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*Social Stratification in Ancient India: Some Reflections***

I

With the Indus script still undeciphered,[1] in spite of nearly sixty years of excavations and substantial evidence relating to varied aspects of life, much of the reconstruction of the social organization of the Bronze Age Indus Valley or Harappa Culture,[2] covering parts of Punjab, Haryana, Sindh, Baluchistan, Gujarat and fringes of western Uttar Pradesh,[3] during the third-second millennia BC,[4] is hypothetical. Though its exact relationship with the pre-existing cultures in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent has not been established so far,[5] its emergence as a result of a West Asian stimulus is being widely discounted now,[6] and it is regarded *sui generis*,[7] an indigenous development among peoples of mixed origin and diverse racial types,[8] who had resided in the Indus Valley for centuries.

Scholars have distinguished Early, Mature and Late periods within the chronological framework of the Harappa Culture,[9] with pronounced rural traits in its Early and Late periods,[10] and a high level of urbanism in its Mature period.[11] A wide agrarian base with surplus foodgrains produced by the peasants in the countryside being stored in the granaries at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro to feed the sizeable non-food-producing urban population;[12] and extensive long-distance trade with West Asia,[13] flourishing trade with Baluchistan, Afghanistan and the Central Asian region,[14] and a lively internal trade, both regional and inter-regional, characterized this period.[15] We also come across developed copper and bronze technology; a highly professional blade industry; adequate use of objects of silver, gold, precious stones and faience; crafts like bead making, shell working and

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** This is a slightly modified version of the Presidential Address to the Ancient India section of the 51st session of the Indian History Congress held in the University of Calcutta in December 1990.

ivory carving; wheel-turned, well-fired pottery, generally plain, but also often provided with a slip over which are painted designs in black pigment; hand-modelled terracottas of graceful human and animal figurines; brick laying and masonry on a vast scale; and the manufacture of exquisite seals, cotton textiles, boats, carts, etc.[16] A large number of full-time city-based specialist artisans producing a variety of articles of high artistic merit for the relatively affluent privileged strata as well as for export, their rural counterparts also engaging in crafts relating to stone, clay, shell, bone, metals and textiles;[17] and a substantial work force comprising wood-cutters, fuel burners, grain-pounders, carters, street and drain cleaners, waste removers and slaves[18] are among the other distinct features of the Mature urban phase of the Harappa Culture.

The overwhelming impression is that of a highly complex socio-economic structure with the city holding a central and commanding position *vis-a-vis* the countryside which it dominated and exploited, and a definite stratification along class lines within the city itself with the privileged ruling elite enjoying unequal wealth, power and prestige in relation to the mass of common people.[19] There are no doubt serious differences of opinion regarding the actual composition of the ruling class. To take only a few examples, V. Gordon Childe thinks that a 'ruler' dwelt in the citadels at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro; includes among the ruling class princes, priests, merchants, officials and scribes; and maintains that superstitions must have played an enormous role in consolidating and maintaining social institutions and economic arrangements.[20] Stuart Piggott, A.L. Basham, D.D. Kosambi, Bridget and Raymond Allchin, Ildiko Puskas and Irfan Habib are inclined to agree. Thus Piggott speaks of a state ruled by priest kings, wielding autocratic and absolute power, controlling production and distribution, and levying tolls and customs.[21] Basham refers to a single centralized theocratic state and continuity of government throughout the life of the civilisation.[22] Kosambi pinpoints the curiously weak mechanism of violence and the use of religion as an ideology by the dominant priests to extract tribute from the traders (who were allowed freedom to amass considerable wealth on their own) and to appropriate social surplus and maintain the class structure.[23] Bridget and Raymond Allchin attest the presence of priest kings or a priestly oligarchy who controlled the religious life, economy and civil government and functioned as administrators as well.[24] Puskas locates supreme power in the priests' hands.[25] Irfan Habib underlines a combination of gods, superstitions and priests binding the rulers and the ruled alike in an awesome dread of change.[26] R.S. Sharma, on the other hand, excludes the priests completely from the category of rulers and gives the pride of place to the traders.[27] Without categorically refuting the likelihood of priests wielding power, K. Antonova, G. Bongard-Levin and G. Kotovsky also visualize the possibility of

power in the Harappan cities being of a republican, oligarchic variety.[28] There is disagreement about the actual position of urban craftsmen as well. While Puskas[29] and R.S. Sharma[30] have no doubt regarding urban craftsmen being a part of the ruling class, Childe associates them with the modest urban dwellings of the lower strata,[31] even though they were to a large extent producing 'for the market'.[32] In a recent article Massimo Vidale expresses the opinion that craft production was under the political control of the urban elites of the Harappa Culture.[33] Antonova, Bongard-Levin and Kotovsky find the presence of both impoverished and prosperous artisans within the precincts of the cities.[34] The class character of the Mature Harappa Culture is, however, generally recognized.[35]

Stretching the evidence to make out the existence of caste and untouchability as well in the Harappa Culture, on the other hand, does not seem to have adequate basis. Iravati Karve, a sociologist, first referred to the probability of 'something very like castes' at Harappa and a street exclusively occupied by a 'caste-like group' which had specialized in pounding rice there.[36] She also loosely spoke of untouchability as a characteristic of the caste structure from top to bottom.[37] Following her, S.C. Malik, another sociologist, imagined the 'roots' of caste and the 'perpetuation of caste status by birth' in Harappan society.[38] 'Caste class patterns', in his opinion, developed in the socio-economic organization at Harappa and the incoming Aryans adopted them in the process of being Indianized.[39] That Malik is not at all serious about the use of the term 'class' here may be gauged from his reference to 'the emergence of complex socio-economic classes' comprising 'the rich and the poor' in the Harappa Culture along with the clarification that 'this is not in the sense of class consciousness or an interclass struggle'.[40] And Malik's reference to caste in the Harappan context evoked from A. Ghosh, a much more perceptive, mature and balanced scholar, the apt comment that such hurling of institutions from the known to the unknown to suggest their origin and bringing them down from the unknown to the known to prove their persistence does not carry conviction.[41] Suvira Jaiswal, too, questioned the propriety of Malik's tagging caste with the existence of class differences reflected in the settlement pattern of the Harappan cities, which survived even after the cities themselves had disappeared.[42] The concentration of various crafts in specific quarters or streets being a normal feature of the Oriental towns up to the present day has been underscored by several scholars.[43] Significantly in his edited work, *Determinants of Social Status in India*,[44] which is presumed to reflect 'a multi-faceted trans-disciplinary approach to the structure of society from ancient history to contemporary times in the Indian subcontinent',[45] neither Malik in his Introductory paper 'Determinants of Social Status in India: Problems and Issues',[46] nor any other contributor makes a single reference to caste in the Harappan context.

That Malik's view of History as a discipline is singularly narrow—almost myopic—is evident from his observation in the Introduction to another edited work, *Indian Civilization: The First Phase—Problems of A Sourcebook*,[47] that historical generalizations are normally arrived at by scrutinizing individual facts that are not amenable to any rational systematic analysis and that historians formulate general propositions, rather tentatively, citing a few instances.[48]

Among the serious and eminent historians Romila Thapar has supported the hypothesis put forward by Karve and Malik regarding caste and untouchability in some of her writings. Avowedly taking 'the help of social anthropology'—not historical evidence—she notes the probability of caste as a pre-Aryan system and part of the social stratification in the Harappa Culture, where a small group may have preserved itself through strict endogamous marriage, claimed ritual purity and higher status, and also exercised authority in a hierarchical social set-up based on a division of labour with the notion of pollution attaching to certain groups of menial workers.[49] She even talks of 'service relationships' on the pattern of the hereditary *jajmani* system and finds in caste the answer to the vexed question as to who was in authority and how that authority was maintained in the Harappa Culture.[50] The detailed reconstruction in the absence of corresponding tangible data in the material finds to support it can only be regarded as exceedingly speculative, for although the notion of ritual impurity may be exemplified by the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro and the existence of separate quarters for grain-pounders (a non-polluting vocation in itself) at Harappa is admitted, evidence of division of labour and occupational groups on the basis of ritual purity and impurity is wanting and there is no trace of the continuity of caste and untouchability in either the Late Harappa period or their transition to the Rigvedic period.[51] The material culture in the post-Harappan Vedic period (*c.* 1500–500 BC), for which we have copious literary evidence in the Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upanisads (they represent a sort of transition from prehistory to history), is glaringly different and comparatively much less advanced. This long period, too, can be divided into two distinct phases—Rigvedic (*c.* 1500–1000 BC) and Later Vedic (*c.* 1000–500 BC). The *Rigveda*, comprising ten *mandalas* (books), is widely accepted as containing two broad strata of historical layers, the earlier represented by Books II–VII and the later by Books I and VIII-X.

