as merely secondary the historical problem of their reorganization.' Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology, Penguin Books, 1976, pp. 64–5. Campbell, however, is not totally inimical to the use of psychoanalytical insight and seems to be more favourably disposed towards Jungian archetypes. As a result, even he has not been spared by Dorson, 'He [the folklorist] can admire the symmetrical structure reared by Joseph Campbell from many disparate materials, but the folk literatures that occupy him cannot all be prettily channelled into the universal monomyth.' Richard M. Dorson, p. 286.

55'The whole theory strikingly illustrates what Whitehead used to call the
others, namely that the language of the unconscious is 'conjectural and inconclusive' and that psychoanalysts exploit mythic and folk tales for their own a priori assumptions. Dorson has chosen the myth of Oedipus to illustrate his point. Dorson states with barely suppressed contempt that just as celestial mythologists wrangled over the sun, storms and stars, so now psychoanalytical mythologists dispute over symbols from the unconscious. In the solar orthodoxy of Cox, Oedipus was the sun hero who defeated the schemings of the thundercloud Sphinx and reunited with his mother, Jocasta, the dawn. In the hands of Freud he became the symbol of wish fulfilment of our childhood goals, in Jung an ethical conflict between life-task and psychic laziness, and in Fromm a social contradiction between patriarchy and matriarchy. ‘The tortured interpretations differ widely from each other’, says Dorson, and asks, ‘which is right?’

Apart from the internal consistency and application to a historical situation, I cannot assess any other aspect of psychoanalytic theory—neither the premises involved in the original formulations of Freud nor the subsequent adornments that followed as corollaries. I therefore accept the prevailing psychoanalytical position that oedipal conflicts are inescapable if one is born and raised as a child of two parents. These are universally reflected in the traditional tales of all societies. If however a literal duplication of the paradigmatic version of the myth is not found in the mythological heritage of a culture, I logically assume that for some historical reasons the symbolic expression of the theme has been further obfuscated by means of secondary elaborations. Thus, when the same symbol is variously used to express different cultural overtones, there can never be one ‘right’ interpretation of it. But within the frame of a defined system of analysis a chain of symbols acquires a coherent relatedness and a proper appreciation of the context narrows the range of their possible meanings, lending greater justification to a particular interpretation. Therefore, in response to the criticism of Kluckhohn, Dorson and others, I can only reiterate that in the final analysis only the historical context can help decide

---

Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness, for Jung’s “collective unconscious” is no more empirically verifiable than Noam Chomsky’s “deep structure”, which similarly appears to explain everything except itself.’ K. K. Ruthven, Myth, The Critical Idiom 31, Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1979, p. 21.

56 Richard M. Dorson, p. 286.
which interpretation is more acceptable than the rest.

Interpretations of symbols do differ widely: this is true not merely
of psychoanalysis but of any other method. For instance structural-
ism, the other major theoretical apparatus for the interpretation of
myths, has been lumped together with psychoanalysis and equally
condemned for being 'deterministic'\(^57\) in attributing a meaning to a
symbol. Structuralism has been described as 'formal'\(^58\) and psycho-
analysis 'transhistorical'\(^59\) for similar reasons. Hence I feel that the
problem does not lie with the method but with the subject of
analysis, the symbols themselves. Symbols are abstract images;
society manipulates them to suit the needs of specific historical
situations. Psychoanalysis is not transhistorical; it is the images, as
Eliade puts it, which 'provide “openings” into a transhistorical
world'. 'Thanks to them', Eliade continues, 'the different “histories”
can inter-communicate'.\(^60\) If the combined effort of the psycho-
analyst and the historian succeeds in identifying some of the
dominant concerns of mankind preserved in their mythologies,
irrespective of the degree of generalization necessary to achieve it,
the effort is worthwhile.

---

\(^57\) Both psychoanalysts—Jung more than Freud—and structuralists are
determinists, but their determinism is of a different nature. For Freud it is the
sexual meaning of a number of symbols that is determined; for the structuralist,
it is the underlying structure.' Gabriella Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi, 'Reply' to the
comments on her paper, p. 65.

\(^58\) 'Structuralist quest for meaning is largely confined to the formal relations
of mythical structures without explicit reference to historical, social or cultural
contexts.' Wendell Charles Beane, *Myth, Cult and Symbols in Śākta Hinduism: A

\(^59\) 'Freud's analysis of the psyche created an independent, transhistorical
mechanism, based not on cultural history, but on biological conception of
man. . . . Jung's theory of the “collective unconscious” enabled him to regard
the foundation of mythical images as positive and creative, in contrast with
Freud's negative evaluation. . . . In principle, however, these images that make
up myths, are, like Freudian mechanism, transhistorical.' The New Encyclo-

\(^60\) Mircea Eliade, 'Symbols and Cultures', Wendell C. Beane and William
Torchbooks, 1976, p. 97.
The Intellectual History of Colonial India: Some Historiographical and Conceptual Questions*

K. N. PANIKKAR

Intellectual history with a viable degree of autonomy or as an integrative tool is yet to become a part of Indian historiography. Till now it has remained confined to the study of the political, social or economic thought of a person or a period, or of ideas in an ancient or medieval text. Even biographies, until recently, have not been intellectual portraits of men in society or detailed life histories basic to the craft of prosopographers. The 'new history' initiated by James Harvey Robinson in the United States or the methodological innovation of Perry Miller in his *New England Mind*, which established 'intellectual history' as a distinct branch of the discipline, hardly had any impact on Indian historiography. Not that the subject matter of this genre of history was anything new; in fact problems which fall within the domain of intellectual history have always been the concern of historians. The departure was in the methodology employed. For instance the influence of religious beliefs and attitudes on social life and social action did form the

*Chronologically this essay focuses mainly on the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, though certain intellectuals of the later period also fall within the purview of analysis.

subject of several studies before Miller. But what distinguished Miller’s treatment from that of his predecessors, like Troeltsch, was its ability to demonstrate the interdependent character of intellectual activities and to show how changes in one intellectual domain lead to a realignment of thought in other realms as well.

