

DRAFT PREPARED BASED ON DISCUSSIONS WITH DHARAMPALJI ON HIS WORK ON STATE AND SOCIETY IN INDIA AT THE BEGINNING OF BRITISH RULE IN THE LATE 18th CENTURY AND WHAT CAN BE DONE WITH THIS AND OTHER MATERIAL.

Sri Dharampal joined the freedom movement when he was studying for his BSc. during 1941-42. From there he moved over to rural development and also worked with Mira Behn in the Roorkee- Rishikesh area. He visited parts of Europe and Israel during 1949 and was General Secretary of the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD) from 1958-64. Sri Jayaprakash Narayan became the President of AVARD from about 1959.

Around 1960 Dharampal began to feel that there was something seriously amiss or disoriented in the functioning of the Indian state and society. Such feeling led him along with some of his colleagues to get better acquainted and study the newly setup village panchayats and block level panchayat samitis. Two main studies were done during 1960-61 – i) on the newly set-up panchayat institutions in Rajasthan and ii) on these institutions in Andhra Pradesh.

In early 1962 he did the compilation of the discussions in the Indian Constituent Assembly on the subject of what should be the primary constituent of the new Indian polity, whether it should be the villages, towns etc. as bodies, or the adult Indian individual? This debate, with far reaching repercussions, took place in 1948-49 and the Indian adult individual was decided as the primary constituent.

From around this time Dharampal began making further enquiries on similar subjects in various states of India, including Rajasthan, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In most of these states he learnt that till very recently, quite a substantial number of villages, were organised on a Samudayam basis, and even till the early 1960s people of many localities joined together to take common decisions and carryout various community tasks. The first major instance of this phenomena, he found in the existence of Bees Biswa panchayats in Rajasthan, particularly in the district of Sawai Madhopur in 1961.

From early 1964, Dharampal got seriously engaged in a long-term study of the Madras Panchayat system, i.e., a study of modern panchayat bodies, in Tamil Nadu from about 1850 to early 1960. Looking at archival materials in Tamil Nadu State Archives he found that the tax on land, which the British fixed in India around the end of the 18th century was set at 50% of the gross agricultural produce. He also learnt that when the cash prices of agricultural produce went down or the produce itself was low, the tax on land, collected by the British government from the cultivators, often became 70 to 80% of the gross produce. Much later, he learnt that because of such high taxation around one-third of the best irrigated land, in Tamil Nadu, went out of cultivation by around 1840.

Another fact, which he noticed was about the organisation of South Indian villages, especially in the Tanjore region. Out of some 5,000 villages in Tanjore around 1700 (one-third) were Samudayam villages. In the villages in Tanjore, pensions were also provided to older persons or those who were handicapped. This and other information led Dharampal to take up intensive archival work on the period at the beginning of the British domination of India. Dharampal says that had he known of or been familiar with any Indian language archival records relating to the beginning of British rule in India or for an earlier period relating to state and society in India, he would rather have looked at such material. But as he or the people he knew, were not aware of any such material, he started looking at what the British had written about India of the 18th and 19th century.

He did this research in London at the India Office Library and the British Library. Later on he visited some thirty other British archives including the National library of Scotland in Edinburgh, the Bodleian in Oxford,

major archives in Leeds, Nottingham, Sheffield, Manchester, and several other places. Out of this research and study some works of his have been published since 1971:

- An Exploration into the Debates of the Constituent Assembly on Panchayat Raj, 1962
- Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century, 1971
- Civil Disobedience in Indian Tradition, 1971
- The Madras Panchayat System, A General Assessment, 1972
- The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century, 1983
- Some Aspects of the Earlier Indian Society and Polity and their Relevance to the Present, 3 Lectures at Pune, 1986
- Bharat Chitta Manas Kala (originally in Hindi), 1991
- India's Polity, its Characteristics and Current Problems, A Paper presented at Lisbon 1992
- Despoliation and Defaming of India: The early 19th century British Crusade, 1999.
- The British Origin of Cow Slaughter in India, 2002
- Bharat ki Pehchan (in Hindi),2003

Dharampal has also perused some of the material in the archives in India. These archives are: 1. Tamil Nadu State Archives, Chennai. The work in TNSA has gone on for several years where he found English language registers on the Barnard survey of Chengalpattu district 1767- 1774 (over 2,000 villages and many towns). He also found massive amounts of material on the British practice of impressing villages for forced labour and supplies as also for thousands of bullock carts and bullocks for transporting the British army and other British and European persons over long distances; 2. National Archives of India, Delhi; 3. The West Bengal State Archives, Kolkatta; 4. The Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow. He has also used the Nehru Museum and Library in Delhi and seen some of the post 1860 private papers, as also the published reports of Indian census since 1881. He has also perused the Indian census material at the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, during June – August 1993. Besides, he has gone through some Jesuit material on India, at the Jesuit archives in Kodaikanal in 1986. He has also spent a few days looking at the paper of Sardar Vallabh bhai Patel, in Ahmedabad. As he does not know any other Indian language except Hindi, he has not explored or looked at or read any archival material in Indian languages.

It may be worth mentioning that, these researches and studies were taken up by Dharampal in his individual capacity, also because he was not considered a scholar or a historian and did not even have a University degree. It may be mentioned that a question about his not having a degree was raised in the Bihar legislature during 1973.

