

Fragmentation and Segmentation Versus Integration? Reflections on the Concepts of Indian Feudalism and the Segmentary State in Indian History*

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I

At present there exist at least three different structural models for the early medieval Indian kingdoms of the post-Gupta and pre-Delhi Sultanate period (c. 550-1200 A.D.)

- (i) The "conventional model" of a rather unitary, centrally organized kingdom with a strong central bureaucracy;
- (ii) the Marxist-influenced "Indian feudalism model" of decentralized feudal states (which, however, presupposes the existence of an earlier rather strong central state which had been weakened through feudalization of the society); and
- (iii) the model of a "segmentary state" which allots the Hindu kingdom a position on a continuum of governance formation between the tribal "stateless" form of government and the unitary state.

These three models depict the early medieval Indian kingdom either (i) as a strong and centralized state or (ii) as a kingdom which was a weak and decentralized successor to an earlier strong and centralized state or (iii) as a state which had not yet reached the position of a strong and centralized state though it did have some of its characteristics in its core around the capital. The first model thus places the Hindu kingdom in the final position of the continuum of pre-modern state formation, whereas the second and third models fix its position far below it. The last two, however, differ completely in the explanation of how the Hindu kingdom arrived at this position. According to the conception of "Indian feudalism", state formation after the Gupta period had a decidedly negative character, since the many local kingdoms and principalities had developed at the cost of former larger political entities. In opposition to this explanation, the concept of segmentary state assumes

*I wish to express my thanks to A. Hofer, G. D. Sontheimer and E. Lenck of the South-Asia Institute for their comments.

that the Hindu kingdom had developed "from below" up to a certain level which, because of inherent structural problems, it was unable to transcend in its further development towards a unitary state.

Before trying to show that the historical development of several Indian regions like Orissa might provide yet another variant of state formation, we should have a closer look at these conceptions as a kind of introduction to the following delineations.

The conventional interpretation of India's early medieval past, particularly by Indian historians, had been influenced by the struggle for independence. Against the obvious neglect of this period by British historians—e.g. V.A. Smith's *Oxford History* devoted nearly the same number of pages to Alexander in India as to the 600 years of North Indian history after Harṣa, and the respective second volume of the *Cambridge History of India* was never published—it had to be shown that the "dark period" in many respects was actually a continuation of the Golden Age. Though much has also been written on the *theory* of the state, kingship and administration, little analytical work was devoted to the *actual structure* of the late ancient and early medieval kingdoms. The early historians had usually identified structure with administration and its analysis with a detailed description of the apparent hierarchically organized levels of administration. From their mention in the inscriptions their existence in the whole kingdom even in its outer provinces was inferred, though their continuous and actual existence was not always established even for the core of the kingdoms. Problems like the continuous growth and decline of various kingdoms were considered questions of mere military conquest rather than of structural peculiarities.¹ It was only in the fifties that a considerable change took place in the research on the late classical and early medieval states of India. The concept of dynastic history, which so far had dominated modern historiography, was supplemented by more analytical and less descriptive work, particularly in the field of socio-economic aspects of certain periods of North-Indian history. An important impetus came from Professor A.L. Basham and a group of young Indian scholars at London University who produced a series of excellent theses, several of which have meanwhile become standard works in their respective fields.²

¹For the relevant literature see chapter XIII of H. Kulke, H. Leue, J. Lutt and D. Rothermund, *Indische Geschichte Altertum bis zur Gegenwart Literaturbericht über neuere Veröffentlichungen*, which is published as a separate issue of the *Historische Zeitschrift*, 1980.

²Examples are: G.L. Adhya, *Early Indian Economics (Studies in the Economic Life of Northern and Western India, c. 200 B.C.-300 A. D.)*, Delhi, 1966; S.K. Maity, *Economic Life of North India in the Gupta Period (cir. 300-550)*, 1st. ed. 1957, 2nd ed. Delhi, 1970, L. Gopal, *The Economic Life of Northern India, c. A.D. 700-1200*, Delhi, 1965.

II

A further decisive step in the historiography of independent India took place with the introduction of the concept of feudalism into Indian history. In the year 1956, Daniel Thorner rightly began his contribution on India to a comparative study on "*Feudalism in History*" with the remark: "There is no single work solely devoted to feudalism in India; nor is there even a single article on the place of feudalism in the historical evolution of India".³ Basing his study only on the Rajput and Muslim states, he concluded "that neither the Rajput nor the Muslim regimes was feudal".