Perry Miller and a host of others who followed him adopted an internal approach, an idealist view of intellectual history, concerned mainly with the logical consistency of a sequence of thought, the elaboration of a world view or the influence of an idea in further intellectual advance. In essence the focus was on the creative vitality of the human mind. It divorced ideas from events and social reality and systematized them only in the context of ideas. This method reduced intellectual history either to the history of intellectuals or to the history of ideas as such within a general theoretical and philosophical assumption of the primacy of ideas.

An external approach, a functional view of intellectual history, on the other hand, emphasized the connection between thought and deed. By treating ideas merely as a series of responses to given situations it tended to overlook the creative potential and innovative ability of the human mind. The emphasis here being on the dynamics of social activity, ideas were only of secondary importance. Given that functional utility was the yardstick for measuring the historical significance of ideas, their importance was judged by the deeds associated with them.

Admittedly, intellectual history cannot afford to overlook the notions inherent in both these approaches.

What is required, however, is not an eclectic combination of both, but a methodology which, without being either idealist or reductionist, would help to comprehend how individually differentiated thought emerges in the concrete setting of an historical-social situation. In other words a methodology based on the conception that ‘the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life…’, and that ‘consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life process’. To establish how ideas are ‘directly interwoven’ with, but not mere reflections of or determined by ‘the material activity and the material inter-
course of men’ is methodologically a difficult and challenging task. It forms a part of the theoretical considerations regarding the relationship between base and superstructure and of the various elements of the latter.

In the light of the general proposition above this essay attempts to suggest a conceptual framework for the study of some aspects of the intellectual history of colonial India. By focusing on the perception of reality, it seeks to explore the relationship between ideology and consciousness in the complex cultural-intellectual situation that came into being in the nineteenth century. Neither the nature of perception nor the contours of consciousness, it is argued, could be explained solely by the political and economic context of colonial domination. Equally vital are the cultural-intellectual processes, particularly those emerging from the cultural-intellectual struggles engendered by the desire to create an ideological base of a modern society, distinct from the traditional and the colonial. Identifying the protagonists of these struggles as well as locating their social base and formative influences are dimensions crucial to an understanding of this process.

A critique of the existing historiography, which forms the first part of this essay, underlines issues which have so far remained outside the domain of the history of ideas in the nineteenth century. The second section explores the formative influences, both intellectual and social, and tries to examine the validity of the generally accepted notion of a direct relationship between Western influence and intellectual commitment as well as of characterizations like ‘conservatives’, ‘reformers’ and ‘radicals’ on the basis of their intellectual make-up. Another aspect relevant to this discussion is the representative character of the intellectual, either of his own class or of the class which forms his social base. An exhaustive examination of this dimension has not been attempted, nor is it possible within the limitation of this essay; yet it is suggested that the comprador-collaborator outfit hardly suits the Indian situation.

The third section highlights the nature of perception of social, political and economic reality and demonstrates how it contributed to the evolution of anti-colonial consciousness. The basic assumption of this treatment is that intellectual endeavour in the nineteenth century was an integral part of the struggle to grasp the reality of subjection. As such, compartmentalizations on the basis of the dominant activity, either socio-religious or political, has to be dis-
pensed with if the process by which the consciousness came into being is to be comprehended.

The final section is concerned with the role of cultural elements in the making of social and intellectual perspectives. The foray into the cultural terrain is influenced by an unease with the notion of religious revivalism and conservatism as the motivating urge in the nineteenth-century effort of self-strengthening and revitalizing social institutions. By recognizing the existence of a ‘consciousness’ regarding other elements relating to language and certain social practices, the concept of cultural defence has been suggested as an alternative. The implications of this concept for understanding intellectual attitudes would require very detailed consideration. What is offered here is only a preliminary statement.

The development of consciousness, dominant or contending, in a society forms one of the major problems of its intellectual history. In colonial India, notwithstanding the existence of different streams of contending consciousnesses based on contradictions within the society, the dominant strand was the growth of an anti-colonial consciousness. The early manifestation of this consciousness was not necessarily in the realm of politics. In fact, given that the institutions of the colonial state were not more retrogressive than the precolonial, it found its initial expression in the realm of ideology and culture. Whether this pre-political and overtly but not inherently non-political phase was an important link in the historical process which gave rise to anti-colonial consciousness, and if so how, are themes which have not been within the focus of historical investigation. The manner in which the cultural-ideological struggle

The importance of culture in national liberation movements has found forceful expression in Amilcar Cabral. He wrote: 'Study of the history of liberation struggles shows that they have generally been preceded by an upsurge of cultural manifestations, which progressively harden into an attempt, successful or not, to assert the cultural personality of the dominated people by an act of denial of the culture of the oppressor. Whatever the conditions of subjection of a people to foreign domination and the influence of economic, political and social factors in the exercise of this domination, it is generally within the cultural factor that we find the germ of challenge which leads to the structuring and development of the liberation movement.' Unity and Struggle, London, 1980, p. 143. (Emphasis added).
in the nineteenth century was a part of, and not distinct from or only contributory to, the dominant consciousness, therefore seems to have escaped notice.