Dharampal's friends however expressed much interest and confidence in his work. Amongst them from the beginning were Sri Jayaprakash Narayan, Sri Annasaheb Sahastrabuddhe, Sri R.K. Patil, Sri Ram Swarup, Sri Sita Ram Goel, Sri Radha Krishna (Secretary, Gandhi Peace Foundation), Sri K. Arunachalam, Sri A.B. Chatterji, I.C.S formerly secretary, Ministry of States, Delhi, Professor R. Bhaskaran, and Dr. D.S. Kothari. From about 1977 many younger friends also got interested in Dharampal's study and research material in several places especially in Delhi, Madras, Bangalore, Varanasi, Kanpur, Goa and Sevagram. One major group, who was influenced by Dharampal's researches was the PPST, Madras which was formed around 1980.

While this work of Dharampal had no formal institutional backing, various friends in India tried to support it. Sri Jayaprakash Narayan was for the setting of an institute for such work. However, at the suggestion

of Sri J.P. Naik, Member Secretary of Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), who thought that such an institute was not needed, Sri Jayaprakash Narayan got a fellowship arranged from the A.N. Sinha Institute, Patna to help Dharampal's work in London. As the amount of the fellowship which Jayprakashji personally collected from his friends was rather low (about British pounds 80 a month), a supplementary amount was given for a year at the behest of Sri Ram Nath Goenka. It was this fellowship which caused the raising of the above mentioned question in the Bihar Legislature. Finally after about 18 months, at Dharampal's request this fellowship was terminated.

Within India the work was greatly helped by the Gandhi Peace Foundation, the Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varanasi, by Sri Anna Saheb Sahastrabuddhe and the Gandhi Seva Sangh, Sri Radha Krishna, Sri Sugata Das Gupta, the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD), and Sri Sita Ram Goel. In London Sri Babulal Sethia made a contribution of pound 500 during 1968 for visiting some British archives. Later in 1991 Sri Swaraj Paul also helped with pound 1,000 for research in connection with a lecture on India. Dharampal gave this lecture in Lisbon in April 1992 on the occasion of a conference on 'The Origin of the State in Europe, 1200 –1800' sponsored by the European Science Foundation.

Thus while there was valuable help from many institutions and friends in India, Dharampal's work got carried on largely on the support of his family, especially his wife and son. Some friends in England also helped, now and then, in various ways. Around 1990 the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), Chennai made him a Fellow of the CPS, which continued until his demise.

II

Europe's direct contact with India starts with the arrival of Vasco de Gama to Calicut in 1498. Before that, there were perhaps very few European texts or documents, which concerned India. India however has had intimate contacts with countries of S.E. Asia and with China and Korea and to some extent with Japan from ancient times. Quite some material, in these countries, pertaining to India is fairly known for the past 100 – 200 years, and perhaps was well known to scholars and political people in India a 1000 or more years ago. India's contacts with central Asia and Tibet also go to ancient times. Similarly India had fairly close contacts with countries of West Asia and part of the Arab world as also east Africa, perhaps from much before the Christian era. The contacts within India, of one distant region with the other, seem to be of a far earlier date and are well illustrated by texts like the Ramayana, the Maha bhārata, the Raghuvansha and many other literary works.

Dharampal feels that the real work of knowing India as it has been through the centuries would only start when we begin to look at material in Indian languages. The other material which we could look into profitably would be material written down in East Asian and South East Asian countries about how they perceived India and with whom India has had very intimate relationship from very ancient times.

It may also be useful here to give some idea of the manner in which India was ruled from Britain and of the archival material available which throws light on this aspect, a small part of which Dharampal came across during his stay in Britain.

The British contact with India started around 1580 or 1590 with the travel of some British men to India. In 1600 the British formed what they term, The East India Company trading to the East Indies. In 1617 when the British envoy Sir Thomas Roe visited the Mughal Emperor Jehangir, the British sought Jehangir's

permission for establishing commercial and trade centres in a few places in India and since then many more British men and ships began to visit India for travel and trade. The visit of Thomas Roe provided the British with some Indian territory – places like Surat where they established outposts, which were called Factories. From the time of their establishments these Factory places began to build small fortifications, big storehouses and created small townships. Texts and documents were generated in these places for conveying the reports of their activities to the authorities in Britain. These can be said to be the beginning of the massive and voluminous British archival records which exist on India in Britain today. Soon after the Factories came the British Presidency towns of Bombay, Madras (Fort St. George) and Calcutta (Fort St. William). These three Presidencies generated much more records and it seems several fair copies of these proceedings began to be sent to the authorities in Britain on a regular basis. The Dutch, the French, the Danes, also established a substantial number of Factories on India's coast, and a few inlands also, during the 17th century.

Around 1748, along with the French or in alleged opposition to them, the British began to occupy large areas of Indian territory around the town of Arcot in northern Tamilnadu and within about 10 years extended such territorial occupation down to the southern tip of India. Similar territorial occupation started in northern India in the areas of Bengal and Bihar from about June 1757. In 1773 the British Governor of Bengal was made Governor General by the British government. All this meant generation of larger amounts of reporting for conveying to Britain.

In 1784 the British parliament passed an act, which constituted a Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India with a British cabinet minister as its president. Initially the British Prime Minister was also a member of this Board. For most of its 74 years existence (1784-1858), the Board had six members - all of them British privy councillors, out of whom three were cabinet ministers. It was this Board, which governed India from 1784 to 1858 when a British Secretary of State for India replaced it and India began to be formally considered by Britain as a part of the British Empire.