The hymns portray the Aryans as first and foremost a warlike people driving horse-drawn chariots and using weapons of *ayas* (copper or bronze) effectively against their non-Aryan foes in the land of the seven rivers. Professional fighters organized in separate tribal groups, they continuously fought internecine wars as well. Booty or spoils of war (*lotra*)[52] formed an important means of their livelihood. They also engaged in primarily pastoral[53] and subsidiary agricultural

pursuits, their agriculture being subsistence-oriented. Using ox-yoked plough (*langala, sira*) with wooden ploughshare (*phala*) and such other implements as hoe (*khanitra*), axe (*parasu, vrikna*), sickle (*datra, srini*), etc., they produced *yava* (barley).[54] Leather strap for the plough (*varatra*), furrow (*sita, sunu*), terms for field (*ksetra, urvara*) and ploughman (*kinasa*) are mentioned. Since most of the references to agriculture are found in the admittedly late Books I and VIII–X and a hymn in Book IV (57.1–8), which is considered an interpolation, agrarian economy obviously stabilized towards the close of the Rigvedic period.

The absence of evidence for the sale, transfer, mortgage or gift of land or its disposal in any other way makes individual ownership of land at this stage doubtful. The kin-based tribe, Rigvedic *vis* or *jana*,[55] whose members were normally on the move and temporarily dwelt at one particular place, appears to have collectively owned both the cattle and the land and worked together in the fields. Iron being unknown at this stage and tilling the virgin land being by all means an arduous task, the whole tribe toiled to produce barley.

Scholars differ seriously about the use of hired extra-tribal labour, especially slaves, in these limited agricultural operations. R.S. Sharma firmly and consistently argues in his writings that slavery in the *Rigveda* was purely domestic, that slaves, mostly women captured in wars, were used for replenishing the depleting Aryan ranks through begetting children and for household chores, and that the *Rigveda* does not have any term for wage or wage-earners.[56] A.A. Macdonell and A.B. Keith[57] and Basham,[58] on the other hand, assert that the Dasas were in many cases reduced to slavery and hence the word *dasa* has the sense of 'slave' in several passages of the *Rigveda*. P.V. Kane in his monumental *History of Dhrmasastra* cites a Rigvedic passage referring to the gift of a hundred *dasas* in the sense of slaves.[59] In Dev Raj Chanana's opinion the Aryans must have known debt slavery, slavery as a result of defeat in gambling and war slavery before their advent into this country and quite a few Dasas may have been enslaved and almost any service demanded from them.[60] Kosambi holds the view that just as cattle were herded in common and fields were tilled in common, the *dasa* was also used as common tribal property in the *Rigveda*.[61] Romila Thapar presupposes the employment of non-kin *dasa* labour in the householding economy of the *Rigveda*.[62] According to Irfan Habib, the *dasas* worked like cattle on the field and tended the herds.[63] R.N. Nandi, too, attests the use of non-kin *dasa* labourers in barley fields.[64]

Only a few crafts were practised in the post-urban rural milieu of the *Rigveda*, which mentions the *karmara* (metalsmith), the *taksan* or *tastri* (carpenter), the *carmamna* (tanner) and the *vaya* (weaver). The *karmara* smelted the metal ore in fire (hence the designation *dhmatri* or smelter) and made household utensils, tools and weapons of

copper or bronze. The *taksan* or *tastri* built chariots for war,[65] prepared vessels, buckets, sacrificial ladles and bedsteads of wood and engaged in carving. The *carmamna* tanned hide (*carman*) from which were manufactured bowstrings, slings, reins and bags. Cotton being unknown, the *vaya* (weaver) prepared woollen cloth. Common words for these artisans in several Indo-European languages suggest that the Rigvedic Aryans did not learn these crafts on the Indian soil. The Rigvedic word for potter (*kulala*) has, however, no parallels in other Indo-European languages; this may indicate the adoption of local traditions in pottery.

The products of craftsmen's labour and skill do not appear to have been meant for sale or collection in the form of taxes and in view of the unavailability of surplus to support them they probably engaged in food production as well. The evidence of a Rigvedic hymn composer calling himself a poet, his father a physician and his mother a grinder of corn[66] suggests that the indispensable division of labour had not advanced beyond a point and specialization had not become hereditary. In view of the usefulness of their work, the artisans were respected members of the Aryan *vis*. Characterizing their relationship with other members of the tribe as *jajmani*[67] is perhaps too bold. The economy was not yet fully or even primarily agrarian; craftsmen and peasants were not two compartmentalized categories; and their mutual relationship in a semi-sedentary set-up was not hereditary, subsisting from generation to generation.

Also the surplus produced in this predominantly pastoral Rigvedic economy was not substantial enough to undermine the broadly egalitarian tribal structure or to lead to the development of classes.[68] The Rigvedic tribal chief had hardly any regular or fixed source of income in the form of cereal or cattle on which he could flourish along with his priests. The term *bali* occurs in the *Rigveda* in the sense of a voluntary offering or present from tribesmen to their chief. Occasional exaction of tributes from the conquered people and spoils of war were the other sources of his income, but since resources were not adequate to maintain a regular army, he had to share these in periodic communal sacrifices with members of the tribe who formed the militia. The institution of mutual gifts also checked the growth of economic disparity and there was no leisured class living off the surplus of others. Differentiation within the tribe had, however, begun and the tribal chiefs and priests were not only claiming and enjoying superior ranks, they also received the major share of the spoils of war in the form of slaves, animals, weapons and ornaments and enjoyed a somewhat better economic position.

The term *varna* occurs in the *Rigveda* a number of times and is initially used to distinguish Arya from Dasa and Dasyu. The difference may initially have been both ethnic and cultural.[69] The words brahmana and ksatriya occur fifteen and nine times respectively

in the text, often in the sense of open and fluid functional categories, but the word *varna* is never used in connection with them. Neither kingship nor priesthood appears to have depended merely on birth or heredity at this stage and there is no evidence of restrictions as regards partaking of food or marriage. The sudra occurs only once in the *purusasukta*[70] in Book X and that also along with the brahmana, the rajanya and the vaisya (the two latter too occur for the first time here). Here the sudra is stated to have sprung from the feet of the *Purusa* or Primeval Being, unlike the brahmana who sprang from the mouth, the rajanya who sprang from the arms and the vaisya who sprang from the thighs. Significantly the word *varna* is not used in this context. Also there is a consensus among scholars that Book X belongs to the latest stratum of the *Rigveda* and virtually synchronizes with the Later Vedic texts. Evidently *varna* in the *Rigveda* did not have the sense it came to acquire later. The fourfold *varna* system had definitely not been brought to India by any group or wave of Aryans. It was an indigenous development and was not a reality in the Rigvedic period.[71] Certainly contact with peoples is not tabooed and there is not even a semblance of untouchability in the text.[72]

The Later Vedic period (*c.* 1000–500 BC), information pertaining to which is based not only on the post-Rigvedic texts, but also on the archaeological finds of the Painted Grey Ware culture synchronizing both in time and region with it,[73] furnishes evidence of all-round material progress. Victories in wars and penetration to new areas in the east brought large tracts of Uttar Pradesh, north Bihar, parts of Rajasthan, besides Punjab and Haryana, under the political and cultural sway of the Aryans. Forests were extensively burnt and land was cleared for cultivation to meet the needs of an expanding population. Economy became primarily agrarian. Besides barley, rice, wheat, millet, lentils, several kinds of pulses, sesamum and linseed were produced. References to the use of large and heavy ploughs, to which six, eight, twelve and even twenty-four oxen were yoked, and *paviravani* or *pavirava* in the sense of metal ploughshare occur in Later Vedic literature. The lone evidence of iron ploughshare from Jakhera in Etah district of Uttar Pradesh has, however, been assigned by R.S. Sharma[74] to the close of the period. It seems that hard wood (*khadira, udumbara*) ploughshares were used for deep digging to get better yield. Intensive cultivation, application of manure (*karisa, sakrit* and *sakan*), practice of irrigation and better knowledge of seasons contributed to increase in production and sufficient surplus to make possible the emergence of classes. Ownership of land devolved from the tribe to families under patriarchal heads and the process of disintegration of the Aryan tribes began.