The cultural-ideological struggle in colonial India had two mutually complementary facets. The first was directed against the backward elements of tradition, culture and ideology and was expressed in the reformation and regeneration of socio-religious institutions. The second was an attempt to contend with colonial culture and ideology. The first formed a part of the second; what gave birth to the first was an awareness of the inadequacies of traditional institutions to cope with the new situation created by colonial intrusion. The intellectual debate in China, Japan and the West Asian countries articulated this awareness, and so implicitly (during the early phase) did the attitude of Indian intellectuals. While in countries such as China and Japan the question of revitalization of indigenous institutions was linked with political destiny from the very beginning of the colonial thrust, in India the perception of this connection was slow in maturing. Yet the socio-cultural consciousness generated by revitalization movements was not altogether divorced from the evolving dominant consciousness, for the latter comprehended within it the socio-cultural crisis created by colonial domination.

The influences of European thought and knowledge as the decisive factor in the making of the cognition of socio-cultural reality and the idea of progress in colonial India has been an assumption common to the bulk of the existing literature on the history of ideas. They are viewed as acculturative, arising from the contact of indigenous cultures or subcultures with that of industrial Europe, leading to cultural plasticity and a creative synthesis. The analytical frameworks derived from this assumption do not seem to be sensitive to the fact that the difference in power was a major constraint on cultural-intellectual adaptation, nor to the fact that Western ideas, which filtered through the medium of colonialism, did not have the same progressive function as at their sources. Thus to J. N. Farquhar, R. C. Majumdar and Charles Heimsath, English education and the Western impact were key factors which brought about a socio-cultural and intellectual regeneration; to Salahuddin Ahmad and

---

David Kopf British institutions provided the push. ‘The stimulating forces’, wrote Farquhar, ‘are almost exclusively Western, viz. the British Government, English education and literature, Christianity, oriental research, European science and philosophy, and the material elements of Western civilization’. Charles Heimsath attributed not only ideas but even the methods of organization adopted by Indians to Western inspiration. David Kopf has tried to demonstrate how Fort William College, the institution created for training British officials, played a decisive role in ‘the social, cultural, psychological and intellectual changes’ in Bengal in the nineteenth century. The Bengal Renaissance to him was ‘a result of the contact between British officials and missionaries on the one hand and the Hindu intelligentsia on the other’. The social, intellectual and cultural regeneration is thus traced directly to Western influences on the Indian mind through colonial rule. Most of the historical writings on nineteenth-century India which deal with social reform, the emergence of new ideas and the rise of nationalism follow this strait-jacket explanation.

The image of the occident and what the occident meant to the Indian mind, as distinct from the general and descriptive ‘Western influence’ and ‘Western impact’, is of crucial significance in this context. European rational and humanist thought, scientific knowledge, economic development and political institutions were conceived by Indian intellectuals as progressive characteristics of the West. While these objective progressive attributes of Western society were looked upon with admiration and approval and compared with conditions in India, there was no appreciation of the social and intellectual forces which made these advances possible. In other words, the focal point of interest was what was objectively superior and progressive in the West and not what led to that objective situation. Therefore the intellectual endeavour, at least to begin with, was to a certain extent involved with the adoption and replication of these objectively superior and progressive attributes:

naturally no attempt was made to test their adaptability in the context of indigenous cultural and intellectual traditions. That the English-educated middle class, alienated from mass culture and placed almost totally outside the traditional intellectual milieu, formed the social base of this quest made it all the more restricted. Moreover, since the objective attributes of the West were divorced from the historical forces which went into their making, colonial power, as a representative of the West’s progress and achievement, assumed ideological dimensions for Indians. What was objective about the West, in the context of colonialism, became an illusion, an ideology. This inversion negated the possible genesis of an indigenous body of thought to cope with the problems faced by Indian society. The scramble for Tom Paine in Calcutta, the intellectuals’ addiction to Mill, Spencer and Locke, the admiration for European political ideas and institutions, the approach to Western science and technology, and a host of other examples right down to the shaping of the Indian Constitution are indicative of this. How Indians in the nineteenth century arrived at this intellectual position can be appreciated only by a study of the role of colonial ideology, an area still outside the concern of Indian intellectual history.

What were the implications of the objectively advanced Western knowledge, political ideas and social thought to the Indian mind labouring under the disadvantages inherent in a colonial situation. An unequal political relationship, along with the economic exploitation and stagnation that goes with it, is hardly ideal for creative intellectual adaptation of an enduring nature. Conventional historiography, mostly caught within the ‘impact-response’ syndrome—whether emphasizing the Western impact or the Indian response—is not sensitive to this question. It merely follows the path chalked out by colonial ideologues who saw Britain’s role as a civilizing mission. For instance, writing about the Western impact, R. C. Majumdar observed:

A new ideology suddenly burst forth upon the static life, moulded for centuries by fixed sets of religious ideas and social conventions. It gave birth to a critical attitude towards religion and a spirit of enquiry into the origin of state and society with a view to determining their proper scope and function.\

An appreciation of the inherently different functions of Western

*R. C. Majumdar, p. 89.
ideas at their sources and in the colonies is the initial step necessary for a departure from this trend. A recognition of the differences in the nature of social formation and the character of political institutions in the metropolis and colony is equally vital. Given these differences there could be no convergence in the socio-political role of liberal principles and institutions shaped by them when superimposed on the colonies. This has two specific consequences; functional mutation and functional debility. The role of orientalism and utilitarianism in colonial societies, distinct from their basic intellectual quest, is an example of the first. The Indian intellectuals’ efforts at modernization, which were blighted by the very weaknesses inherent in their historical situation, was indicative of the second. To certain aspects of these consequences attention was first drawn by D. P. Mukherjee in his seminal study of modern Indian culture.9 A few years later Susobhan Sarkar’s pioneering essays on the Bengal Renaissance, while recognizing the role of the West in the Indian awakening, emphasized that ‘foreign conquest and domination was bound to be a hindrance rather than a help to subject people’s regeneration’.10 In pointing out that imperialism ‘raised barriers in the Indian mind against critical ideas from the West because these ideas came from the sources that were holding India down’, A. K. Bhattacharya identified another important dimension.11 More recent researches in this area by Marxist scholars have tried to place intellectual developments within the context of the constraints and contradictions generated by colonialism.12 Asok