It is not without a touch of irony that exactly in the same year 1956 D.D. Kosambi published two articles on the development of feudalism in India and the origin of feudalism in Kashmir.⁴ And only two years later R.S. Sharma began to contribute a series of articles to various journals on the origin and development of feudalism in India.⁵ Together with several new articles, they were republished in 1965 in his monograph on "*Indian Feudalism*", which though not uncriticized, became the standard work on Indian feudalism until now.⁶ More recently he published several other articles in which he summarized his research, highlighting several important aspects of his theory.⁷

During the last 15 years Sharma's theory was followed by a rather large group of North Indian historians who contributed various articles and quite a few monographs, particularly noteworthy among them being B.N.S. Yadava's comprehensive study on the *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century*.⁸ They enlarged considerably the available material for a comparative study of Indian feudalism, but only a few of them contributed to a more theoretical discussion of its conceptual framework. A general insight into the discussions among this "Indian Feudalism School" is given in the two publications *Historical*

³Daniel Thorner, "Feudalism in India", in *Feudalism in History*, R. Coulborn, ed. Princeton, 1956 p. 133-150.

⁴D.D. Kosambi, "On the Development of Feudalism in India", in *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, XXXVI, 1956, pp. 258-369; "Origins of Feudalism in Kashmir", in *J. of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (The Sardhasatapdi Commemoration Volume, 1804-1954)*, 1956-57, pp. 108-20.

⁵R. S. Sharma, "The Origins of Feudalism in India (c.A.D. 400-650)", in *J. of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, I, 1958, pp. 297-328.

⁶R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism: c. 300-1200*, Calcutta, 1965.

⁷R.S. Sharma, "Methods and Problems of the Study of Feudalism in Early Medieval India", in *Indian Economic Review*, I, 1974 pp. 1-10; "Indian Feudalism Retouched", in *Indian Historical Review*, I, 2, 1974, pp. 320-30.

⁸B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in North India in the 12th Century*, Allahabad, 1973; see also D.N. Jha, *Revenue System in Post-Maurya and Gupta Times*, Calcutta, 1967.

*Probings in Memory of D.D. Kosambi*⁹ and the first volume of the *Indian Historical Review* (1974), both edited by R.S. Sharma and V. Jha and published by the Indian Council of Historical Research.

According to R.S. Sharma the origin of Indian feudalism has to be sought in the ever-increasing number of land grants to Brahmins and religious institutions since the early centuries A.D. and later, also to various government officials. Their endowment with more and more immunities (e.g. freedom from taxation and inspection by royal officers etc.) and royal prerogatives (e.g. jurisdiction and collection of fines etc.) led to the creation of a class of landed intermediaries which alienated land and people from the central dynasty and deprived the villagers of traditional rights. The loss of coercive control over land and people was further aggravated by the decline of urbanism and interregional trade and the scarcity of coins. Politically the development was characterized by a continuous process of fragmentation and decentralisation, caused "by the widespread practice of granting big and small territories to vassals and officials who entrenched themselves territorially and ended up as independent potentates".¹⁰

The conception of Indian feudalism raised a vehement controversy even before R. S. Sharma's book was published. In a special seminar held in December 1964 at the Centre of Advanced Study in Ancient Indian History and Culture at the University of Calcutta several lectures were delivered supporting or criticizing the conception. D. C. Sircar concluded his lecture on "Landlordism confused with Feudalism" with the remark: "Feudalism is thus a misnomer in the early Indian context".¹¹ His main argument against the application of the concept of feudalism to Indian history is the undeniable scarcity of inscriptions granting service tenure against the overwhelming majority of land grants to Brahmins and religious institutions. According to Sircar "the majority of the numerous charters discovered all over the country record grants of land to gods and Brahmanas without stipulating any obligation of the donees to the donors. Obviously, the priestly class was the most unsuitable for rendering services of the feudal type".¹² In a formal sense, in the narrow context of early European feudalism, this argument is certainly correct but, as

⁹R.S. Sharma and V. Jha (eds.), *Indian Society: Historical Probings in Memory of D. D. Kosambi*, New Delhi, 1974, 2nd ed., 1977. For a very helpful general survey see also D. Rothermund, "Feudalism in India," in *The Phases of Indian Nationalism and other Essays*, by D. Rothermund, Bombay, 1970, pp. 165-78.