Crafts, too, proliferated. The *rathakara*, distinct from the *taksan*, appeared as a professional craftsman for the first time. The profession of *karmara* became enormously important, for he began to manufacture

iron (*syama* or *krisna ayas*) artifacts on a modest scale about 900 BC or a little later.[75] Although the early use of iron was largely confined to weapons of war such as spearheads, arrowheads, etc., found at the excavated Painted Grey Ware sites, the role of iron axe in clearing forests for cultivation in thick vegetation areas of the middle and lower Ganga basin in the seventh century BC is incontrovertible.[76] *Ayastapa* (heater of metal, iron or bronze) and *kosakari* are mentioned in the texts; bellows appear to have been used at Atranjikhera; and two furnaces for smelting iron and forging objects from it were found at Suneri village in Jhunjhunu district of Rajasthan towards the close of the period.[77] Increase in ksatriya or rajanya power and transformation of the Rigvedic tribal chiefs into relatively strong monarchs ruling over the first territorial kingdoms of the period may have been due to their exclusive possession and use of iron weapons.[78] Extensive use of bows and arrows not only in wars but also in hunting led to the development of the specialized crafts of the bowmaker (*dhanvakrit/dhanvakara*), arrowmaker (*isukrita, isukara*) and the maker of bowstring (*jyakara*). The jeweller (*manikara*) and worker in gold (*hiranyakara*), too, make their appearance. The texts furnish more details about leather work (*carmanya*). Predominance of women in weaving, dyeing, embroidery, basket making and thorn working is reflected in terms like *vayitri, rajayitri, pesakari, bidalakari* and *kantakikari* respectively. Washing, too, had given rise to a professional category in which both men (*malaga*) and women (*vasahpalpuli*) participated. Some of the craftsmen and craftswomen apparently belonged to non-Aryan segments. The *rathakara*, the *taksan* and the *karmara* were treated with utmost esteem and consideration owing to the immense value of their crafts for wars, agriculture and general social comforts in a predominantly rural setting. The king visited their houses to perform certain ceremonies in course of sacrifices to show them respect and ensure their support. There is definitely no trace of any stigma attaching to any craft. Some of these crafts may have tended to become hereditary, though there is no textual reference to occupational *jatis* at this stage.

Division of labour and specialization of functions evidently made definite headway during the period. Agriculture became the primary concern of the vaisyas, the most numerous of the four *varnas* which developed during the period. Cattle-rearing was a secondary occupation for them. Some craftsmen, too, may have belonged to this category. The period also saw the rise of the fourth *varna* of sudras from the conquered aborigines and the defeated and dispossessed sections of the Aryans. Although occasionally wealthy cattle-owners,[79] the sudras were by and large less well-off than the vaisyas and engaged in the service of the upper classes. References to the sudra being dedicated to toil (*tapase*) in the *purusamedha* (symbolic human sacrifice) in the *Vajasaneyi Samhita*,[80] *Taittiriya Brahmana*,[81] and

Satapatha Brahmana[82] point to his belonging to the class of labourers. According to Kosambi, the new organization of society made available for the first time a supply of labour whose surplus was easily expropriated and the place of slave was taken by the sudra.[83] In Irfan Habib's opinion, the use of heavy ploughs without iron ploughshares implied as its inevitable corollary the employment of servile labourers.[84] The brahmana as a professional priest and the kastriya/rajanya as warrior/ruler had also emerged as specific *varnas*, leading to the formation of the fourfold *varna* system during the period.

Reflecting the emerging social stratification as a result of progressive division of labour, specialization of functions and growth of surplus, the *varna* system was from the beginning hierarchical. With birth and heredity becoming increasingly important factors in this division of labour and specialization of functions, *jati* (literally caste) also developed during the period, the term first occurring in Yaska's *Nirukta*[85] and being applied to a woman of the sudra caste (*sudra-jatiya*). *Varna* was in essence exploitative in nature and content. There are crude statements to the effect that the vaisya and the sudra are to be exploited for the advantage of the ruling class with the brahmana priest's active cooperation and help. The *Aitareya Brahmana* characterizes a vaisya as *anyasya balikrit*, 'tributary to another', *anyasyadya*, 'to be eaten or lived upon by another', and *yathakamajyeya*, 'to be oppressed at will', and a sudra as *anyasya presya*, 'to be expelled at will', and *yathakamavadhya*, 'to be slain at will'.[86] Sacrifices are consciously designed to help rulers overcome internal conflicts and to make the vaisya and the sudra submissive.[87] Brahmana-ksatriya claims and counter-claims to supremacy notwithstanding, their distance from the vaisya and the sudra in the emerging class structure was growing. The former two joined hands to repress and exploit the vaisya and the sudra. In fact, brahmana-ksatriya collaboration is regarded as indispensable and vital for their mutual well-being and prosperity in several texts. The crucial role of the brahmanas, with more or less complete control over rituals and the Vedic lore, in theoretical formulations facilitating the process of tribal disintegration and class formation is transparent. Their invaluable support to buttress the temporal authority entitled them to gifts from the ruler, *visamatta* (eater of the *vis*) becomes one of whose epithets. Taxes collected in kind through kinsmen (*sajata*) of the monarch became now the primary source of extraction of the available surplus. *Varna* division thus approximated to class division.[88] Productivity in the pre-iron agriculture phase, however, not being high, the material basis of this class division was weak. The tribal bonds were, therefore, not completely sundered,[89] and the vaisyas not only formed part of the tribal militia, but also received an honourable place in rituals, a *Satapatha Brahmana* passage even ordaining that

the *ksatra* and the *vis* should eat from the same vessel.[90] A full-fledged class society and state with substantial appropriable surplus, regular taxation, army, administrative apparatus and monetary economy developed only when the use of iron in agriculture and crafts became common in the post-Vedic period.

III

Few historians have written more comprehensively and adequately on the problem of social stratification in ancient India than my distinguished teacher, Professor R.S. Sharma. D.D. Kosambi's pioneering studies and brilliant insights touch the core of several themes handled by him in his books and numerous articles.[91] Romila Thapar is full of fresh ideas and her writings show a remarkable awareness of the latest trends and developments in disciplines like sociology and social anthropology. B.N.S Yadava's masterly use of a wide range of original sources in his book *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century*[92] and articles is worth emulation by every young researcher in Indian history. B.P. Mazumdar, Suvira Jaiswal, R.N. Nandi and a host of other historians including those from the south have enriched our understanding of caste and class in the ancient Indian context. Attempts to understand the patterns of social development in different regions of the country in the past and regional studies of the problem of social stratification are truly commendable, though there is need and scope for much more work in this area. Among the medieval Indian historians no one covered various branches of ancient Indian history in as much detail as the present Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research, Professor Irfan Habib. The Anthropological Survey of India has under its 'People of India' project in course of 1985–90 compiled and computerized the latest data on 4,384 communities in all the States and Union Territories of India including 426 Scheduled Tribes, 443 Scheduled Castes (quite a few of these were neither in the past nor at present are regarded untouchables in different parts of the country) and 1,051 Backward Classes in 120 volumes which will prove invaluable to researchers in history. Dr K.S. Singh, the present Director-General of the Survey, and the scholars who have assisted him in this major academic endeavour deserve all compliments. Historians in this country need to look up more carefully the good work done by sociologists like M.N. Srinivas, Andre Beteille and G.S. Ghurye as well as their Western counterparts to have a few useful insights for their own researches in history. I have myself written a few lengthy articles on some untouchable groups and the despicable phenomenon of untouchability in the ancient period. I shall not attempt to cover the entire gamut of social stratification in post-Vedic times up to AD 1200 in this brief article and I shall draw your attention to only a few aspects of this problem in a general way.

One major development in the Later Vedic period was the beginning of the process of assimilation of forest-dwelling tribes on the periphery of the immigrant Aryan settlements. Quite a few such tribes are mentioned in the texts. Among these are the Nisadas,[93] the Candalas, the Paulkasas, the Andhras and the Kiratas. It is not that all these tribes and many others who are referred to in later texts came into eqully close contact with the Aryans. But some of those who did and had poor material background fared badly in the unequal encounter. In fact they were among the first peoples who became tabooed and were subsequently damned as untouchables. It is a historical fact that when untouchability first appeared in the full-fledged class and caste society of the pre-Mauryan post-Vedic times, they were the first victims to be relegated to the ritually lowest social position. I have in mind the well-known—rather notorious—cases of the Candalas, Mritapas, Matangas and later Svapakas, Dombas and others. These were the original inhabitants of the country who are known to have belonged to the Munda-speaking Proto-Australoid ethnic type.[94] One theory about the origin of caste and untouchability is that these were pre-Aryan institutions[95] which the Aryans themselves imbibed from them. This is simply not true.