Sen’s study of the life and work of Vidyasagar has brought out admirably the consequences of this context:

Vidyasagar was a victim of the illusions which he shared with his stage of history, about the prospects of modernization under colonial rule. The very process, which gave his genius a strong social commitment, imposed severe limits on effective social practice. Such limits were inherent in the economic directions of imperialism. This is where the colonial situation made a grievous anomaly of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, a significant individual among our first ‘moderns’, of his existential need for social integrity of self-development.¹³

Marxist historiography has primarily attempted to demonstrate how politico-economic structures had warped intellectual developments in nineteenth-century India. Though tending to be reductionist and deterministic at times, it does define the parameters of intellectual endeavours and thus explains why intellectuals in the nineteenth century had to face certain defeat and tragedy in their socio-cultural efforts. While it marked a distinct departure from earlier colonial and liberal historiographical trends and assumptions, it does not indicate how intellectual perceptions and positions were arrived at. This can be seen only when the analytical focus is on processes within the given historical context. The context as such does not explain the essentials of a particular phenomenon, it only defines its general character. The emphasis on context, though important, has tended to blur this distinction.

II

The ideas articulated by intellectuals which historians have tended to write about are not the only concern of intellectual history, which embraces the moods, beliefs, values and thoughts of members of all social strata. For instance, a peasant’s or an industrial worker’s perception of his situation in society, as well as the way in which the rationalization of primordial beliefs or the internalization of a given ideology contributes to the making of his consciousness and to his ability to struggle for emancipation, are very much within the domain of intellectual history. They are, however, not counterposed to the hitherto popular emphasis on the creators, reproducers

¹³Asok Sen, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, p. 154.
and propagators of relatively enduring and effective ideas in society. Nor do they by mere virtue of the object of investigation provide a methodological advance or fuller understanding of the historical process. Therefore, although the intellectual history of a society is not the history of its intellectuals alone, given their hegemonic role an enquiry into their social and intellectual formation, their socio-political function and their ideas does form an important and integral part of intellectual history.

Preliminary to this is the question of who constituted intellectuals in colonial India. How did they come into being socially and intellectually, and what function did they perform in the given social and political situation? In describing the creators and propagators of ideas as well as early social and political activists, several categories have been employed: social reformers, marginal men, cultural brokers, westernizers, modernizers and compradors are some of them. These are based on either partial or false perceptions of their role in society. Basically they were non-conformists, critical of existing social conditions and performing the social function of generation or adoption and propagation of ideas with a view to ushering in socio-political progress and advancement. This group was not limited to a handful of activists but comprised a large number of less known people engaged in the elaboration and dissemination of ideas. What distinguished them from intellectual workers in general was the specific social function they performed, which Gramsci has characterized as follows:

The problem of creating a new stratum of intellectuals consists in the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in everyone at a certain degree of development, modifying its relationship with the muscular-nervous effort towards a new equilibrium, and ensuring that the muscular-nervous effort itself, in so far as it is an element of a general practical activity, which is perpetually innovating the physical and social world, becomes the foundation of a new and integral conception of the world.\(^{14}\)

In identifying intellectuals as a distinct social stratum the emphasis on their specific social function—that Gramsci calls the creation of a new equilibrium and the perpetual innovation of the physical and social world—has been a central concern in most studies on

intellectual development. The distinction between the ‘cultural objective’ and ‘philosophic subjective’ intelligentsia made by Richard Pipes, between the educated and the intelligentsia by Theodor Geiger and Boris Elkin, the concept of concentric circles for differentiating the intellectuals from intelligentsia by Milnikov and Edgar Morin’s definition of intellectuals based on ‘a profession that is culturally validated, a role that is socio-political and consciousness that relates to universals’—are some examples.

This distinction raises several questions, of which the more important for the purposes of this essay are: what enables the ‘critical elaboration of intellectual activity’, thus arriving at a commitment to a specific social function, and to what extent do ideological and cultural systems and the nature and direction of social formations influence or determine cognitive ability? In attempting to answer the first, formative educational influences have been generally identified as the decisive factor, excluding almost if not totally the role of social experience: how social factors mediate in the formation of intellectuals and the growth of consciousness. One reason for this emphasis is the intellectual historian’s concern with identifying [factors which contribute to the making of cognitive ability. Richard Pipes on Russia, Joseph Levinson on China and Edward Shils on India are representatives of this perspective. The bulk of the literature on social reform and the emergence of nationalism in India shares this point of view. Charles Heimsath, David Kopf and R. C. Majumdar on reform and regeneration in the nineteenth century, and David MacCulley, Anil Seal and Tarachand on the national movement are a few among numerous examples

A notable exception to this is Edward Shils who uses the term to include ‘the independent man of letters, the scientist, pure and applied, the scholars, the university Professor, the journalist, the highly educated administrator, judge or parliamentarian’. The Intellectual Between Tradition and Modernity: The Indian Situation, Hague, 1961, p. 9. Shils, however, recognizes the existence of a group with a different social function in advanced countries, but not in newly independent countries. ‘Political Development in the New States’, Comparative Studies in Society and History, 11, 1960.


of this tendency. The biography of Ram Mohan Roy by S. D. Collet, of Keshubchandra Sen by Meredith Borthwick and of Dayanand Saraswati by J. T. F. Jordens fall into the same category. This is not an assumption limited to colonial, liberal and nationalist historians for most Marxist historians also seem to follow a similar path. Such an approach has been detrimental to the formulation of a methodology which draws intellectual history closer to the sociology of knowledge.