During the 74 years, 1754-1848, while the EIC prepared the initial drafts of all the instructions to be sent to India - in any of the governmental departments either at the Presidency levels or at the India level - the Board of Commissioners in each and every case made the finalisation and approval of each and every instruction. The instructions, though finalised and approved by the Board, were however formally conveyed to the British governments in India under the signatures of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman and some twenty members of the Court of Directors of the EIC. In a way the job of this Court was similar to the job of a under secretary to the Government of India today, who ordinarily conveys all governmental orders and instructions under his own signature, in the name of the President of India.

As said earlier, most of the material on India, now available in Britain, was generated by the three presidency governments in India and from 1800 by the government of the North West Provinces (the present Uttar Pradesh) and from 1833 by the newly created government of India at Calcutta. All this material however was conveyed - in 5 or 6 fair hand written copies - to Britain for the use of the EIC and the Board of Commissioners.

As all this official material originated in India, it is also to be found in several places in India in the British created archives at Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Lucknow and perhaps one or two other places, while in Britain the whole of it is available in one place, i.e., in the India Office Library, London.

The India Office Library, London and the British Library and a few other major British archives also hold material pertaining to internal discussions and decisions on India amongst the concerned British Prime Ministers and other political personalities in Britain. While this important material helped in determining

British policy in India, it did not get conveyed to India at any time. The British created Indian archives in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay or Delhi, therefore do not have this internal British material.

Another kind of British material is known as private papers, comprising largely of the writings on India, mostly after 1600, of private British individuals - as travellers, businessmen or as specialists of various kinds. Such material is only to be found in various archives in Britain, unless copies of some of this material have been brought to India in recent years.

A more important series of private papers, starting from about 1773 when Warren Hastings was made the first Governor General of India, is the correspondence between these Governors General and the authorities in Britain, which from 1784 to 1858 meant the correspondence between the Governors General and the President of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India. From 1858 this correspondence carried on between the newly created British Viceroy and the Secretary of State for India in the British government. This correspondence between the Governor General (later Viceroy) and the President of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India (from 1858 Secretary of State for India) is the basic material, which describes what was happening in India and the ideas which the British governments in India had, and the advice and orders of the British authorities in London to their servants in India. Additionally the Governors General also corresponded from time to time with a large number of other persons in Britain as well as in India and a large part of such correspondence is of great value. There is also some occasional correspondence between the Viceroy and the British sovereign.

After the establishment of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India in 1784 and the supreme power it had regarding the governance of India, before any instructions were sent to India in any department or to any of the Presidencies, all the relevant background papers, mostly taken from the proceedings of the governments in India, were put before the Board. These papers later became a series in the India Office called the "Boards' Collections". Only a part of them has survived after 1858. Recently the India Office Library has been made a new comprehensive index of the 3,000 bulky volumes of the 'Boards Collections'. This index should make it much easier now to get all the references to any particular incident or place in India during the period 1784-1858. This and certain other series makes the task of research about India far more easier in the India Office Library than it is in the Calcutta, Madras or Bombay archives. But if one had a fairly clear idea of what one was looking for during the period 1784 to 1858, researching for it, over a long period may be much more convenient and inexpensive in the archives in India.

After 1858 not all of the proceedings of the Indian governments were sent to Britain, as the authorities in London no longer needed a large amount of detail. So, from 1858 onwards, the India Office Library in London does not have as much governmental material on matters in India as the archives in India have.

In London, from 1966 to 1982, and during some later visits, Dharampal collected a considerable amount of British archival material. Dharampal's books mentioned above contain some of this material. Of the remaining, around 500 documents have, in the last few years, been put on computer amounting to around 1500 computer pages. These computerised documents have further been divided into 18 parts. These are:

VOLUME I :- SOME EUROPEAN NARRATIONS ON INDIA c. 1600-1800,
13.

pp 39, Docs.

VOLUME II : SOME NARRATIONS ON INDIAN AGRICULTURE, PLASTIC SURGERY, TANK IRRIGATION SYSTEM, CHRONOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE, INDIAN COTTON TEXTILE INDUSTRY, AND OIL WELLS IN BURMA, pp 65, Docs. 11.

VOLUME III : ASPECTS OF INDIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY AND LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE, pp 54, Docs. 15

VOLUME IV : THE BRITISH BACKGROUND : OUTLOOK, INSTITUTIONS, ATTITUDES, pp 55, Docs. 24

VOLUME V : PREPARATION AND THE BEGINNING OF THE BRITISH CONQUEST OF INDIA, STARTING FROM ARCOT NEAR MADRAS IN 1748, AND PLASSEY, NEAR CALCUTTA , IN JUNE 1757; 74 pp, Docs. 29+19=48

VOLUME VI: BRITISH STATE TAKES CONTROL OF INDIA BUT KEEPS THE EAST INDIA COMPANY AS THE CONVEYOR OF ITS INSTRUCTIONS, pp69, Docs. 37

VOLUME VII: BRITISH POLICY AND ORGANISATION FOR INDIA

VOLUME VIII: NEED FOR EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION AND A NEW CODE OF LAWS FOR THAT, 1829, 1859, Docs. 6