Similarly there is no basis to suggest that the caste system in our country first originated among the Dravidians in the south and then percolated to the north.[96] The south developed the phenomenon only as a result of the impact of north Indian cultural and political contact.[97] From what we know of the Harappans and the Aryans it is clear that they cannot be equated so far as their contribution to caste and untouchability in this country is concerned. There is no positive evidence for untouchability at Harappa and the Aryans did not bring the institution but developed it on Indian soil a few centuries after their advent.

Ideology and force were both systematically employed to slowly develop caste and untouchability in this country. The notion of pollution in relation to certain social groups was first elaborated in the *Dharmasutras* of Apastamba, Gautama, Baudhayana and Vasistha, then in the Smritis of Manu, Visnu, Yajnavalkya, Narada, Brihaspati and Katyayana, and still later in the early medieval Dharmasastra and Nibandha texts.[98] Even secular texts (by ancient Indian standards) like the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya fell in line. Detailed rules and norms were prescribed regarding marriage, food, association and contact and those who violated them—unless of course they were materially and politically strong—were in for serious trouble. One careful look at the institution of outcastes (*patita*)—they differed from the untouchables in not being permanent or hereditary—in Dharmasastra literature would show that they were to be no less severely punished for violation of prescribed norms and intimate contact with the untouchables than the untouchable segments till they relented and

observed the rituals of penitence and redemption. They were to lose inheritance; even their wife and children were expected to disown them; and of course for the society they would simply cease to matter.

The king's *danda* (coercive authority) was to be applied for the observance of caste rules[99] and several inscriptions bear out royal claims to follow the Dharmasastra directive in this regard. In their own way the epics and the Puranas lent support to caste norms, whose essence lay in its institutionalized inequality.[100] The brahmanas and the ksatriyas and all those who could by virtue of their power, resources and position join the elite group and had no role in primary productive activities benefited from the system; for its apparent rigidity notwithstanding, caste always retained the requisite amount of flexibility and an attitude of accommodation. Many foreign invading hordes were assimilated as higher caste groups. Even when indigenous tribes broke up, the best among them could be accommodated as priests or even as rulers.

The Dharmasastra writers employed new theoretical concepts to explain the social phenomenon. One such concept was the theory of *varnasamkara*,[101] which was used to explain the status of several emerging groups and the untouchability of sections like the Candalas, the latter being simply regarded as the lowest *pratiloma* caste—offspring of a hypogamous union between the fourth *varna* of sudra and a brahmana woman.

The notion of *jatyupakarsa* (upward mobility of a caste) owing to marriage in a higher *varna* or pursuit of an occupation prescribed for a higher *varna* continuously for five to seven generations[102] does not appear to have been valid with respect to the Candala. Downward mobility (*jatyapakarsa*) was, however, possible in the case of other theoretically *pratiloma* categories through marriage in a lower *varna* or pursuit of an occupation prescribed for a lower *varna* continuously for five to seven generations. As M.N. Srinivas points out, the untouchables differ from the other low castes in that, unlike the latter, the former have no means of pushing themselves up in the caste hierarchy and even Sanskritization does not help.

It is significant that the Sanskrit term *asprisya* for untouchability was first used in the *Visnusmriti*,[103] a text of the third century AD, and the phenomenon existed for long with terms like *anta, antya, antyaja, antyayoni, antyavasayin, apapatra, abhisasta,* etc.

The classical *varna* theory did not have any place for a fifth *varna*, though in his commentary to the *Brahmasutra*, I. 4.12, Samkaracarya (early eighth century) shows awareness of a school of thinkers who regarded the Nisada as a fifth *varna* and the *Samba Purana*, 66. 10 (sixth-eighth centuries) mentions the fifth *varna*. Untouchability was evidently considered an integral part of the *varna* system.

It is not true that Buddhism tried to confront the caste system squarely or sought to destroy it.[104] Caste was denounced; brahmanical

superiority was challenged; divine sanction behind it was questioned; it was not permitted within the *Samgha* (Order of monks); but Buddha did not seek to weed it out from the society. Caste was part and parcel of the prevailing mode of production which benefited the haves at the cost of the have-nots and Lord Buddha was perceptive enough to broadly accepts this social reality. Mahavira and Jainism, too, went along a similar line.

Beef-eating had nothing to do with the origin of untouchability.[105] It was not prohibited in the Dharmasastra texts until the early medieval period.

Bhakti succeeded in relaxing the rigours of caste to some extent.[106] Lokayata, Tantra and the Sahajiyas were openly hostile to caste and did not determinate against the low order but they failed to dislodge caste from its entrenched position in organized society.[107]

That the practice of untouchability was immediately connected with excessive and abnormal notions of purity and pollution cannot be denied, but then this is also true that caste did not develop in primitive societies where these notions are found. *Varna* in India provided a framework for their growth and systematization and projected through them the dominant material relations in ritual terms. The ideology of purity/pollution was surely used to assign low position, segregate and hereditarily exploit a large segment of population.

That there was periodically stiff resistance to caste oppression is reflected in the accounts of the Kali age in the epics and the Puranas, which show the discomfiture of the upper castes and an unusual aggressiveness on the part of the lower orders,[108] but the tempo does not appear to have been sustained and continuous enough to disrupt the system.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Despite numerous attempts and more than forty claims to success, the decipherment of the Indus script (the unilingual inscriptions, mostly on seals and some on amulet tablets or even as scratches on potsherds with never more than twenty and usually not more than ten symbols, are too short) remains an unresolved issue and does not shed light on the available archaeological material. In 'The Study of Society in Ancient India: A Reorientation of Perspectives', Presidential Address to the Ancient India section of the 31st session of the Indian History Congress, Romila Thapar argued that the decipherment must conform to a grammatical and linguistic system and the reading of the inscriptions must make sense in terms of the context of the culture; see *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (hereafter *PIHC*), Varanasi, 1969, p. 26. According to Asko Parpola, who with his Finnish colleague, Kimmo Koskenniemi, has on the basis of computer-aided analysis of the Indus script produced an impressive concordance of the known inscriptions, *A Concordance to the Texts in the Indus Script* (University of Helsinki, 1982), and with Simo Parpola, Seppo Koskenniemi and Pentti Aalto as co-authors written *The Decipherment of the Proto-Dravidian Inscriptions of the Indus Civilization* (hereafter *Decipherment*; The Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen, 1969), the Indus script is

full of challenging problems; see 'Interpreting the Indus Script', in B.B. Lal and S.P. Gupta (eds.), *Frontiers of the Indus Civilization*, Sir Mortimer Wheeler Commemoration Volume (hereafter *Frontiers*), Indian Archaeological Society and Books & Books, New Delhi, 1984, p. 191. Iravatham Mahadevan, author of the *Indus Script: Texts, Concordance and Tables* (Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1977), regards the Indus script as one of the seven pictographic scripts developed in the ancient Orient during the Bronze Age (*c.* 3000–1500 BC), the other six being Sumerian, Egyptian, Proto-Elamite, Cretan, Hittite and Chinese, generally written from the right, only about 7 per cent being written from the left, having 425±25 distinctive signs and being an independent invention; see 'What Do We Know About the Indus Script? *Neti Neti* ('Not This Nor That')', Presidential Address to the Historical Archaeology, Epigraphy and Numismatics section of the 49th session of the Indian History Congress, *PIHC*, Dharwad, 1988, pp. 600, 604–5, 614. On the basis of his structural and analytical study of the script, Mahadevan, like Parpola and his team and a group of Soviet philologists, ethnologists and mathematicians (G.V. Alekseev, M.A. Probst, A.M. Kondratov, I.K. Fedorova, B.Ya. Volcok and N.V. Gurov) led by Yu. V. Knorozov, who too have used the computer to bring out *The Soviet Decipherment of the Indus Valley Script: Translation and Critique* (hereafter *Soviet Decipherment*), edited by Arlene R.K. Zide and Kamil V. Zvelebil (Mouton, The Hague/Paris, 1976), maintains that the language was Proto-Dravidian and refutes S.R. Rao's theory put forward in his *The Decipherment of the Indus Script* (Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1982) that the language was an archaic branch of the Old Indo-Aryan and the script evolved in two stages, the early or mature script comprising 62 basic signs during 2500–1900 BC and the late script containing only 20 basic signs during 1900–1200 BC, the change-over being from a logographic-syllabic to a syllabic-alphabetic script; see Mahadevan's review article in Vivekanand Jha (ed.), *The Indian Historical Review* (hereafter *IHR*), Vol. VIII, Nos 1–2, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, July 1981 and January 1982, pp. 59–60, 64–66.