An assumption inherent in this approach is that Western knowledge and philosophical notions were fundamental to the development of a critical attitude and cognition of reality. Is this supposition true of colonial India? In terms of the formative educational influences, two broad categories can be identified among Indian intellectuals: one nurtured on traditional knowledge and the other on a combination of the Western and the traditional. While Radhakant Deb, Dayanand Saraswati and Narayana Guru belonged to the first category, Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekanand, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Jawaharlal Nehru belonged to the second.

The available biographical information on several nineteenth-century intellectuals is not exhaustive enough to enable an accurate construction of their intellectual evolution. In its absence, qualitative changes in their consciousness and consequent changes in their sensitivity to social problems remain obscure and inexplicable. Even elementary biographical sketches are wanting in many cases, and where they exist there are far too many areas of darkness. For instance, the intellectual influences on and social experience of Ram Mohan during the pre-1815 period is yet to be carefully chronicled; what led to Dayanand’s transition from a Vedic scholar to a social reformer is unknown; how Ranade reconciled himself to that which by conviction he did not approve is not entirely clear, in spite of the illuminating reminiscences of his wife. These are only a few examples; similar gaps exist almost everywhere else.

Despite these limitations, certain broad generalizations about formative influences can still be advanced by referring briefly to the intellectual evolution of Ram Mohan and Dayanand. Ram Mohan was born in all probability in 1772 in a devout Vaishnava family, but Vaishnava influence, if any, was only negative in character.19 Information about Ram Mohan’s life during 1972 to 1976 is scanty.

One of his earliest biographers, Sophia Dobson Collet, hardly had any information about this phase and those who have followed her have not been able to go much further. Yet it seems fairly certain that by 1800 Ram Mohan had acquired a good knowledge of Islamic theology, particularly of the teachings of the rationalist school of mutazillas, and of the Hindu scriptures.\textsuperscript{20} Whether he was associated with any particular madrasa in Patna, and if so what its curriculum was, is unknown. But the influence of Islamic theology was certainly dominant during his early life, as is evident from his first extant work, 

\textit{Tuhfat-ul-muhawaddin}, composed around 1800.\textsuperscript{21} In the absence of any specific information about the sources of this influence, a textual analysis of 

\textit{Tuhfat} in the context of the knowledge in Islamic tradition would be a useful exercise. The manner in which he came to acquire a knowledge of Hindu philosophy and scriptures is equally unknown. It has been suggested that his intimate acquaintance with Hindu philosophy was through his connection with Hariharanda Tirthaswami, a tantrik, at Rangpur. It would be worth investigating whether his trip to Varanasi was motivated by a desire to acquire closer familiarity with the shastras and, if so, information on pundits with whom he came into contact would help to establish an important link in his intellectual evolution—particularly as 

\textit{Tuhfat} is almost entirely of Islamic inspiration and bereft of Hindu influence. At any rate, it is certain that Ram Mohan’s first exposure was to Indian traditional influence, both

\textsuperscript{20}Lant Capenter, a friend and admirer of Ram Mohan, has recorded: ‘Under his father’s roof he received the elements of native education, and also acquired the Persian language. He was afterwards sent to Patna to learn Arabic; and lastly to Benares to obtain a knowledge of Sanscrit, the sacred language of the Hindoos. His masters at Patna set him to study Arabic translations of some of the writings of Aristotle and Euclid; it is probable that the training thus given strengthened his mind in acuteness and close reasoning; while the knowledge which he acquired of the Mahommadan religion from Mussulamen whom he esteemed, contributed to cause that searching examination of the faith in which he was educated, which led him eventually to the important efforts he made to restore it to its early simplicity.’ Rama Prasad Chanda and Jatindra Kumar Majumdar (ed.), \textit{Selection from Official Letters and Documents Relating to the Life of Raja Ram Mohan Roy}, Calcutta, 1938, p. xxx.

\textsuperscript{21}In 

\textit{Tuhfat} Ram Mohan dealt with the origin of religion and the nature of religious systems at an abstract and general level. He quoted profusely from the Koran and his arguments were in keeping with the rationalist critique within Islamic tradition. Jogesh Chander Ghose, \textit{The English Works of Raja Ram Mohan Roy}, Allahabad, 1906, pp. 941–58.
Hindu and Muslim, and his familiarity with European languages, thought and philosophy came only at a later stage. Thus in the make up of Ram Mohan's intellectual world traditional knowledge was a decisive factor and the East-West synthesis for which he has been generally lauded was attempted from strong indigenous moorings. Several others, such as Vivekanand, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Jawaharlal Nehru, seem to have undergone an intellectual process in the reverse order: they were initially exposed to Western knowledge and philosophy and at a later stage tried to return to their own sources. After an initial intoxication with European philosophy, Vivekanand sought enlightenment in the spirituality of Ramakrishna Paramahansa; Bal Gangadhar Tilak, in spite of his knowledge of Western political praxis, took to the Gita for guidance. Jawaharlal Nehru, whose training at Harrow and Cambridge made him something of a misfit both in the East and the West, had to attempt a discovery of India to discover himself. These examples strongly suggest the importance of indigenous tradition in the make-up of an intellectual and his ability to perform his socio-political function. In fact those who were unable to relate themselves to their own tradition failed to rise to the level of intellectuals who could assume social and political leadership: they could engage themselves only in the elaboration of middle-class values. The bulk of the literature which explains the rise of social and political consciousness out of the contradictions inherent in English education in India seems to overlook this dimension.

In contrast Dayanand Saraswati, like Radhakanta Deb and Narayana Guru, was a product almost exclusively of the Indian intellectual tradition. All that Mula Sankara, the precocious young boy from Kathiawar born into a Shaivite family, had received

---

22Ram Mohan started learning English only in 1796 and when William Digby met him in 1801 ‘he could speak it well enough to be understood . . . but could not write it with any degree of correctness’. Sophia Dobson Collet, Life and Letters of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Calcutta, 1962 edition, p. 24.

