Of the papers written by me over the last ten years and published in various journals and publications, I have selected for reprinting those which relate in a general sense to the study of ancient Indian social history, since I thought it might be worthwhile to put them together in one volume. By and large, the papers deal with the early period of Indian history to the end of the first millennium A.D.

The opening paper, although historiographic in content, sets out the framework for the subsequent papers where the emphasis is on interpretation. The viability of this collection seems to me to be basically in terms of the interpretations suggested and the historiographic background to these interpretations is discussed in the latter half of the first paper.

In arranging the papers thematically rather than in the order in which they were written, some papers of ten years ago are juxtaposed with those of recent months. This may in some cases result in a modification of, or an added emphasis on, particular historical generalisations over the years. I have not now sought to revise my views of an earlier period since they do not substantially differ from more recent analysis: the difference is more in nuance than in essentials. Inevitably such a collection of papers cannot avoid some degree of duplication in themes. Since the papers were originally published in different places there is some discrepancy in the forms of foot-noting and the use of diacritical marks which I have tried to reduce to a minimum.

The arrangement of papers is broadly around certain subthemes: society and religion, social classification and mobi-
licity, archaeological data in the study of society, historiographical concepts of the early period and approaches to the study of regional history. The papers 'Society and Law in the Hindu and Buddhist Tradition', and 'Ethics, Religion and Social Protest in the First Millennium B.C. in Northern India', are attempts to view the social dimensions of groups organised around religious ideas, Hindu and Buddhist, and supporting a religious identity. 'Renunciation: the making of a Counter-Culture?', examines the degree of success of groups of renouncers seeking to create a parallel or alternative society., 'Dāna and Dakṣinā as Forms of Exchange', is a preliminary perspective on the tradition and system of gift-giving on ritual occasions as an indicator of economic changes. 'Social Mobility in Ancient India with Special Reference to Elite Groups' and 'The Image of the Barbarian in Early India' relate to the two ends of the social hierarchy—elite groups (brāhmans and kṣatriyas) and their social gradation on the one hand and on the other, the definition and evolution of the categories generally termed mleccha. 'The Historian and Archaeological Data' is a general assessment of the possible ways in which archaeological data can provide evidence for social and economic history. The correlation of archaeological data and literary sources in the specific context of early India is investigated in the subsequent two papers. 'The Study of Society in Ancient India' and 'Purāṇic Lineages and Archaeological Cultures'. Both focus on the evidence of the nature of society and the migration of peoples and language as available from two categories of source material. The three papers, 'The Tradition of Historical Writing in Early India', 'Origin Myths and the Early Indian Historical Tradition', and 'Genealogy as a Source of Social History', examine the content of the itihāsa-purāṇa tradition—the early Indian historical tradition—in the context of its social and political function. Finally, the paper 'The Scope and Significance of Regional History', is an attempt, on the basis of a case study of Punjab history to suggest the kinds of investigations
which at this stage may be carried out by those working on
regional history.

One of the problems with working on early Indian social
history is that not all the texts can be accurately dated; some
can be precisely dated while others span across centuries.
This may be due in part to a lack of concern in the tradition
with carefully dated texts, but also perhaps to the over-
lapping of social formations, which seem to be a more char-
acteristic feature of early Indian society as compared to
other ancient societies. This may also to an extent account
for the continuity of what might otherwise be regarded as
anachronistic features in certain social institutions.

I would like to thank my colleagues at the Centre for His-
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whom I have on various occasions discussed the contents of
some of the papers.

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