2. Culture, observes V. Gordon Childe in *Social Evolution* (Watts & Co., London, 1951, p. 26), is an organic whole, not a mechanical aggregate of traits. Of the two most important and best known sites of the Indus Valley (both in Pakistan now), Harappa in Punjab, though smaller in size than Mohenjo-daro in Sindh, being discovered in 1921, one year earlier than Mohenjo-daro, gave its name to this culture. There are still wide gaps in the archaeological material, notes A.H. Dani; see *Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Pakistan*, Unesco, Paris, and the Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, Tokyo, 1988, p. 1.
3. In the post-Independence period Indian archaeologists have identified more than 700 sites of this culture inside the country and excavated to a varying degree as many as 40 of them; see B.K. Thapar, *Recent Archaeological Discoveries in India*, Unesco, Paris, and the Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, Tokyo, 1985, p. 52.
4. Sir John Marshall first estimated the duration of the Harappa Culture from 3250 to 2750 BC; see *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization* (hereafter *Mohenjo-daro*), Vol. I, Arthur Probsthain, London, 1931, pp. 104, 106. Sir Mortimer Wheeler dated this culture in 2500–1500 BC; see 'Harappa, 1946: The Defences and Cemetery R 37', *Ancient India*, Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of India, No. 3, New Delhi, January 1947, p. 82. In *The Indus Civilization* (3rd edn., Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 125; first published in 1953), however, Wheeler modified his position and postulated the founding of the nuclear cities some time before 2400 BC and their enduring in some shape in the eighteenth century BC, these time brackets not fitting closely and mechanically to the Indus towns and villages of all sizes and in all locations. Asko Parpola *et al* have dated the Harappa Culture in *c.* 2500–*c.* 1800 BC (*Decipherment*, p. 3), while Knorozov *et al* have dated its outer limits in *c.* 2200–*c.* 1750 BC (*Soviet Decipherment*, Preface, p. 5). D.P. Agrawal plotted some two dozen radiocarbon dates, including those for Kot Diji, Kalibangan and Lothal, and, based on uncalibrated dates, concluded *c.* 2300–1750 BC as the maximum date bracket of this culture, though at the individual sites the duration of this culture might have been still smaller ('Harappa Culture: New Evidence for A Shorter Chronology', *Science*, Vol. 143, No. 3609, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Washington, 1964, pp. 950–51); cf. 'Harappan Chronology: A Re-examination of the Evidence',

in D. Sen and A.K. Ghosh (eds.), *Studies in Prehistory*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1966, pp. 139, 147.

5. A. Ghosh (ed.), *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology* (hereafter *Encyclopaedia*), Vol. I, ICHR and Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1989 (a posthumously published two-volume monumental work which contains the major findings of Indian archaeology in prehistory, protohistory and ancient historical period during the last one 150 years and encompasses information available up to 1978), p. 75.
6. A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (hereafter *Wonder*), 3rd revised edn., Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1967; first published in 1954, p. 15; Glyn Daniel's Preface to Childe, *Man Makes Himself*, Watts & Co., London, 1965; first published in 1936, p. xii.
7. A. Ghosh, *The City in Early Historical India* (hereafter *City*), Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1973, p. 2.
8. Childe, *New Light on the Most Ancient East* (hereafter *New Light*), reprint, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963, first published under this title in 1934 and as *The Most Ancient East* in 1928, p. 175; *Man Makes Himself*, p. 169; *What Happened in History* (hereafter *What Happened*), reprint, Penguin, 1972, first published in 1942, p. 132; Stuart Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1950, p. 140; A.D. Pusalker, 'The Indus Valley Civilization', in R.C. Majumdar (ed.), *The Vedic Age*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1951, pp. 176, 196; Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization*, p. 136; Bridget and Raymond Allchin, *The Birth of Indian Civilization: India and Pakistan Before 500 B.C* (hereafter *Birth*), Penguin, 1968, p. 126; Raymond Allchin, 'The Legacy of the Indus Civilization', in Gregory L. Possehl (ed.), *Harappan Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective* (hereafter *Harappan Civilization*), American Institute of Indian Studies and Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., New Delhi, 1982, p. 332; K. Antonova, G. Bongard-Levin and G. Kotovsky, *A History of India*, Book I, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1979, pp. 14–16; V.K. Thakur, *Urbanization in Ancient India*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 26–27; Dani, *Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Pakistan*, pp. 2, 55.
9. A. Ghosh places the Early and Mature Harappa periods within *c.* 2700–1900 BC and the Late Harappa period within *c.* 1700–1000 BC; see *Encyclopaedia*, Vol. I, pp. 87, 90. The most recent radiocarbon dates (without MASCA correction) are *c.* 2900–2100 BC for the Early Harappa period, *c.* 2200–1800 BC for the Mature Harappa period and *c.* 1800–1300 BC for the Late Harappa period. Applying MASCA correction, the Early and Mature Harappa periods extend from *c.* 3200 to 2200 BC and from *c.* 2700 to 2100 BC respectively; see K.S. Ramchandran, 'Dating the Indus Civilization' in B.B. Lal and S. P. Gupta (ed.), *Frontiers*, p. 539.
10. Gregory L. Possehl (ed.), *Ancient Cities of the Indus* (hereafter *Ancient Cities*), Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, pp. x, 47–48, 287. Though the Early and Late periods were substantially rural, according to Jim G. Shaffer, urban centres were not absent during the Late Harappa period; see 'Harappan Culture: A Reconsideration', in Possehl (ed.), *Harappan Civilization*, p. 49.
11. The new cities are spatially larger and can accommodate a much denser population than the agricultural villages that have been absorbed in them or that still subsist beside them and urbanism on a vaster scale than on the Nile or the Euphrates signified progress in terms of organic and cultural evolution; see Childe, *Man Makes Himself*, pp. 14–15, 142. The Indus Civilization marked the zenith of the first period of urbanization during the Bronze Age, maintains Dani; see *Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Pakistan*, p. 1.
12. Vivekanand Jha, 'Agricultural Labour and Village Artisans in Early North Indian History (up to *c.* 500 BC)' (hereafter 'Agricultural Labour and Village Artisans'), *Social Science Probings*, Vol. I, No. 4, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 544–46 (the article was first presented at the Indian History Congress symposium at its 45th session held at Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, in 1984); cf. Childe, *What Happened*, p. 135; *Progress and Archaeology*, Watts & Co., London, 1944, p. 49; *Man Makes Himself*, p. 131; Ernest Mackay, *Early Indus Civilization*, 2nd enlarged and revised edn., Luzac, London, 1948, first published in 1935, pp. 132–33; Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, pp. 153, 155; Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization*, pp. 72, 84; Basham, *Wonder*, p. 18; D.D. Kosambi, *An*

Introduction to the Study of Indian History (hereafter *Introduction*), Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1956, pp. 55, 62; *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (hereafter *Culture*), Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1965, p. 54; Bridget and Raymond Allchin, *Birth*, p. 126; R.S. Sharma, 'Stages in Ancient Indian Economy I: Bronze Age Urbanism to Iron-based Agriculture' (Section on 'Urban Experiment, *c.* 2600–1500 BC'), *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India* (hereafter *Perspectives*), Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 105–6; *Ancient India*, 3rd revised edn., NCERT, New Delhi, 1990, p. 48, first published in 1977; Irfan Habib, 'The Peasant in Indian History', General President's Address to the 43rd Indian History Congress session, *PIHC*, Kurukshetra, 1982, p. 6.

Some scholars have envisioned the existence of a peasant segment in the towns also; cf. Childe, *Progress and Archaeology*, p. 49; idem, 'The Urban Revolution', reprinted in Possehl (ed.), *Ancient Cities*, p. 15; Robert McAdams, 'The Natural History of Urbanism', loc. cit., p. 20.