VOLUME IX: BRITISH NARRATIONS ON INDIA 1600-1900 A.D. pp 151, Docs. 40

VOLUME X: SOME DOCUMENTS ON EARLY BRITISH INTERVENTION IN THANJAVUR, AND ITS FORMAL POLITICAL SUBORDINATION BY BRITAIN FROM 1799 ; 1770-1805, 84pp, Docs. 23

VOLUME XI: BRITISH AND EUROPEAN EXPLORING OF INDIA AND THE PROCESS OF SUBORDINATION AND CONTROL OF ITS RULERS, c 1700-1900

VOLUME XII: SOME DOCUMENTS ON RACK-RENTING, EXTORTION, HIGH USURY, AND RECOURSE TO FREQUENT TORTURE DURING BRITISH RULE, c.1750 – 1900, pp 77, Docs. 35

VOLUME XIII: BEGINNING OF WIDESPREAD EXTORTION, MOLESTATION, PLUNDER, PRESSING OF MEN, CATTLE, SUPPLIES IN BRITISH DOMINATED ARCOT, AND THE LARGER CARNATIC UNDER THE NOMINAL NABOBSHIP OF THE HELPLESS AND HUMILIATED BRITISH APPOINTED NABOB OF ARCOT: c. 1750 - 1800

VOLUME XIV: SOME DOCUMENTS ON CHRISTIANISATION OF INDIA AND ALTERATIONS IN STRATEGIES : C. 1700 - 1900

VOLUME XV: BRITISH COUNTERING OF MAHATMA GANDHI ON THE QUESTION OF THE PROMOTION AND REGENERATION OF VILLAGE INDUSTRIES BY HIM AND THE CONGRESS 1934 – 1938, Docs. 52

VOLUME XVI: SANSKRIT AND CHRISTIANISATION, AND LECTURES OF F. W. ELLIS ON HINDU LAW

VOLUME XVII: SOME ILLUSTRATIONS OF INDIAN NON-COOPERATION WITH BRITISH OPPRESSION AND MIS-RULE: c. 1700-1850, pp 38, Docs.11.

VOLUME XVIII. PROSTITUTION IN THE BRITISH ARMY IN INDIA; QUESTIONING IN LONDON, C. 1880s, pp 27, Docs. 20.

Further work needs to be done on these documents, in 18 parts. They have to be examined more carefully, perhaps reorganised and each part given an introduction. Once that is done a decision can be taken if any of them should be published.

There is still a substantial amount of material left at Sevagram besides the 500 documents mentioned above. A part of this is concerned with the widespread British practice of raising forced labour and supplies, including the supply of tens of thousands of bullock carts and bullocks for the transportation of the British Army and other British persons¹. This material if organised and properly introduced could perhaps also be considered for publication. The material is concerned with the period c. 1770 to 1930 and covers practically every part of India.

Another set of material relates to a non-agricultural tax on people in all trades and professions, including beggars, introduced at the initiative of Col. Thomas Munro in about half the districts of the Madras Presidency from 1805. This tax in very many cases was divided into 15 to 20 grades like from one anna to five rupees, to be decided by the concerned local officers of the Madras government in each individual case. The tax perhaps produced a total of about ten lacs annually, half of which went on expenses of collection. The tax was initially started to defray the salaries of the local police as the British authorities felt that every pie of their budget was committed to other expenses, and the people should pay additional taxes for being policed. It was finally abandoned in the 1850s and perhaps another tax introduced in its place. It is possible that one may find some more documents of significance in this material.

III

The major purpose, for which Dharampal started this archival research, from about 1965 was to find out and know the cultural and political framework both at local levels, i.e. the village, town, etc. as also the organisational frame at the regional central levels where political authority got co-ordinated and centred. Dharampal however has done not much work on this aspect, so far. The matter has been referred to here and there, as it has been in the material on over 2000 villages of Chengalpattu (c. 1767-1774), on the subject of agricultural productivity (in some lands as high as 6 tonnes of paddy per hectare) and the infrastructure through which some 20-50 categories of institutions and specialists were maintained. Or when describing agricultural lands endowed as *manyams*, in Southern India, or the vast 1770-1780 data on the Baze Zemin and the Chakran Zemin in Bengal and Bihar. According to the British authorities about one-third of the agricultural land of Bengal had been endowed, before the British conquest, to these two categories. In one district of Bengal where an attempt was made to register the holders of Baze

¹ Around 1900 the Garhwali and Kumaoni army men who had come on leave to their homes were also forced by the local authorities into forced labour. The soldiers made a protest and it was brought to the notice of the British Commander-in-Chief. He asked the authorities of U.P. to exempt the soldiers from such forced labour. The reply of the chief secretary of U.P then was that they could not be exempted. He also said that in Garhwal and Kumaon even the priests of the major temples like Badrinath and Kedarnath were expected to be enrolled for such forced labour and if the priests could do such labour how could mere Garhwali and Kumaoni soldiers of the Indian Army be given exemption.

Zemin lands, the number of claimants was around 72,000. It may also be worth noting that around 90% of the Bazee Zemin lands during 1770-1780 were found to be allocated to Hindu Mathams, temples, Brahmins, etc. There are also statements by persons like Sir John Malcolm, later Governor of the Bombay Presidency that around 1810, some 25-30% of the village agricultural production was allocated for the support of the infrastructure of the villages in Central India, before their conquest by the British.