¹⁰R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism: c. 300-1200*, *op. cit.* p. 159.

¹¹D.C. Sircar, *Land System and Feudalism in Ancient India*, University of Calcutta, 1966, pp. 57-62. The article was republished as "Indian Landlordism and European Feudalism", in: D.C. Sircar, *Studies in the Political and Administrative Systems in Ancient and Medieval India*, Delhi, 1944, pp. 13-32. It was reviewed again by R.S. Sharma in his review article "Indian Feudalism Retouched", *op. cit.*

¹²D.C. Sircar, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

shall be pointed out later on, it may miss an important point when applied to the period of early medieval Hindu kingdoms, when Brahmins did play a most important role in the process of early state formation.

Very recently the "Indian Feudalism School" itself seems to have entered the discussion on the validity of the existing conceptual framework of Indian feudalism. In their respective presidential Addresses at the Waltair Session of the Indian History Congress in December 1979 D. N. Jha and Harbans Mukhia raised several interesting questions concerning the applicability of the concept of feudalism in the Indian context.¹³ In his address to the Ancient India Section, Jha supports the concept of Indian feudalism but he points out that "there has been in the past few years some realisation of the theoretical weakness of the explanation of feudal developments only in terms of foreign trade, whose decline, to a large extent, depended on factors *external* to the Indian situation It is this theoretical impasse which has recently led to a rethinking on the part of the exponents of the Indian feudal model from the vantage point of the *international social contradictions*." Jha enlarges therefore on the concept of the Kaliyuga which according to him indicates a sharp class antagonism in ancient Indian society. This antagonism led to the establishment of the feudal order as, later on the social crisis and the resurgence of trade and urbanism around 1000 A.D. caused the weakening of the feudal order in India. Incidentally, it is interesting that Jha rightly observes that "the areas where the land grant economy first made its appearance were on the periphery of the regions with firmly entrenched brahmanical order and had thus nothing to do with the social crisis and decadence reflected in the idea of Kaliyuga." Jha thus questions one of the main props of R.S. Sharma's explanation of the origin of Indian feudalism.

Whereas, generally speaking, D. N. Jha tries to conciliate the concept of Indian feudalism even more, as formerly done by R.S. Sharma, with the Marxist concept of feudalism, Harbans Mukhia raises very critical questions against the very existence of feudalism in India. After a more thorough delineation on the concepts of European feudalism as derived by European medievalists, he points out that "European feudalism developed essentially as changes at the base of the society took place: in India, on the other hand, the establishment of feudalism is attributed by its protagonists primarily to state action in granting land in lieu of salary or in charity, and the action of the grantees in subjugating the peasantry by means of legal rights assigned to them by the state.

¹³D.N. Jha, "Early Indian Feudalism: A Historiographical Critique", Presidential Address, Section Ancient India; Harbans Mukhia, "Was there Feudalism in Indian History", Presidential Address, Section Medieval India, Indian History Congress XL Session, Waltair Dec. 1979. I am grateful to Prof. Jha and Prof. Mukhia for providing copies of their Presidential Addresses.

It is, indeed, a moot point whether such complex social structures as feudalism can be established through administrative and legal procedures." Like D. N. Jha he agrees that the establishment of the feudal order presupposed a deep social and production crisis. Contrary to Jha, however, Mukhia rejects the existence of such a fundamental crisis in ancient and medieval Indian history. "With a high quantum of agrarian surplus available in the form of land-revenue and cesses etc. to the State—which formed the chief instrument of exploitation—because of high fertility of land and low subsistence level of the peasant a kind of equilibrium existed which facilitated the state's appropriation of the peasant's surplus in conditions of relative stability." Because of this relative stability and in the absence "of a major break in means of agricultural production" feudalism did not develop in India. In a mimeographed supplement to his Presidential Address, Mukhia concludes: "it is difficult to see the logic of such a comparison [between European and Indian feudalism] in the ancient and medieval periods when it might only persuade us to ask questions which have so little relevance to our history."