13. Shereen Ratnagar, *Encounters: The Westerly Trade of the Harappa Civilization*, Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 232; Childe, *New Light*, p. 186; *Man Makes Himself*, p. 150; *What Happened*, p. 134; Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, pp. 133–40; Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization*, pp. 81–82; Kosambi, *Introduction*, pp. 55–57; *Culture*, pp. 59–60; R.S. Sharma, *Perspectives*, p. 107; *Ancient India*, pp. 49–50; Bridget and Raymond Allchin, *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan* (hereafter *Rise*), pp. 219–20; A. Ghosh (ed.), *Encyclopaedia*, Vol. I, p. 85.
14. Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *The External Trade of the Indus Civilization*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 166, 169; Basham, *Wonder*, pp. 18–19; R.S. Sharma, *Perspectives*, p. 107; *Ancient India*, p. 49; A. Ghosh (ed.), *Encyclopaedia*, Vol. I, p. 85.
15. Kosambi, *Introduction*, pp. 57–58; Bridget and Raymond Allchin, *Birth*, p. 129 fn.; S.P. Gupta, 'Internal Trade of the Harappans', in B.B. Lal and S.P. Gupta (ed.), *Frontiers*, pp. 417, 424.
16. Bridget and Raymond Allchin, *Rise*, pp. 193–95, 197, 199, 201–2; A. Ghosh (ed.), *Encyclopaedia*, Vol. I, pp. 83–84.
17. Vivekanand Jha, 'Agricultural Labour and Village Artisans', op. cit., p. 547.
18. Among the scholars who attest the existence of slaves are Mackay, *Early Indus Civilization*, p. 39; Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, pp. 169–70; D.H. Gordon, *The Prehistoric Background of Indian Culture*, Bhulabhai Memorial Institute and N.M. Tripthi Pvt. Ltd, Bombay, 1958, pp. 71, 74; Basham, *Wonder*, p. 18; Kosambi, *Introduction*, pp. 55, 62, and *Culture*, p. 54; Dev Raj Chanana, *Slavery in Ancient India as Depicted in Pali and Sanskrit Texts*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1960, p. 170; and Antonova, Bongard-Levin and Kotovsky, *A History of India*, Book I, pp. 20, 23. Unlike the Soviet scholar V.V. Struve and the German scholar Walter Ruben, however, who regarded the Harappa Culture as a specimen of a slave-based social formation, R.S. Sharma expresses doubts regarding slave labour being a significant component of the Harappan economy; see *Perspectives*, pp. 108–9; cf. Antonova, Bongard-Levin and Kotovsky, *A History of India*, Book I, p. 23; Vivekanand Jha, 'Ancient Indian Political History: Possibilities and Pitfalls', *Social Scientist*, Vol. XVIII, Nos 1–2 (200–201), New Delhi, January–February 1990, p. 41 (in a slightly modified form the article has appeared in *IHR*, Vol. XIV, Nos 1–2, July 1987 and January 1988, published in December 1990, see pp. 101–2, and an earlier version was first presented at the 50th Indian History Congress session at Gorakhpur University in 1989).

Even those scholars who do not consider the evidence regarding slavery in the Harappa Culture as irrefutable, for example, G.K. Rai (*Involuntary Labour in Ancient India*, Chaitanya Publishing House, Allahabad, 1981, p. 46) and Uma Chakravarti ('Of Dasas and Karmakaras: Servile Labour in Ancient India', in Utsa Patnaik and Manjari Dingwaney (eds.), *Chains of Servitude: Bondage and Slavery in India*, Sangam Books, Madras, and Orient Longman, 1985, pp. 42–43), acknowledge the existence of 'a sort of organised labour, with a measure of compulsion never far away' or 'regimented dependent labour' (see Rai, op. cit., pp. 46–47), or 'a section which laboured' in this stratified society and resided in barrack-like quarters near the granaries (see Uma Chakravarti, loc. cit.). Wheeler, too, had referred much earlier to servile and semi-servile labour as a

familiar element of all ancient polities including the Harappan (*The Indus Civilization*, p. 54).

19. Y.M. Chitalwala. 'The Problem of Class Structure in the Indus Civilization', in B.B. Lal and S.P. Gupta (eds.), *Frontiers*, p. 211. In his opinion, the so-called massacre at Mohenjo-daro may have been the result of an internal conflict rather than an all-out external invasion (ibid., p. 215). Possehl, too, finds society internally differentiated and structurally specialized ('Archaeological Terminology and the Harappan Civilization', ibid., p. 30), and envisages peasant revolts as one of the possible factors of the decline of the Harappa Culture (*Ancient Cities*, p. 288). Antonova, Bongard-Levin and Kotovsky do not accept the view that the Harappan society was pre-class in character and find unmistakable evidence of class stratification here (*A History of India*, Book I, p. 22). Amita Ray, too, has no doubt about the hierarchical structure of the Harappan urban society based upon the rule of the few over many ('Harappan Art and Life: Sketch of A Social Analysis', hereafter 'Harappan Art', in Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *History and Society: Essays in Honour of Niharranjan Ray*, hereafter *History and Society*, K.P. Bagchi & Co., Calcutta, 1978, pp. 117, 119, 129). Class societies, according to Childe, subsume a small minority that annexes, concentrates and accumulates the social surplus and the masses who at best retain just as much of the product of their labour as is required for domestic consumption (*Social Evolution*, p. 37).
20. Childe, *New Light*, p. 174; *Man Makes Himself*, pp. 130, 142; *Progress and Archaeology*, p. 22.
21. Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, pp. 136, 153.
22. Basham, *Wonder*, pp. 15–16.
23. *Kosambi, Introduction*, pp. 58–59, 61–62; *Culture*, pp. 64, 70.
24. Bridget and Raymond Allchin, *Birth*, p. 137; *Rise*, p. 182.
25. Puskas, 'Society and Religion in the Indus Valley Civilisation', in Bridget Allchin (ed.), *South Asian Archaeology*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 163.
26. Irfan Habib, General President's Address, op. cit., p. 6.
27. R.S. Sharma, *Perspectives*, p. 106; *Ancient India*, p. 50.
28. Antonova, Bongard-Levin and Kotovsky, *A History of India*, Book I, p. 53. Pusalker, too, regards it a 'democratic bourgeois' polity; see 'The Indus Valley Civilization', in Majumdar (ed.), *The Vedic Age*, p. 173.
29. Puskas, op. cit., p. 163.
30. R.S. Sharma, *Perspectives*, p. 106.
31. Childe, *New Light*, p. 175; *What Happened*, p. 135.
32. Childe, *What Happened*, p. 134.
33. J.M. Kenoyer, 'Specialized Producers and Urban Elites: On the Role of Craft Industries in Mature Harappan Urban Contexts', in Kenoyer (ed.), *Old Problems and New Perspectives in the Archaeology of South Asia* (hereafter *New Perspectives*), University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1989, p. 180.
34. Antonova, Bongard-Levin and Kotovsky, *A History of India*, Book I, pp. 21, 23.
35. The rich-poor divide amounting to class division is indicated not only by the well-to-do sections inhabiting large houses and the poor taking shelter in tiny dwellings, but also by the burial practices showing the wealthy as being interred with jewellery and decorated vessels and the poor with accoutrements on a far more modest scale (ibid., p. 23). According to Amita Ray, the more conventional and sophisticated potteries, the intaglio seals, the bearded busts and the dancing Harappan male seem to reflect the ethos and psyche of the dominant minority, while the terracotta female figurines and animals, the vegetal decorations and narrative paintings, the Mohenjo-daro girl and the male torso reflect the ethos and psyche of the working communities ('Harappan Art', op. cit., p. 129).
36. Iravati Karve, *Hindu Society—An Interpretation*, first published in 1961, 2nd edn., Deshmukh Prakashan, Poona, 1968, pp. 54–64, and Introduction by W. Norman Brown, p. vi.
37. Iravati Karve, *Kinship Organization in India*, first published in 1953, 3rd edn., Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1968, p. 7.