The British treated the prevailing Indian practice of allocations in agricultural produce to institutions and individuals from the village level, or endowments in manyams as luxury or worse, and decided to reduce these, over a period, to around 5% of what they were prior to the British conquest of India. They cut out the expenses on the maintenance of irrigation works altogether (some 4% of the gross agricultural produce was allocated for the maintenance of irrigation works in the Madras Presidency before the arrival of the British).

They abolished the local militias and the police. This militia and the police within a short time began to harass the British authorities and were termed by the British as dacoits².

They made the karnam and other higher categories accountants for land records and land tax, as servants of their own government and decided that the payment to the ironsmiths, carpenters, potters, washermen, panchangams, school teachers, vaidyas (medical doctors), the musicians, dancers and many others had little to do with the government and therefore whatever was paid to them out of the claimed government share should, in future, be brought to the government account. The endowments to religious and cultural institutions were also either stopped altogether, or so regulated that, over time, the condition of these institutions were like skeletons from the past or, they were made to look like centres of great oppression over the people.

During 1770 and 1780, especially in Bengal and after 1800 in most of the Madras Presidency, the British raised the land tax to about 5 times of what it had been traditionally in India. Further from the most ancient times to the beginning of British domination, the Indian peasant, all over India, had permanent occupancy rights over the land, or over the share, which he had, in Samudayam villages. Further he could not be turned out of the land unless he had not paid the tax on land for a long period. This position was brought to the notice of a major committee on India of the British House of Commons in 1812. Its decision was that since the cultivator in Britain did not have any such rights, therefore the Indian peasant could not have this right either, for the Indian cultivator could not be allowed any rights which were superior to those enjoyed by the British cultivator.

The village in India, as the British officers in the various districts observed and understood from about 1770-1805, was described in the House of Commons Papers in 1812. The description was as under:

“A village, geographically considered, is a tract of country comprising some hundreds or thousands of acres of arable and waste land: politically viewed, it resembles a corporation or township. Its proper establishment of officers and servants consists of the following descriptions: The pottail, or head inhabitant, who has the general superintendence of the affairs of the village, settles the disputes of the inhabitants, attends to the police, and performs the duty, already described, of collecting the revenues within his village; a duty which his personal influence and minute acquaintance with the situation and concerns of the people renders him best qualified to discharge. The Curnum; who keep the accounts of

² In 1772 Warren Hastings, the new Governor of Bengal, asked rhetorically who were the dacoits. Then he himself answered that the dacoits were such persons who had been the militia and the police of different regions in India and whose sources of income or remuneration were taken away from them by the British authorities and they in turn became dacoits.

cultivation, and registers everything connected with it. The Talliar and Totie; the duty of the former, appearing to consist, in a wider and more enlarged sphere of action, in gaining information of crimes and offences, and in escorting and protecting persons travelling from one village to another: the province of the latter, appearing to be more immediately confined to the village, consisting among other duties, in guarding the crops, and assisting in measuring them. The Boundaryman; who preserves the limits of the village, or gives evidence respecting them, in cases of dispute. The Superintendent of the Tanks and Watercourses distributes the water therefrom, for the purposes of agriculture. The Brahmin, who performs the village worship. The Schoolmaster, who is seen teaching the children in the villages to read and write in the sand. The Calendar Brahmin, or astrologer, who proclaims the lucky or unpropitious periods for sowing and threshing. The Smith and Carpenter, who manufacture the implements of agriculture and build the dwelling of the ryot. The Potman, or Potter, The Washerman. The Barber. The Cowkeeper, who looks after the cattle. The Doctor. The Dancing Girl, who attends at rejoicings. The Musician and the Poet. These officers and servants, generally constitute the establishment of a village, but, in some parts of the country, it is of less extent, some of the duties and functions above described being united in the same person; in others, it exceeds the number of individuals which have been described.

“Under this simple form of municipal government, the inhabitants of the country have lived, from time immemorial. The boundaries of the villages have been but seldom altered; and though the villages themselves, have been sometimes injured, and even desolated by war, famine, and disease; the same name, the same limits, the same interests, and even the same families, have continued for ages. The inhabitants have given themselves no trouble about the breaking-up and division of kingdoms; while the village remains entire, they care not to what power it is transferred, or to what sovereign it devolves; its internal economy remains unchanged; the potail is still the head inhabitant, and still acts as the petty judge and magistrate, and collector or renter of the village.

“In addition to the portions of land appropriated to the pagoda establishment, to the local officers of government and to the village servants, they each were entitled to certain small shares or perquisites from the crops of the villages; which were allotted to them, generally before, but sometimes subsequently, to the division of the produce between government and the cultivators. Provision appears to have been also made, in the mode last prescribed, for the maintenance of public servants incapacitated by age or accident from the discharge of their duty. The fund of these disbursements, in which the several classes of revenue officers and village servants likewise participated as one of the sources of their official emoluments, was the sayer or inland duties, and the sea and land customs.

“The practice of allotting lands free of rent, or at low rents, and of applying shares of the agricultural produce, and of the customs, to the uses and purposes above explained, was followed by the Mahomeddan government; with whom it was also a frequent custom to provide for their relations, and to reward the higher ranks of their officers in the military and civil departments, by large grants of land, under the name of jaghires. The territorial grants to the religious institutions of the country, and for charitable purposes, bear the name of enaums; those to the revenue officers and servants in the villages, are called mauniums; but both descriptions generally pass, under the former name, in the official records of the Company. The perquisites from the crops are denominated russoom or marahs.”³

³ from British House of Commons Papers : 1812 Vol. 7 : known as the Fifth Report; also reproduced in computer reprints, vol. III, No. 8

The description of the Indian village and its structural arrangements as described by the British authorities in 1812 seems to be reasonably accurate. It is supported by what remains, though in a fractured and disoriented form, of the village infrastructure in many parts of India today. The 1767-1774 detailed data on palm leaves which are presently being studied by the Centre for Policy Studies, Chennai as also the 1780 Bengal report on the Bazee Zemin and the Chakaran Zemin in Bengal and Bihar, also seems to support the 1812 British description.