III

Recently, the analysis of the structure of Hindu kingdoms as carried out both by conventional historians and adherents of the concept of Indian feudalism has also been challenged by a group of American historians in the context of South Indian history. Among them Burton Stein figures most prominently. About a decade ago he introduced, with reference to B. Subba Rao,¹⁴ in an elucidatory article the concept of "nuclear areas" which he designates as a major factor in the historical development of South India. According to Stein, the "nuclear areas of corporate institutions" and high population density are basically units of agrarian organization situated mainly in the drainage basins of the major rivers. They are fundamentally independent and self-governing Brahmin and Sat-Sudra settlements and relatively autonomous economic units. The district assembly (*nāḍu*) of these nuclear areas was the only institution which commanded full authority over all resources of the nuclear areas. Otherwise the nuclear areas have "only the lightest links to the great warrior families of Kanchi or Tanjore, the capitals of Pallava and Chola dynasties". B. Stein therefore concludes that "the political system in early medieval South India may best be described as a multicentered system of power".¹⁵

¹⁴B. Subbarao, *The Personality of India: A Study of the Development of Material Culture of India and Pakistan*, Baroda, 1956.

¹⁵B. Stein, "Integration of the Agrarian System of South India", in *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, R.E. Frykenberg ed., Madison, 1969, pp. 175-216 (185).

In 1973, Stein went several steps further in his critical approach. At a conference held by Duke University on "Realm and Region in Traditional India", he came forward with a highly critical and provocative paper entitled "The Segmentary State in South Indian History" which was published in 1977.¹⁶ He derived the conception of the segmentary state from the anthropologist A. W. Southall and his studies on the Alur society in Eastern Africa. Stein admits that "the concept of the segmentary state, drawn from African material and adapted to early Indian society, may produce a certain, predictable culture shock generally, and for students of South Indian society, especially".¹⁷

As mentioned above the segmentary state represents "a position on the continuum of governance formation". At the centre, where authority and political control was nearly absolute, it has some indicators for a unitary state, i.e. territorial sovereignty, centralized government, a specialized administrative staff, and the monopoly of coercion. But these indicators of a unitary state are shading off towards the periphery into mere ritual hegemony. In the outer areas there exist "several levels of subordinate foci" which are organized pyramidally. "The central and the peripheral authorities reflect the same model, the latter being reduced images of the former".¹⁸ The political fragility of the segmentary states is caused to a large extent by the ambiguous loyalty of the segments in the outer areas. "The more peripheral a subordinate authority is, the more chance it has to change its allegiance from one power pyramid to another".¹⁹

Stein elaborates two more points which are essential for understanding his concept of the segmentary state in South Indian history. The organization of units or the segments in the segmentary state as a whole is pyramidal. This pyramidal segmentation is continued in the various segments themselves. According to Stein the relationship between a centre of these segments (B) and their respective peripheral elements (C) is the *same* (italics by Stein) as the relationship between the prime centre (A) of the kingdom and its subordinate centres (B). The only distinction is that the B-C relationship is a "reduced form" of the A-B relationship, "B" exercising authority over fewer people than "A". The important question whether there is really no qualitative difference between the A-B and B-C relations will be discussed later on in more detail.

¹⁶B. Stein, "The Segmentary State in South Indian History", in *Realm and Region in Traditional India*, R.G. Fox. (ed.) New Delhi, 1977, pp. 3-51; B. Stein's forthcoming publication, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* which has been announced recently by the Oxford University Press in India is not yet available to the author.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

Stein furthermore distinguishes sharply between actual political control on one side and ritual sovereignty on the other. All the numerous centres of the segmentary state do exercise actual political control over their own part or segment, but only one centre, the primary centre of the ruling dynasty, has the primacy of extending ritual sovereignty beyond its own borders. In a detailed elaboration Stein confines ritual sovereignty mainly to the state cult—in the case of the Cōḷa empire most impressively exemplified in the royal śīva cult of Rājarajā's Rājarājeśvara temple at Tanjore—and to the eleemosynary inscriptions. In opposition to the conventional view which interprets these inscriptions as indicators of actual *political control* of the central dynasty over those localities where they are found, Stein interprets them as a clear evidence of *ritual sovereignty* with the aim of distributing "to all inhabited places the standardized message of a great kingship".²⁰ Ritual sovereignty thus formed the overarching ideological element which made these units segments of a whole and "converted a congeries of local political systems into a segmentary state".²¹

In this context, mention should also be made of a recent publication of G.W. Spencer. Although the concept of the segmentary state is not mentioned explicitly, it may contribute an important supplementary aspect.²² In his analysis of imperial Cōḷa policy during the 11th century Spencer speaks of a "tax-tribute-plunder-continuum" which radiates from the royal centre beyond its own peripheral areas into the outer areas of the neighbouring kingdoms. Regular tax was collected only in the core area of the Cōḷas, tribute was imposed on the outer autonomous small kingdoms, and plunder was the main objective of Cōḷa warfare with the peripheral units of the neighbouring kingdoms and sometimes even with their centres.