38. S.C. Malik, *Indian Civilization: The Formative Period—A Study of Archaeology as Anthropology*, first published in 1968, reprint, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, and Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1987, p. 107.
39. S.C. Malik, *Understanding Indian Civilization: A Framework of Enquiry*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1975, p. 76.
40. S.C. Malik, 'Harappan Social and Political Life', in B.B. Lal and S.P. Gupta (eds.), *Frontiers*, pp. 204, 208. In a recent article, 'An Enquiry into the Concepts of Technology, Surplus and Social Stratification' (in Dilip K. Chakrabarti (ed.), *Man and Environment*, Vol. XII, Indian Society for Prehistoric and Quaternary Studies, Deccan College, Pune, 1988, pp. 1–16), Makkhan Lal, too, has made an elaborate, clumsy and facile attempt to deny any link of the appearance of surplus and advance in technology with the emergence of social stratification in the ancient period. His broadside on Childe in the names of all the supposed celebrities on the other side of the fence that Makhan Lal could think of is especially misplaced because Childe also maintained that 'man's progress from savagery to civilization is intimately bound up with the advance of abstract thinking' (*The Aryans: A Study of Indo-European Origins*, hereafter *Aryans*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., London, 1926, p. 3), and thirty-seven years before Kosambi published his famous article, 'Combined Methods in Indology' (*Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. VI, Nos 3–4, Mouton, The Hague, 1963, pp. 177–202), Childe advocated a coordination of literary evidence with archaeological and anthropological data (Preface, p. xii) for the reconstruction of history.
41. A. Ghosh, *City*, p. 84.
42. Suvira Jaiswal, 'Caste in the Socio-Economic Framework of Early India', Presidential Address to the Ancient India section of the 38th Indian History Congress session, *PIHC*, Bhubaneswar, 1977, pp. 27–28; idem, 'Studies in the Early Indian Social History: Trends and Possibilities', *IHR*, Vol. VI, Nos 1–2, July 1979 and January 1980, pp. 11–12.
43. Cf. Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, p. 170.
44. Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, and Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1986.
45. Preface, p. ix.
46. Pp. 1–27.
47. Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1971.
48. P. xv.
49. Romila Thapar, Presidential Address, op. cit., pp. 21, 36 fn.; idem, *The Past and Prejudice*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1975, p. 29. In his Foreword to Stephen Fuchs, *The Children of Hari: A Study of the Nimar Balahis in Madhya Pradesh, India* (Verlag Herold, Vienna, and The New Order Book Co., Ahmedabad, 1949, p. viii), Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf no doubt tentatively puts forward the hypothesis of an urban origin of untouchability, but does not consider it possible to ascribe the growth of this social phenomenon to any definite period in Indian history. Even so, the hypothesis is not well-founded in evidence, for not only has the movement from villages to towns in recent times been a factor in lessening the rigours of caste and untouchability, the 'second urbanization' in the Ganga basin in the sixth century BC borrowed nothing from the Harappa Culture (A. Ghosh, *City*, pp. 2, 30), and untouchability first appears prominently in post-Vedic texts broadly reflecting a rural setting. The study of the socially and culturally lowest segment of the Nimar Balahis by Fuchs himself does not even remotely indicate that their untouchability was at any stage due to their habitat in an urban milieu.
50. Romila Thapar, Presidential Address, loc. cit.; cf. J.M. Kenoyer, 'Socio-Economic Structure of the Indus Civilization as Reflected in Specialized Crafts and the Question of Ritual Segregation', in Kenoyer (ed.), *New Perspectives*, p. 189. In her recent study, *From Lineage to State: Social Formations in the First Millennium BC in the Ganga Valley* (hereafter *Lineage*) (Oxford University Press, 1984, p.53), without specifically mentioning caste, she refers to the possibility of Harappan society being ruled by an aristocracy claiming power through ritual and religion and the notion of purity and pollution prevailing there.

    In her *A History of India* (Vol. I, first published in 196, reprint, Penguin, 1986, p. 37), however, Romila Thapar does not recognise caste as a phenomenon of the

Harappa Culture and categorically states that there was no consciousness of caste even when the Rigvedic Aryans first came to India. In her *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (hereafter *Interpretations*) (Orient Longman, 1978) also, where the Presidential Address has been reprinted in pages 211–39, she maintains in the chapter 'Society and Law in the Hindu and Buddhist Traditions' (pp. 26–39) that the order of castes emerged from a divine source in the Hindu tradition (p. 29) and in the chapter 'Ethics, Religion and Social Protest in the First Millennium BC in Northern India' (pp. 40–62) she assigns the growth of caste to this period (p. 47). Although in her General President's Address to the 44th Indian History Congress session she speaks of continuities between the Harappan and post-Harappan societies, including the Vedic (*PIHC*, Burdwan, 1983, pp. 4, 18)—she had expressed her inability to identify any 'specifically Aryan elements in the variety of post-Harappan cultures in the Indus and Ganga valleys in her Varanasi Presidential Address in 1969, *PIHC*, pp. 16–17—she refrains from mentioning caste in the Harappan context.

51. Vivekanand Jha, 'Candala and the Origin of Untouchability' (hereafter Candala), *IHR*, Vol. XIII, Nos 1–2, July 1986 and January 1987, pp. 33–34 fn. A shorter version of the article was first presented at the International Seminar on 'New History' organised by the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, in collaboration with the India International Centre, New Delhi, in February 1988; and a more elaborate version was presented at the National Seminar on 'Untouchability in Ancient India' organised by the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, in March 1989.

The Rigvedic Aryans are no longer regarded as the immediate successors of the Mature Harappa Culture or the invading hordes which destroyed it, as had been initially suggested by Childe (*New Light*, pp. 187–88) and Wheeler ('Harappa, 1946: The Defences and Cemetery R 37', *Ancient India*, No. 3, January 1947, p. 82) and enthusiastically supported later, among others, by Kosambi (*Introduction*, pp. 68–69; *Culture*, pp. 55, 71). Way back in 1931 Sir John Marshall thought that the Harappa Culture could have been but 'a mere shadow of its former self' when the Indo-Aryans entered Punjab about the middle of the second millennium BC, and since no evidence of a large-scale armed confrontation had been found at the excavated sites, they were not its destroyers (*Mohenjo-daro*, Vol. I, pp. 110–12). Among the adherents to this view are Basham (*Wonder*, pp. 24, 28); Asko Parpola *et al* (*Decipherment*, p. 5); K.A. Nilakanta Sastri (*Aryans and Dravidians*, P.C. Manaktala & Sons, Bombay, 1979, pp. 8–9); George F. Dales ('The Mythical Massacre at Mohenjo-daro', in Possehl (ed.), *Ancient Cities*, p. 294); Vishnu-Mittre ('The Harappan Civilization and the Need of A New Approach', in Possehl (ed.), *Harappan Civilization*, p. 37); Romila Thapar (*Interpretations*, pp. 18, 152–53. 262); Antonova, Bongard-Levin and Kotovsky (*A History of India*, Book I, pp. 27–29); R.S. Sharma (*Perspectives*, p. 110); and A. Ghosh (ed., *Encyclopaedia*, Vol. I, p. 89). As Dani points out, the *Rigveda* does not speak of a great state against which the Aryans fought and their opponents may have been those who lived in small territorial zones like that of Taxila; see*The Historic City of Taxila*, Unesco, Paris; and the Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, Tokyo, 1986, p. 35.

52. Emile Benveniste, a well-known authority in comparative linguistics, has found words corresponding to Sanskrit *lotra* in several Indo-European languages; see *Indo-European Language and Society*, Faber & Faber, London, 1973, pp. 135–36.

53. R.S. Sharma has counted 176 references to *gau* (cattle) as against 21 references to agricultural activities in the *Rigveda*. Cattle not only provided milk, meat and hide, but as the primary source of energy were also used in ploughing fields and drawing carts. Battles were fought for the sake of cattle, which also formed the medium of exchange and were the very measure of wealth of the Rigvedic Aryans; see 'Forms of Property in the Early Portions of the *Rigveda*', *Essays in Honour of Professor S.C. Sarkar*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976, p. 40; cf. *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* (hereafter *Material Culture*), Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1987, pp. 38–39; *Sudras in Ancient India* (hereafter *Sudras*), first published in 1958, 3rd edn., Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1990, pp. 10, 12, 21, 29; Kosambi, *Introduction*, p. 77.