23‘Return to the source’ is a concept used by Cabral to explain the response to colonial culture and domination. ‘“The return to the source” is not and cannot in itself be an act of struggle against foreign domination (colonial and racist), and it no longer necessarily means a return to tradition. It is the denial by the petite bourgeoisie of the pretended supremacy of the culture of the dominant power over that of the dominated people with which it must identify itself.’ Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral, New York, 1973, p. 63.
before becoming Dayanand, the reformer, was a knowledge of Vedanta, Sanskrit grammar, tantrism, yoga and a practical experience of social conditions in the country through extensive travel. He had no knowledge of European thought and philosophy, nor did he, like many of his contemporaries, make an effort to acquire it. This intellectual make-up did not adversely affect his cognitive ability; rather it seems to have equipped him to test through experimentation the very sources of knowledge he had acquired.\textsuperscript{24} It also provided him with the intellectual drive necessary for confronting social problems.

As in the case of Ram Mohan, there are several gaps in the biographical information on Dayanand. The three years from 1860 to 1863 which he spent at Mathura under the guidance of Swami Virjananda, and the subsequent four years in which he travelled extensively through various parts of the country, seem to have been crucial for his intellectual evolution and the development of his social vision. He reached Mathura as a \textit{sanyasi} in quest of the path to \textit{moksha}, but at the end of these seven years he emerged as a reformer impatient with the existing social and religious practices. The process through which this transformation took place has not been a point of enquiry in his innumerable biographies, except in the latest, and thus far the best, by J. T. F. Jordens. Jordens has posited Virjananda's involvement with the regeneration of Hinduism, his advice to his disciple to propagate the books of the \textit{rishis} and the Vedic religion, and Dayanand's own reaction to Hinduism as he saw it around him at Mathura, as possible factors.\textsuperscript{25} The extent to which his social experience during his journey through various parts of the country contributed to this transformation would be a rewarding investigation.

It is important to emphasize that, in spite of the differences in the formative educational influences on the members of these two groups, their perception of reality and vision of social transformation seem remarkably similar. In their understanding of the con-

\textsuperscript{24}In order to verify the information on human anatomy contained in some religious works, he dissected a corpse at Garhmukteshwar. When he found that the description given in the books did not tally at all with the actual details, he tore the books into pieces and threw them into the river along with the corpse. R. C. Yadav (ed.), \textit{Autobiography of Dayanand Saraswati}, Delhi, 1976, p. 38.

nnection between social and religious practices, in their perception of British rule as a divine dispensation and in their attitude towards caste, idolatry and polytheism, this similarity was clearly manifest. In fact there was no direct correlation between their formative influences and their specific position on various social questions. Stereotype labels such as ‘conservatives’, ‘radicals’ and ‘reformers’, commonly employed in the existing historiography on the basis of traditional, western and synthetic intellectual influences, respectively, are therefore of doubtful validity. Neither did western influences automatically lead to ‘progressive’ social and political consciousness nor did traditional influences invariably create conservative attitudes. In fact some who were rooted in traditional knowledge and culture held more advanced views on several social questions than their Western-educated contemporaries. The attitude of Radha Kanta Deb towards female education and of Narayana Guru towards caste are cases in point. It would be interesting to examine whether a traditional intellectual milieu had the potential to stimulate ideas which had already made their appearance in western societies. The sources from which Akshay Kumar Dutt and Viresalingam derived the idea of an organic theory of society and Ram Mohan and Narayana Guru evoloved the idea of religious universalism are interesting pointers.

This enquiry into the intellectual evolution of Ram Mohan and Dayanand tends to suggest that formative educational influence, though important, was not the only determinant in the formation of Indian intellectuals in the nineteenth century. It also suggests that differences in the nature of formative educational influences did not prevent an identical mediation in the social process. Conversely, it may also be argued that similarity in intellectual influences did not lead to identical cognitive ability or social mediation. Access to knowledge is an essential but not a sufficient prerequisite since it only creates the basic ability to internalize social experience which plays a crucial role in the formation of intellectuals. The rearrangement of the known epistemological components or the articulation of qualitatively new ideas need not necessarily be of any social consequence. Only when those ideas are related to socio-cultural and political interests or dissent, at least potentially, do they assume social significance. The ability to establish such a relationship is a crucial component in the making of an intellectual. What underlined the role of Ram Mohan in Bengal, Dayanand in Punjab,
Viresalingam in Andhra and Narayana Guru in Travancore was that their ideas suited the social requirements of the new classes trying to break away from certain existing social norms. Although the dynamics of these classes set the parameters of their socio-political action and effectively mediated in their transition from an academic to an intellectual position, it did not limit their socio-political vision to the interests of these classes. Instead, their effort had been to develop a consciousness which was progressive at the given historical juncture. The role and character as well as the ‘organicity’ of the intellectuals in nineteenth-century India has to be located within this context. The tendency to characterize them ‘compradors’ or ‘almost compradors’ and representatives of a particular class or caste seems to miss this all-important point. What Marx said about Ricardo is pertinent here:

Ricardo’s conception is, on the whole, in the interest of the industrial bourgeoisie, only because, and in so far as, their interests coincide with that of production or the productive development of human labour. Where the bourgeoisie comes to conflict with this, he is just as ruthless towards it as he is at other times towards the proletariat and the aristocracy.26

III

A study of the nature of perception is a necessary prelude to the understanding of the evolution of consciousness in society. The existing literature on the history of ideas in the nineteenth century focuses mainly on the movements and the ideas propagated by them; the perceptions of reality which generated these movements are only incidental to this central concern. The interrelationship between perception and consciousness is also relegated to the background. They are treated either in isolation, or perception is considered synonymous with consciousness.