IV

No doubt the discussions about Indian feudalism, though being quite controversial, and the more recent concept of the segmentary state in Indian history have contributed a lot to our knowledge of the late ancient and early medieval Indian states. Obviously, for the first time in Indian historiography their *actual* structure and not their *theoretical* or *śāstric* concept became the focal point of research. For the first time, the apparently invariable picture of either stagnant and somewhat chaotic kingdoms on the one hand or kingdoms of rather unchanging glory and greatness (interrupted only temporarily through military setbacks) on the other, was supplemented and partly replaced. R. S.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 17.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 16.

²²G.W. Spencer, "The Politics of Plunder: The Cholas in the Eleventh Century Ceylon", in *J. Asian Studies*, XXXV, 1975/76 pp. 405-19.

Sharma's research depicts considerable *structural change* in the post-Gupta period, particularly in the socio-economic fields which had been much neglected in previous studies. Whereas the Indian Feudalism School tends to emphasize the diachronic structural development during the early medieval period, B. Stein and G.W. Spencer emphasize the synchronic structural differentiation within a given kingdom. Without neglecting the historical dimension, they are particularly interested in analysing the structural elements which constitute the early medieval Hindu kingdoms and the method and means which allowed the central kings to maintain their powerful yet ambiguous position.

Despite their undeniable merits I deem it necessary to raise several objections to these conceptions. I shall focus mainly on the questions of an alleged decentralization by land grants to Brahmanas and religious institutions in the context of Indian feudalism and on the concept of ritual sovereignty relating to the theory of the segmentary state.

A major disadvantage of the theory of Indian feudalism is the preponderance of its conceptual framework of decentralization and political fragmentation. This interpretation is certainly true with regard to Northern India during the period which followed the disintegration of the Gurjara-Pratihara empire in the second half of the 10th century A.D. and which Sharma calls the "heyday of political feudalism".²³ But it does not explain the earlier growth of the great regional kingdoms and their considerable duration of rule. And, of course, the period which followed the disappearance of the classical Gupta empire in the early 6th century A.D. must be interpreted as a period of political fragmentation in North India and parts of Central India. But this fragmentation certainly was not caused through land donations either to religious or secular donees. A structural interpretation of the post-Gupta era reveals that this period of North-Indian decentralization coincided with a very intensive process of state formation on the local, subregional, and regional level in some parts of Northern India, in many parts of Central India and in most parts of Southern India. It was during this time that a process of indigenous state formation took place in many parts of India which, during previous centuries, had formed only temporarily provincial outposts of the classical (North!) Indian empires.

During this period of early medieval indigenous state formation, Brahmins played a decisive role, but not by decentralizing the state through alienation of land and people as assumed by the school of

²³The question of how these principalities arose is answered by Sharma: "Some of them were obviously the results of the partition of the ruling family. But others resulted from the widespread practice of granting big and small territories to vassals and officials who entrenched themselves territorially and ended up as independent potentates" (R. S. Sharma, 1965, p. 159). But here also we have to ask whether this political fragmentation was a process of decentralization "from above" or whether new *allodial chiefs* came up "from below" in a time of weakness of the centres.

Indian feudalism. Indeed, inscriptions prove that they were often settled systematically as administrative and, of course, religious specialists near the capitals and, in a kind of inner colonization, in the outer areas. This "constructive" element of settling Brahmins was even conceded by R.S. Sharma in the context of Orissa: "The significance of land grants to Brahmanas is not difficult to appreciate. The grantees brought new knowledge which improved cultivation and inculcated in the aborigines a sense of loyalty to the established order upheld by the rulers, who could therefore dispense with the service of extra staff for maintaining law and order".²⁴