54. No other grain is specified.
55. The traditional idea of *vis* being a subdivision of *jana* has been disputed by R.N. Nandi, in whose opinion *jana* signified the earlier wandering group while *vis* marked the beginning of household life; see 'Anthropology and the Study of the Veda', Review Article on Romila Thapar's *Lineage*, *IHR*, Vol. XIII, Nos. 1–2, pp. 155–56. Romila Thapar's hypotheses regarding *vis* and lineage presented in her book on *Lineage* have been disputed by A.M. Shah, R.N. Nandi and R.S. Sharma.
56. R.S. Sharma, 'Conflict, Distribution and Differentiation in Rigvedic Society' *IHR*, Vol. IV, No. 1, July 1977, pp. 3, 4, 11; *Perspectives*, pp. 28, 113.
57. *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects* (hereafter *Vedic Index*), Vol. I, first published in 1912, reprint, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1967, p. 357.
58. Basham, *Wonder*, p. 32.
59. VIII. 56.3; Kane, *History of Dharmasastra* (hereafter *Dharmasastra*), Vol. II, Pt. 1, first published in 1941, 2nd edn., Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1974, pp. 180–81.
60. Chanana, *Slavery*, pp. 19–20.
61. Kosambi, *Introduction*, pp. 92–93.
62. Romila Thapar, *Lineage*, pp. 39–40.
63. Irfan Habib, General President's Address, op. cit., p. 7.
64. R.N. Nandi, 'Anthropology and the *Rigveda*', op. cit., pp. 162–64.
65. In Nandi's opinion horse-yoked chariots were also used for gathering fruits, honeycomb, *soma* plant and game; ibid., p. 164.
66. *Rigveda*, IX. 112.3.
67. Jaimal Rai, *The Rural-Urban Economy and Social Change in Ancient India (300 BC–300 AD)*, Bharatiya Vidya Prakshan, Varanasi, 1974, pp. 99–100.
68. R.S. Sharma, *Sudras*, p, 30; *Perspectives*, pp. 27–28; 'Conflict, Distribution and Differentiation in Rigvedic Society', op. cit., p. 11.
69. R.S. Sharma refers to the difference of colour and physiognomy as well as cultural differences between the Aryans and their enemies; see *Sudras*, pp. 14–16. Basham stresses the religious, social and cultural differences between the Aryans and the non-Aryans, but concedes that the racial connotation of *arya* had not become quite meaningless in the Rigvedic stage; see 'Aryan and Non-Aryan in India', in M.M. Deshpande and P.E. Hook (eds.), *Aryan and Non-Aryan in India*, University of Michigan, 1979, pp. 4–5.
70. *Rigveda*, X. 90. 12.
71. The view expressed in Vedic *Index* (Vol. II, p. 250), by Macdonell and Keith that the caste system was already well on its way towards general acceptance in the *Rigveda* is not correct. Childe rightly denies the existence of caste in this text (*Aryans*, p. 32). Irfan Habib correctly points out that it is futile to expect the social institution like caste to exist before the producers in society were able to provide a 'surplus' and the *varna* initially presaged very little of the caste system that was to grow later; see *Caste and Money in Indian History*, D.D. Kosambi Memorial Lecture, 1985, University of Bombay, 1987, pp. 4–5.
72. Vivekanand Jha, 'Stages in the History of Untouchables' (hereafter 'Stages'), *IHR*, Vol. II, No. 1, July 1975, p. 14; 'Candala', *IHR*, Vol. XIII, Nos. 1–2, p. 1.
73. R.S. Sharma, 'The Later Vedic Phase and the Painted Grey Ware Culture', in Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *History and Society*, pp. 131–43.
74. R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture*, p. 60.
75. Ibid., p. 58; 'Class Formation and Its Material Basis in the Upper Gangetic Basin (*c.* 1000–500 BC)' (hereafter 'Class Formation'), *IHR*, Vol. II, No. 1, p. 2; B.P. Mazumdar, 'Changing Profile of Economic History', Presidential Address, Ancient India section, 37th Indian History Congress session, *PIHC*, Calicut, 1976, p. 38.
76. R.S. Sharma, 'Class Formation', op. cit., pp. 2–3; 'Problems of Social Formations in Early India', General President's Address, 36th Indian History Congress session, *PIHC*, Aligarh, 1975, p. 5.
77. R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture*, p. 59.
78. R.S. Sharma, 'Class Formation', op. cit., p.7.
79. *Bahu-pasu, Pancavimsa Brahmana*, VI. 1. II.
80. *Vajasaneyi Samhita*, XXX. 5.
81. *Taittiriya Brahmana*, III. 4. 1. 1.
82. *Satapatha Brahmana*, XIII, 6. 2. 10.

83. Kosambi, *Introduction*, p. 91; *Culture*, p. 24.
84. Irfan Habib, General President's Address, op. cit., p. 10.
85. XII. 13. The *Nirukta* is a commentary on the *Nighantu*, a Vedic glossary in five chapters and is pre-Paninean.
86. *Aitareya Brahmana*, VII. 29.
87. *Satapatha Brahmana*, VI. 4. 1. 13.
88. Claude Meillassoux, 'Are There Castes in India?', *Economy and Society*, Vol. II, No. 1, London, February 1975, pp. 89–111.
89. Basham, *Wonder*, p. 41.
90. *Satapatha Brahmana*, IV. 3.3. 15.
91. It is unfortunate that a compilation of all his articles except those on coins (*Indian Numismatics*, (ed.) B.D. Chattopadhyaya, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1981) is yet to be published.
92. Central Book Depot, Allahabad, 1973.
93. See my article, 'From Tribe to Untouchable: The Case of Nisadas', in R.S. Sharma and Vivekanand Jha (eds.), *Indian Society: Historical Probings (In Memory of D.D. Kosambi)*, ICHR and People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 67–84.
94. A.L. Basham, 'Aryan and Non-Aryan', in Deshpande and Hook (eds.), *Aryan and Non-Aryan in India*, p. 2.
95. Cf. Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, *Social Life in Ancient India*, Academic Publishers, Calcutta, 1965, p. 151.
96. This hypothesis was put forward by N.K. Dutt, *Origin of Caste in India, Vol. I, c. 2000–300 BC*, London, 1931, pp. 106–7.
97. K.A.N. Sastri, *Aryans and Dravidians*, pp. 48–82. In his book entitled *Untouchability: A Historical Study* (Koodal Publishers, Madurai, 1979, pp. 127, 132–41, 144), K.R. Hanumanthan has shown that untouchability in the south has a distinctly later origin than in the north and the earliest references to untouchability can be found in *Acarakkovai* (fourth/fifth century AD) which shows the Dharmasastra influence.
98. The obligatory nature of expiatory rites and penances, relatively simple or complex, and the strong social sanction behind them is proved by elaborate provisions regarding their strict enforcement in these texts.
99. The preservation of the *varna* order is ordained as the primary responsibility of the monarch in the *Dharmasutras* of Gautama (XI. 9–10) and Vasistha (XIX. 7–8), the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya (1. 3. 14–17), the *Smritis* of Manu (VII. 35), Visnu (III. 1, 33), Narada (XII. 113) and Yajnavalkya (I. 363).
100. The *Ramayana*, for example, portrays Rama killing a sudra named Sambuka who in violation of *Dharmasastra* norms was practising penance which had purportedly resulted in the death of a brahmana's son (*Uttara Kanda*, LXXIII. 2–LXXVI. 15, Gita Press Edition.
101. See my article '*Varnasamkara* in the Dharmasutras: Theory and Practice', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 3, Leiden, 1970, pp. 280, 287–88; G.C. Pande, *Foundations of Indian Culture, Vol. II, Dimensions of Ancient Indian Social History*, Delhi, 1984, p. 229; S.J. Tambia, 'From Varna to Caste Through Mixed Unions' in Jack Goody (ed.), *Character of Kinship*, Cambridge, 1973, pp. 218, 223–24. The substantial increase in the number of mixed castes in Manu (55 according to P.V. Kane, *Dharmasastra*, Vol. II, Pt. I, p. 59) reflects the growing fusion and assimilation of various elements with the Aryan population. *Varnasamkara* was presumed to be caused not only by marriage with women unfit for marriage or promiscuity among the *varnas*, but also by relinquishing one's obligatory duties (*Manusmriti*, X. 24).
102. *Gautama Dharmasutra*, IV. 22–24; *Manusmriti*, I. 96.
103. *Visnusmriti*, X. 37–38. Katyayana (AD 400–600) also uses the term *asprisya* twice in the sense of untouchables (verses, 433, 783).
104. A useful recent study based on the Buddhist Canon is that by Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1987. It is significant that like the *Upanisads*, *Dharmasastra* and other brahmanical texts, Buddha also expressed full faith in the theory of high and low births and material position being connected with action in previous birth. B.R. Ambedkar did not carefully go into all the evidence while propounding the theory that Buddhism in a way effectively countered caste and untouchability in

the country. For a detailed exposition of my views in this regard, see my articles 'Stages', *IHR*, Vol. II, No. 1, pp. 21–23, and 'Candala', *IHR*, Vol. XIII, Nos 1–2, pp. 24–31.

105. B.R. Ambedkar made untenable claims in this regard in his book *The Untouchables* (Delhi, 1948, pp. 103, 155, 159); cf. Vivekanand Jha, 'Stages', op. cit., p. 31.

106. See my article 'Social Content of the *Bhagavadgita*', *IHR*, Vol. XI, Nos. 1–2, July 1984 and January 1985, pp. 1–44 (first presented at the VIIth World Sanskrit Conference held at the Kern Institute, Leiden, in August 1987). This *IHR* volume was released in 1988. I have not found any evidence of the impact of feudalism on *bhakti* (devotion) in this text.

107. Debiprasad Chttopadhyaya has in his book *Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism* (People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1959), and B.N.S. Yadava has in his study *Society in Northern India* provided evidence for this.

108. R.S. Sharma, 'The Kali Age: A Period of Social Crisis' in S.N.Mukherjee (ed.), *History and Thought (Essays in Honour of A.L. Basham)*, Subarnarekha, Calcutta, 1982, pp. 186–203; B.N.S. Yadava, 'The Accounts of the Kali Age and the Social Transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages', *IHR*, Vol. V, Nos. 1–2, July 1978 and January 1979, pp. 31–63; Vivekanand Jha, 'Candala', op. cit., pp. 21–23.