The recent interest in the differences between the objective reality and perceived reality is integral to studies concerning the impact of colonialism on Indian social development. Why intellectuals in the nineteenth century failed to realize the true nature of colonial rule has been the focus of this interest. False consciousness, compradorism and class interest are some of the explanations offered. That

colonial ideology and the character of the colonial state and state institutions contributed to a perception which did not correspond to the reality seems too general and perhaps too obvious an observation. Nevertheless, the manner in which colonial state apparatuses functioned as instruments of ideological dissemination, and the way colonial state institutions (which were ‘over developed in relation to the structure’ in the colony) functioned as ideological instruments aiding political control, have remained unexplored areas.

While the former function was inherent in almost every policy pursued by the British in India, the principles on which the state system was organized and institutions functioned contributed to the latter. The first was a direct effort to superimpose an alien ideology and culture and to develop a sense of inferiority and a dependency complex in the minds of the colonized. The colonizer also created and propagated several myths about the character and capacity of the colonized which in course of time the colonized themselves began to believe. Moreover the very character of the institutions created by the British in India imparted to it certain


\[28\] Syed Hussein Alatas has demonstrated how the myth of the lazy native came into currency in Malaysia during colonial rule. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, London, 1977. Jose Rizal, the well-known Filipino patriot and martyr and a leading intellectual of the time, was one of the first to call attention to this. He argued that the indolence of Filipinos was not hereditary but due to historical reasons. E. Alzona, *Selected Essays and Letters of Jose Rizal*, Manila, 1964. In India also, deception, dishonesty and undependability as characteristics of Indians became a part of the self image in India only during the colonial era. Today the English-educated élite readily ascribe these qualities to the masses. Ram Mohan was sensitive to how Indians came to acquire these qualities. Pointing out that ‘the peasants or villagers who reside at a distance from large towns and head-stations and courts of law, are as innocent, temperate and moral in their conduct as the people of any country whatsoever’, he observed:

The inhabitants of the cities, towns or stations who have much intercourse with persons employed about the courts of law, by Zamindars etc. and with foreigners and others in a different state of civilization, generally imibe their habits and opinions. Hence their religious opinions are shaken without any other principles being implanted to supply their place. Consequently a great proportion of these are inferior in point of character to the former class (villagers and peasantry) and are very often even made tools of in the nefarious work of perjury and forgery.

ideological dimensions. For, those institutions based on principles which informed an advanced polity and economy were quite over-developed in the given political and social context of the colony. The effort of the colonial state to establish hegemonic control over the colonized society was aided by this objective reality. The nature of perception was contingent on these factors, what Francis Bacon called ‘the idols that rule the minds of men’. Indeed, idols also came from the traditional ideology and culture.

In perceiving the reality of colonial rule the intellectuals in nineteenth-century India adopted an idealized view of the state, without making any distinction between an alien and a native government. Conscious of the anomic that had preceded the colonial conquest, and faced with a well established state system based on liberal principles, most of them accepted and even welcomed British rule as divine dispensation. This arose not out of any personal profit from collaboration but out of a belief in the instrumentality of British rule in bringing about a political future based on liberal and constitutional principles. That Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century represented the most advanced polity and economy in the world, and that it was ‘the liberator of Europe’ whenever freedom and liberty were endangered by despotic rulers, reinforced this belief. British rule was therefore looked upon as the ‘chosen instrument’ for leading India to the path of political and economic modernization. Ram Mohan characterized England as a nation of people who not only are ‘blessed with the enjoyment of civil and political liberty but [who] also interest themselves in promoting liberty and social happiness, as well as free enquiry into literary and religious subjects among those nations to which their influence extends’. The attitude towards British rule during its early phase

---


31For instance Keshubchandra Sen observed: ‘it is not a man’s work, but a work which God is doing with His own hands, using British nation as His instrument’, *Keshubchandra Sen in England*, Calcutta, 1938, p. 90.

32J. C. Ghose, p. 367.

was integrally a part of this notion of instrumentality.

When asked whether it would be beneficial to allow Europeans of capital to purchase estates and settle on them, Ram Mohan favoured *Europeans of character and capital* to do so since ‘it would generally improve the resources of the country, and also the condition of the native inhabitants, by showing them superior methods of cultivation, and the proper mode of treating their labourers and dependents’.\(^{34}\) He also felt that if Europeans returning home were encouraged to settle in India with their families, it would greatly improve the resources of the country.\(^{35}\) However he was opposed to the idea of admitting Europeans of all descriptions to become settlers, as ‘such a measure could only be regarded as adopted for the purpose of entirely supplanting the native inhabitants and expelling them from the country’.\(^{36}\) Ram Mohan was evidently concerned with preconditions necessary for industrialization, namely capital and technology. The lack of capital and backwardness of technology occupied an important place in nineteenth-century economic thought. A solution was sought through the British connection.

However, a different perception of the nature of British rule was developing simultaneously in the nineteenth century. This was an outcome of the intellectual quest to understand the economically exploitative and politically dominating nature of colonial rule. Evolving from within and not parallel to the perception of the British as ‘the chosen instrument’ of Indian regeneration, what gave rise to it was the contradiction inherent within the very nature of colonial rule. Beginning as a vague sense of patriotism and national pride and as abstract discussion on the disadvantages of dependence, it culminated in a definite vision of a future free from British domination. The poems of Kashi Prasad Ghose, the speeches and articles of Kylash Chunder Datta, Sharada Prasad Ghose, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Shama Charan Dutt, several anonymous contributions to contemporary journals in Bengal, the articles of Bhaskar Pandurang Tarkadkar and of anonymous pamphleteers in *Bombay Gazette* in Maharashtra—were indicative of the early attempts to grapple with political reality. A letter published in *Reformer*, a journal edited by Prasanna Kumar Tagore, while discussing the connec-

\(^{34}\)Ibid., p. 284.