This valuable suggestion, however, was not followed up by a comprehensive study of this most important aspect of early medieval Indian land grants, either by Sharma²⁵ or by other historians of the Indian Feudalism School. Instead, major attention was paid to the "discovery" of the few land grants to secular donees against the overwhelming majority of land grants to Brahmins and religious institutions.²⁶ The necessity of proving the existence of land grants as beneficium to secular officers and chiefs is quite understandable because they are a necessary condition for the existence of feudalism. And instead of analysing the above-mentioned "positive" or constructive aspect of land grants to Brahmins as one of the major aspects of internal policy of early medieval Hindu kings, these land grants were generally interpreted under the aspect of alienation of land, people and power from the central dynasty and the formation of a class of landed intermediaries.²⁷

This one-sided interpretation of land grants to Brahmins by the Indian Feudalism School may at least partly be explained, through a precipitate transfer of the concept of European feudalism to the Indian context. In central European and particularly in early German history, ecclesiastical vassals had certainly played a considerable part in the decentralization and degeneration of the "Holy Roman Empire of German Nations", a process which, on the other side, led to the eman-

²⁴R. S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism: c. 300-1200, op. cit.*, p. 281.

²⁵Sharma assumes this "negative" role of land donations already for the early Śātavāhana-period: "A second factor leading to decentralisation was the grant of fiscal rights to Buddhist and brāhmaṇa beneficiaries", in *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, 2nd ed., Delhi 1968, p. 292; see also p. 303 f.

²⁶A good example—besides R.S. Sharma's own book on *Indian Feudalism*—is B. N.S. Yadava, "Secular Land Grants of the post-Gupta period and Some Aspects of the Growth of Feudal Complex in Northern India", in: D.C. Sircar p. 72-94. Some cases which Yadava mentions seem, however, to refer to sinecures as a reward after performing a deed rather than a beneficium, granted in order to secure the future support of the donee. (Max Weber distinguished between "true" *Lehensfeudalismus* and *Pfrundenfeudalismus*)

²⁷D.N. Jha, "Temples as Landed Magnates in Early Medieval South India (c. A.D. 700-1300)", in: R.S. Sharma and V. Jha *op cit.* pp. 202-16; M. Liceria, "The Emergence of Brāhmaṇas as Landed Intermediaries in Karnataka" in *Indian Historical Review*, I, 1974, pp. 28-36.

icipation of those socio-economic forces which initiated the breakthrough of the modern age. In India, however, religious donees had a very different position. First of all there was no papacy behind or above them to strengthen their position and they never had the means (nor the intention?) to entrench themselves militarily against their secular donors. An investiture struggle would have been unthinkable in the context of Hindu kingdoms. If we want to compare the Indian development with feudalism in Europe at all, we should not only—as is usually done—look at the classical form of feudalism after the territorial principalities or the “ethnic” duchies had developed in Germany. More fruitful for a structural comparison is the Franconian kingdom during the period of transition from the Merovingians to the Carolingians. Even German Medievalists who usually tend to characterize the classical vassalage as “main instrument of breaking up central power” concede that “in Franconian time vassalage was the only means of intensive state formation and strengthening royal coercion”.²⁸

V

It is exactly in this context of early state formation, characterized by limited coercion, near non-existence of an indigenous administrative staff, reduced interregional communication and trade, and scarcity of coinage that land grants to Brahmins in the post-Gupta period have to be understood. Therefore, before assuming alienation of royal power and resources through land donations to Brahmins and their endowment with immunities (*parihāra*) and privileges, one should always ask whether the royal donor had really been able to exercise all those powers himself which he transferred to the donee. In many cases, the *de jure* transfer of the regalities might actually have brought about, for the first time, their *de facto* execution. By land donations to loyal Brahmins outside the central area of the ruling dynasty, the king might also have deprived potential opponents among his *sāmantas* of their resources rather than relinquished tribute which he had never been able to extract regularly. During the process of early state formation in the post-Gupta period the Brahmins thus might well have acted as pace-makers of royal authority and coercion and its legitimation rather than as agents of feudalization. Because of their own authority and peaceful way of living they were much more suited to this job than the hated royal

²⁸K. Bosl, *Lebenswesen*, in Rossler-Franz, *Sachwörterbuch zur Deutschen Geschichte*, München, 1958. The German historian O. Hintze argued very similarly as early as 1919: “Not feudal degeneration ‘denatured’ the (German) empire but vice versa: The whole feudal development is intelligible only under the assumption that this (early Franconian) empire had been no real state but something quite different”. O. Hintze, “Wesen und Verbreitung des Feudalismus” (“Nature and expansion of F.”), reprinted in: O. Hintze, *Staat und Verfassung*, Göttingen, 1970, p. 86.