The British however either intentionally or just rhetorically stated in this description that the Indian villages were so involved with their individual affairs that they did not care or notice the conquest or oppression when it happened of those around them. It is possible that in certain areas in India some villages were indifferent to the dangers faced by their neighbors or that they had detached themselves altogether from the larger society around them. But it seems more likely that this statement of the British was introduced in this description to justify their own domination and oppression in India as also, for their own purposes, to give validity to the previous but much more limited, Islamic domination and conquest of certain regions and pockets of territory in India.

The main job for India today seems to be to know in detail how Indian society actually functioned before European intervention and British domination and how the units or localities of the society, villages, towns, cities, great religious, cultural and industrial and trading centers were linked with one another. In recent years a few non-Indian scholars have tried to look into this question and it is possible that we may learn a few things about ourselves through them in the same way as we do learn about certain aspects of our technologies, social institutions, and the manners of our people during the 18th and early 19th century from the writings of the British and other Europeans.

But as this knowledge and understanding is of much more importance to us and to the reshaping of our future, it is we who would have to attend to the exploration of such knowledge and more importantly to link the various constituents together, for various periods of our past, so that we have more authentic and truer statements of the past of Indian society in its vastness, complexity as well as in its diversity. It is not as if we, i.e. the larger Indian society, today wishes to find some point in the past from where it could start to reshape itself. What it really wants is to know is what made it move, how it solved its various problems, and how it kept India prosperous, attractive, relaxed and beautiful. That it was all this is fully substantiated by the plans of India's villages and towns and perhaps much more by its old architecture not only in southern India but also in states like Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bengal and Assam. The ordinary Indian even in his present depressed state wants to recapture this past of prosperity, attractiveness, relaxation and beauty. The work on this should have started when the British decided to leave India in 1947.

IV

India does not begin in AD 1700, neither does it begin with the Islamic domination of parts of India around AD 1200 or from the incursions of Islam into Sindh in the 7th century AD, or the destruction of Somnath by Mohammad Gazni in the 9th century AD. India has had a very long existence and perhaps for most of this existence it had a very prosperous, scholarly, an aesthetic society and vibrant polity. As an instance, modern western scholars have recently worked out that till about AD 1750 the China region and the India region together produced some 73% of the manufactures of the whole world. Even after the breakdown of the states and societies of these regions, the industrial production was still around 60% of the world, till around 1830.

In recent years a few scholarly works have come out regarding the relations between India and China in the early 15th century. There is much information (published over some 40 pages even in the American

Time magazine) on the visits of the Chinese Admiral Zeng Ho to various countries of Asia and Africa including visits to India, especially several months stay in Calicut in 1405. In 1405 he was in Calicut with 300 ships and some 30,000 soldiers. Around the same time there were several Chinese ambassadors to Bengal and it is also stated that a number of ambassadors from Bengal had gone to China during the 15th century. There were probably similar links between China and other regions of India not only in the 15th century but perhaps from much before the beginning of the Christian era. If there were such links with China, it should imply that political, cultural and commercial links also existed with several other countries in east and Southeast Asia just as they existed with some of the Arab countries. The information which we get from these sources would not only help us re-build our relations with our neighbors but also may be of value in knowing more about our society of those times.

Such exploration and study of whatever is newly found could however lead man in several directions. Much of the researching of the West since 1450 has led it to the conquest of the world and its plunder and the destruction of the environment as well as suppression and elimination of other human communities. In a way most of western research has been an accompaniment of despotism and worldwide imperialism. A major military historian of the USA, Victor Davis Hanson produced an important work 'Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power'⁴, just a few weeks before the much talked about 9-11 in the USA. Two years earlier, he had written another book, 'The Soul of Battle: From Ancient Times to the Present Day, How Three Great Liberators Vanquished Tyranny'⁵. In the introduction to 'Carnage and Culture', Professor Hanson states, "why Westerners have been so adept at using their civilization to kill others – at warning so brutally, so often without being killed. Past, present, and future, the story of military dynamism in the world is ultimately an investigation into the prowess of Western arms. Scholars of war may resent such a broad generalization. Academics in the university will find that assertion chauvinistic or worse – and thus cite every exception from Thermopylae to Little Big Horn in refutation. The general public itself is mostly unaware of their culture's own singular and continuous lethality in arms. Yet for the past 2,500 years – even in the Dark Ages, well before the "Military Revolution," and not simply as a result of the Renaissance, the European discovery of the Americas, or the Industrial Revolution – there has been a peculiar practice of Western warfare, a common foundation and continual way of fighting, that has made Europeans the most deadly soldiers in the history of civilization".