\(^{35}\)Ibid., p. 285.

\(^{36}\)Ibid., p. 284.
tion between England and India, drew the following conclusions:

Without her [India's] dependence on England as her conqueror and possessor, her political situation would be more respectable and her inhabitants would be more wealthy and prosperous. The example of America which shows what she was when subjected to England and what she has been since her freedom, most naturally lead us to such a conclusion.37

This was not an isolated instance. Sharda Prasad Ghose considered 'the deprivation of the enjoyment of political liberty as the cause of our misery and degradation'.38 Kylash Chunder Dutta, in an essay on the India of his dreams a hundred years hence, conjured up an armed rebellion for the overthrow of British rule.39 Akshay Kumar Dutt was concerned with dependence itself which he considered a terrible suffering, worse than the naraka of the Hindus, the hell of the Christians and the jahannam of the Mussalmans.40

The growing consciousness about the new political situation was also reflected in periodicals published in Maharashtra. In a series of letters written in Bombay Gazette in 1841 under the pseudonym 'A Hindoo', Bhaskar Pandurang Tarkadkar not only focused attention on administrative lapses and injustice, like many of his predecessors, but also tried to comprehend the nature and consequences of British rule.41 At the very outset he tried to demonstrate how British rule was alien and how it was different from that of earlier conquerors who established their empires in India. In drawing this distinction two criteria were employed: administrative and economic. In administrative matters like employment and the dispensation of justice, Muslim rulers did not discriminate on religious grounds whereas the British clearly favoured their countrymen.42 Citing

40Biman Behari Majumdar, p. 74.
42'A Letter From a Hindoo', 28 July 1841, Bombay Gazette, 30 July 1841, vol. LIII, new series, no. 25, p. 103. I am thankful to Hulas Singh, Research Scholar in History, Jawaharlal Nehru University, for providing me the text of the letters of Bhaskar Pandurang Tarkadkar.
instances to show how the British were partial to Europeans in the
dispensation of justice, the disparity between the principle of the
rule of law and administrative practice was highlighted. More
important, however, was the perception of the role of law and the
judiciary in promoting colonial interests. ‘Whenever’, Tarkadkar
wrote, ‘you [the British] have to establish a new act of oppression,
your first precaution is to insert it in your Indian code of laws and
give it the colour of justice and equality’.

The second criterion used by Tarkadkar to identify the alien
character of British rule was its economic activity, which was geared
to the transfer of wealth to England ‘at the sad expense of the
prosperity and happiness of the poor and inoffensive inhabitants’
of India. That he contrasted this with the lack of any such intent
by earlier rulers was indicative of his sensitivity to a crucial element
which distinguished British rule. He was also conscious of the fact
that the British did not identify themselves with the socio-cultural
life of the country.

The perception of economic conditions and the consequent
involvement with economic problems was limited during the first
three quarters of the nineteenth century. Yet intellectuals were
neither indifferent to the general economic condition of the country
nor insensitive to the economic implications of colonial rule. The
poverty of the masses, inequality in society, the condition of the
peasantry, the destruction of the handicraft industry and the drain
of wealth through trade attracted their attention. Almost everyone
from Ram Mohan to Vivekanand was concerned with poverty and
inequality. Some only bemoaned the misery of the people, but
others reflected on the causes which produced the misery. While
Ram Mohan sought an explanation in administrative practice, Akshay
Kumar Dutt and Bankim Chandra Chatterji posited it

43 "Your partiality to your countrymen is extreme and it is not very seldom
that we witness your sacrificing your conscience and trampling under foot your
law and casting aside every other consideration to preserve the life of your
countryman or lighten his punishment however extremely heinous his crime
may be and however deserved he may be to very harsh punishment." Bombay
Gazette, 30 July 1841, no. 25, p. 103.

44 Bombay Gazette, 10 Aug. 1841, no. 37, p. 138.

45 Ibid.

46 Susobhan Chandra Sarkar (ed.), Ram Mohan on Indian Economy, Calcutta,
1965, p. 9.
within the existing socio-economic relations in society. Bankim Chandra’s *Samyo*, which, like Ram Mohan’s *Tuhsat*, is a landmark in the intellectual history of India, was the most significant effort in the nineteenth century to deal with the problem of inequality. Borrowing from a variety of European thinkers and thus eclectic in content, *Samyo* is a good index of the strength and weaknesses of intellectual development in colonial and modern India. While it indicated a certain penchant for philosophical speculation and abstract discussion that was almost non-existent in nineteenth-century India, it tended to rely heavily on an alien intellectual tradition, a tendency which has almost become a debility in our contemporary intellectual life.

That the economic consequences of British domination, particularly the drain of wealth and the decline of handicraft, were within the focus of the nineteenth-century perception of reality has not received adequate emphasis in existing historical writings. Ram Mohan was conscious of the drain of wealth from India through remittances out of salaries, savings out of the professional incomes of English civilians as well as of the earnings of English merchants, agents and planters, and through Indian revenues expended in England. On the authority of ‘a very able servant of the Company, holding a responsible situation in Bengal’, he estimated ‘the aggregate of tribute, public and private, so withdrawn from India from 1765 to 1820 at £110 million’. In course of time attention came to be further focused on this question. The central argument in Tarkadkar’s critique of British rule was the drain of wealth. In fact the very purpose of his letters was ‘to show how rigorous the present policy of the British has been in operation in regard to draining India of its wealth and reducing it to poverty’. He recognized British trade as the main channel of the drain and argued that it had ‘more effectively emptied our purses in a few years than the predatory excursions of these tribes (Pindaries and

---


50 *Bombay Gazette*, 30 July 1841, no. 25, p. 103.