officers (*rājapurūṣa* etc.). Even in the core area of the central dynasty, which was certainly under its direct control, the endowment of *agrahāra* or Brahmin villages with immunities prohibiting entry of royal officers and troops should not be considered under the aspect of alienation of royal regalities only. The symbiotic relationship of the Brahmins with the dynasty made them a part of the establishment which by itself was interested in its perpetuation, based on a smooth cooperation between *brāhmaṇa* and *kṣātra*.²⁹ Opposition which could be coped with by military coercion only was certainly not to be expected from these Brahmin villages. The systematic settlement of Brahmins in villages around the early capitals and their endowment with immunities may even in some cases have tended to create a partly "demilitarized zone" around the royal seat, because the immunities of the Brahmin villages certainly had to be respected by potential opponents among the royal relatives and powerful officers of the inner circle.

VI

Particularly with regard to the important question of land grants to Brahmins and religious institutions and their function within the context of the Indian states, Stein's interpretation offers a major advantage. As has been shown above, he regards them as an essential part of the "ritual sovereignty" of the segmentary state, and states in his studies on the Cōḷas that "we can no longer interpret such grants as indicating an alienation of resources of the Chola central government".³⁰ Stein's approach is corroborated by an earlier article by G.W. Spencer on "Religious Networks and Royal Influence in Eleventh Century South India" in which he pointed out that the establishment and costly patronage of the new temple at Tanjore by Rājarāja I "was in fact a method adopted by an ambitious ruler to enhance his very uncertain power."³¹

The major contribution of Stein's theory has to be seen in his analysis of the segmentary structure of the Cōḷa empire on one side and the overarching function of what he calls the "ritual sovereignty" on the other. For the South Indian Cōḷa empire, with its strong and autochthonous local "segments" as represented in the *nāḍus* based on ethnic and lineage affiliation and on one thousand years' documented local history,

²⁹For the *brāhmaṇa-kṣātra* relationship, see particularly L. Dumont, "Conception of Kingship in Ancient India" in L. Dumont, *Religion, Politics and History in India*, Paris/The Hague, 1970, pp. 63-88; J-C. Heesterman, "Power and Authority in Indian Tradition", in *Tradition and Politics in South Asia*, R. J. Moore ed., New Delhi, 1979 pp. 60-85; J.D.M. Derret, "Rajadharma", in *J.Asian Studies*. XXXV, 1976, pp. 597-609.

³⁰B. Stein, *ibid.*, p. 13.

³¹G.W. Spencer, "Religious Networks and Royal Influence in Eleventh Century South India", in *J. of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, XII, 1969, pp. 42-56.

the conception of a segmentary state sounds fascinating and is much more convincing than any other conception offered so far.

However, there are a few points which should be discussed before accepting the concept as an established theory and particularly before trying to establish its validity for other regions of India. Since the ideological element rightly plays an important role in his concept of "ritual sovereignty", much depends on his interpretation of Hinduism. In his refutation of the concept of Indian feudalism in South Indian history, he questions the existence of a "politically relevant moral order" for all castes in Hinduism. He points out that Hinduism as an aspect of kingship ideology also "provided for considerable instability. The power of political legitimation was vested with local Brahmans responsible to no superiors and the religion was characterized by a basic discontinuity between relatively high-caste (Brahman and non-Brahman) participants in Vedic sect activities and the mass of Hindus involved in highly localized, non-Vedic, folk religious affiliation. This discontinuity in Hinduism considered as a morally binding force—the gulf between the high and the low—is a factor which historians have neglected. The other side of the coin of ritual exclusiveness is a discontinuous moral order".³²

Though this argument is brought forward by Stein in order to prove the non-applicability of the concept of feudalism (in which a binding moral order formed the most essential basis of vassalage) to Indian history, it may also be of crucial importance for understanding his concept of the segmentary state in general and of ritual sovereignty in particular. Of course, Hinduism was primarily based on and derived its strength from the two poles of the "great" all-Indian Sanskrit tradition and the many local or "little" traditions. But as has been shown recently in connection with the Jagannātha cult and the regional tradition of Orissa, these two poles did by no means remain dichotomic entities.³³ Since the last centuries of the first millennium A.D. they became increasingly joined in an uninterrupted continuum, focusing on new regional traditions. This is not the place to go into details of the development of these regional traditions which, in a way, became more and more the true melting pot of the Sanskrit tradition and the local village traditions. In the field of religion these regional traditions were best known through their various bhakti cults. They diminished and in some cases even eliminated the previous discontinuity between "Vedic sect activities and the mass of Hindus involved in highly localized, non-Vedic folk religious activities" and, what matters most in our context,

³²B. Stein. "State and the Agrarian Order in Medieval South India: A Historiographical Critique", in *Essays on South India*, B. Stein ed., New Delhi, 1976, pp. 64-91 (86).