Possibly scores of other American scholars have done similar work, earlier to that of these books of Hanson, or further work is being done on these subjects. It seems such research and its conclusions are in some direct way connected with the public statements of the President of the United States during the last two years and have been of some use in the waging of the US war on Iraq, in creating conditions for it, and would be useful in the present effort of the United States to dominate most of the world. If it were agreed that this was the case, many people would say that such exploration and research and analysis should not be permitted. But it is possible that the same sources and data that Prof. Hanson has used may have led scholars from other civilizational backgrounds to very different conclusions and instead helped in calming down passions and military ambition.

It is possible that what has happened in the USA could happen, in some distant future, in India also. But the greater chance in India, given India's relative inwardness and pacific and non-violent nature and the slowness with which it moves, if it moves at all, is that such things would not conceivably happen in India. And at any rate, given India's present absence of self-awareness, India must try to know itself by knowing what happened in its past over the past several thousand years.

⁴ Doubleday, New York 2001

⁵ The Free Press, New York, 1999

One major view on such self-awareness was expressed by Sri Jayprakash Narayan in 1962. He had then said⁶:

“The ancients held that the highest form of knowledge is self-knowledge and that he who achieves that knowledge achieves all. It seems to me that the value of self-knowledge holds good for nations as well. No matter how one defines a nation – and it has not been found easy to do so – the essence seems to lie not in its outward attributes but in the mental world of those who comprise it. Of the ingredients of this inner world, the most important is self-image, that is, the image that the people comprising a nation have of themselves and their forefathers.

“During the British period, the needs of imperialist rule dictated that Indians be pictured as an inferior people in respect to material, moral and intellectual accomplishments. This deliberate denigration of the Indian nation was furthered by the incapacity of the foreigner to understand properly a civilization so different from his own. So, in course of time, as our political subjugation became complete, we happened to accept as real the distorted image of ourselves that we saw reflected in the mirror the British held to us.

“Not a small part of the psychological impetus that our freedom movement received was from the few expressions of appreciation that happened to fall from the pens or lips of Western scholars about Sanskrit literature, Indian philosophy, art or science. Sometimes these foreign opinions about past Indian achievements were seized upon and inflated out of all proportions so as to feed the slowly emerging national ethos.

“After the first few years of euphoria since Independence, a period of self-denigration set in during which educated Indians, particularly those educated in the West, took the lead. Whether in the name of modernization, science or ideology, they ran down most, if not all, things Indian. We are not yet out of this period. I am not suggesting that what is wrong and evil in Indian society or history should be glossed over. But breast-beating and self-flagellation are not conducive to the development of those psychological drives that are so essential for nation building, nor so is slavish imitation of others.

“One of the reasons for this state of affairs is lack of sufficient knowledge about our history, particularly of the people’s social, political and economic life. One of the faults of our forefathers was their lack of sense of history, and their proneness to present even historical fact in the guise of mythology. As a result, even after long years of modern historical research, in India and abroad, our knowledge happens to be limited – particularly in the field of social history. Also there are long gaps or period of darkness about which not much of anything is known. One such period was that between the decline of the Mughal power and the arrival of the European trading companies and the ultimate consolidation of British power. That period was undoubtedly one of political disintegration. Yet, the material researched by Shri Dharampal and published herein reveals the survival of amazing powers of resistance to the state in the common people – ‘the Lohars, the Mistresses, the Jolahirs, the Hujams, the Durzees, the Kahars, the Bearers, every class of workmen’, to quote the Acting Magistrate of Benares in 1810 – when, in their opinion, it became oppressive or transgressed the limits of its authority.

“The behaviour of the five hundred and odd princes towards their people during British rule had created the general impression that the king in Hindu polity was a tyrant and there was no limit to his power as far as it related to his subjects, who were supposed to be traditionally docile and submissive. Foreign and Indian studies of Hindu polity, no doubt, had revealed quite a different type of relationship, which allowed even for the deposition of an unworthy king by his people. But that was considered to be a mere idealistic

⁶ Sri Jayprakash Narayan in Foreword to “Civil Disobedience in Indian Tradition”, Sarva Seva Sangh, 1971

formulation, true more in theory than in practice limited by dharma, that is, the system of duties, responsibilities and privileges that had evolved through the ages and come to be accepted by all concerned, was also not taken seriously. Instances of autocratic monarchs who defied the established dharma and got away with it were looked upon not as exceptions but as the rule.

“The material brought together by Sri Dharampal throws quite a different light on the subject.”

There is another way of looking at such self awareness, that of Mahatma Gandhi which perhaps represented the dharana (view) of most Indians. In 1909 he had said in Hind Swaraj:

“Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves.

“If this definition be correct, then India, as so many writers have shown, has nothing to learn from anybody else, and this is as it should be. We notice that the mind is a restless bird; the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge our passions the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich, or unhappy because he is poor. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy. Observing all this, our ancestors dissuaded us from luxuries and pleasures. We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before. We have had no system of life-corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regulation wage. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. They therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet. They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance and that people would not be happy in them. They enjoyed true Home Rule”.

Again, around 1911 he wrote to his eldest son, Harilal Gandhi on fagun sud 5 (March 5, 1911) that it was because of the punya accumulated by our immediate ancestors that we are functioning today. He added, “the practical knowledge boys in India possess is not due to the education they receive in schools, but is due to the unique Indian way of life. It is due to the meritorious deeds of our ancestors that we find healthy standards of behaviour, thrift, etc., around us.”⁷

V

A step towards the exploration and study of the immediate past, say from AD 1700-1950, could be seriously undertaken by setting up a major archive of all such material on India, whether from within India or from Britain, etc., which the present day Indian archives, governmental as well as private, do not possess. Private institutions and persons who have the resources as well as concern should preferably set this up. The place where it is to be set up should have some scholarly background or at least possibilities of it and should not be such that it is physically dominated by governmental administration or by some major industrial network. The setting up of such an archive could possibly cost about Rs.100 crores, and its use by scholars, students and others another Rs. 5–10 crores annually. Besides archival material, it should have all necessary reference literature relating to India as well as most of the post 1500

⁷ CWMG: Vol X, pp. 429 Letter of Mahatma Gandhi to his son, Harilal Gandhi, March 5, 1911.

world. It may be mentioned that the British library in London has some two crore books, and the library of the US Congress some four crore. A large number of Universities in Europe and America and perhaps also in China as well as Japan each have about one crore books besides journals.

If we are serious about understanding our past as well as know much more about the world, our effort and undertaking must be commensurate with our objectives. It is possible that setting up such an archive which may within a few years become a major centre of research would lead to the formation of many other centres of knowledge and learning including the creation of a University suited to the requirements of India and its people.

There has recently been a major study of the people of India by the Anthropological Survey of India. It has been published in some 60 massive volumes, 11 relating to India as a whole and the rest pertaining to the various states of India. According to this survey, to a large extent based on the British censored data, collected from 1881 onwards, the people of India are constituted by over 4,000 professional, jati, and ethnic groups. Out of this around 500, perhaps more, seem to have followed industrial occupations. Around 200 –300 groups may be taken to have played music in temples and on other occasions besides being engaged in other activities. Possibly a 100 or more used to deal with health related matters and were well versed in surgery, the setting of broken or dislocated bones, and were proficient in the use of ayurveda, siddha etc. and in acrobatics as well as yoga and were also engaged in dancing etc..

Large numbers of these professional groups still survive but at a very low and ignored level of existence. The British classed some of them as criminal tribes or thieves or dacoits. The treatment and classification started after 1858 by the British continues even today as is evident even from the study, though in some instances with different names. It seems as if the groups themselves were not asked by the researchers of the Anthropological Survey to give individual accounts of their background or what their ancestors actually did till the later part of the 18th century when a large number of them lost their professions and were reduced to poverty and wretchedness.

Incidentally, the British did a survey of a few jatis in Madras around 1770. Warren Hastings, who was in Madras till then, initiated the survey and the jatis were asked to define themselves. The Chamars of the Madras area had then said that 'they were great soldiers and that they also made saddles'.

According to the People of India Survey amongst the 4000 group surveyed, some 1780 have jati puranas. It is to be hoped that the Anthropological Survey has been wise and has collected these jati puranas, and if some of these jati puranas were merely known orally, then they have been written down.

Besides the jati puranas, India has sthal puranas, which possibly number in tens of thousands. In addition there are village histories, a large number of them also to be found in Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner. We also have the Champu literature, mostly perhaps in Sanskrit and being written till at least the beginning of the 17th century.

Coming to the most ancient times, we have the Vedas, which according to tradition were divided by the great Vyasa from one into four and by his disciples into some 1200 shakhas. After the Vedas we have the Brahmanas, the Upanishadas and then the Puranas. Besides the Puranas we have the Ramayana, originally composed by Valmiki, and later in Tamil by Kamban, the Adyatama Ramayana followed by the much more known Rama Chrita Manas of Tulsidas. The Indian tradition believes that there are hundreds of Ramayanas in the different languages of India and many in the languages of the countries, which adjoin it.

Rama is also considered to be born time after time, in different yuga cycles but always in Ayodhya and as son of Dashratha. Tulsidasa in the Ram Charita Manas beautifully describes this happening and the divine crow, Kaga Bhushandi, tells the story of it.

Besides the above, we have numerous darshanas, books on grammar, old dictionaries of the languages of India, text on Indian sciences like astronomy, arithmetic, on chemistry, agriculture, and a large amount of literature on vastu shastra, which includes architecture, town and village planning and allied matters. Then we have various texts on niti, on laws and on keeping man and the domestic animals healthy. The Charak Samhita and the Sushrut Samhita are the more well known amongst these texts. Then we have texts on music and dance like the Natya Shastas and works on aesthetics. Besides that we have high literature like the plays by Bhasa, Kalidas and countless others. Starting from much before the Christian era and going well into the 17th century, we have texts on logic and commentaries on Vedas and other sacred literature. The Adi Shankara wrote several texts and Saynas commentary on the Vedas etc. are well known even today.

Besides the above there are the religious, scientific and literary texts of the Jains, as also of the Buddhists, who spread over most of Asia; and in later times of the Sikhs and the Ligayats. In all, this ancient literature would perhaps number in tens of thousand of volume.

Though a large part of the texts mentioned above have been published here and there during the past 150 years or so, we have not yet considered publishing them in standard and well-printed, bound versions. Similarly we have a very large amount of knowledge about the universe, about the world around us, about our plants and trees, our animals, birds and insects, about our rivers, lakes and mountains and in today's world it all has to be put in print for our children as well as grown ups so that they have an awareness not only of India's past but also its present and about the nature, in the midst of which we live. Similarly we need to know about our festivals, about the variety of our food, about the connection between natural phenomena and various forms of life, about our various calendars, most of which seem to start every sixty years. All this has to be well written down and should form an essential part of the education of our people and our children.

Pawan Gupta

2nd July 2003

Mussoorie