³³A. Eschmann, H. Kulke, G. C. Tripathi (eds.), *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, New Delhi, 1978.

they bridged at least ideologically "the gulf between the high and the low".

These regional traditions originally centred around the places of pilgrimage (*tīrtha*) with their priestly yet popular legendary accounts which were later collected and magnified in regional collections as for instance Śēkkilār's *Periya Purāṇam*, the "Tamil Bible". The regional traditions furthered the development of a new sense of regional loyalty³⁴ based on regional cults, regional languages and literature, caste and lineage affiliations etc.

It seems that this regional loyalty—as a forerunner of modern regionalism—increasingly became the new ideological basis of the regional kingdoms. Instead of deriving their legitimation from Vedic Brahmins settled near the capitals, the rājās of the great regional empires extended their royal patronage more and more to the enlargement and embellishment of already existing *tīrthas*, many of which were associated with indigenous pre-brahmanic cults. These places of pilgrimage, with their popular bhakti cults and their numerous festivals, particularly the great car-festivals in the South, meanwhile had become the true centres of popular religion bridging the gap between the "high and the low". Once the rājās were directly associated with these places of pilgrimage, they were provided by these centres with an already existing network of pilgrimage. It was through these established channels that the message of the new kingship ideology, based on a more direct association of the king with regional gods, as whose earthly deputies they claimed to rule,³⁵ reached even the remotest villages of the kingdom without further royal effort. After the rituo-ideological activities and performances had shifted from the Vedic altar and the exclusive magic performances (as for instance *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha*) to the practice of land donations to priests and temples and grand royal visits to popular places of pilgrimage,³⁶ the regional tradi-

³⁴R. Thapar, *A History of India*, Harmondsworth, 1966, p. 255.

³⁵H. Kulke, "Jagannātha as the State Deity under the Gajapatis of Orissa", in A. Eschmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-209. Also the forthcoming publication H. Kulke, "King Anāṅgabhīma III, the Veritable Founder of the Gajapati Kingship and the Jagannātha Trinity at Puri", in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1981, pp. 26-39. For Maharashtra, where agrarian expansion and territorial integration till the Maratha period were directly linked with royal patronage of local indigenous deities, see G. D. Sontheimer, *Birobā, Mhaskobā und Khandobā. Ursprung, Geschichte und Umwelt von pastoralen Gottheiten in Maharashtra*, Wiesbaden, 1976.

³⁶Nicholas B. Dirks, "Political Authority and Structural Change in Early South Indian History", in *The Indian Ec. and Soc. Hist. Rev.*, XIII, 2, 1976, pp. 125-158; Arjun Appadurai, "Kings, Sects and Temples in South India, 1350-1700 A.D.", in *South Indian Temples*, B. Stein ed., New Delhi, 1978 pp. 47-74; Ronald Inden, "The Ceremony of the Great Gift (*mahādāna*): Structure and Historical Context in Indian Ritual and Society", paper presented at the VIth European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Paris 8.-13.7.1978.

tion enabled the rulers to communicate in a common cultural language, much more than it was possible in the previous centuries.

The later Cōḷa kings seemed to have realized this new trend in the religious development of the South. B. Stein rightly points out that the royal Śīva cult, as begun by Rājarāja I and continued by his son Rājendracōḷa in the newly built monumental temples at their capitals of Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram was a "distinctive new departure in South Indian Hinduism". But he also admits that these temples were atypical because "both were funerary or samadhi shrines meant to enhance the importance of the ruler and his kingly lineage in ways similar to the Khmer (Cambodian) 'god king' cult".³⁷ However, it seems to me that their uniqueness was not only due to their being samadhi shrines but perhaps even more to their unprecedented and, in the Indian context, obviously too close association with royalty. In contrast to Cambodia, Hinduism in India, though providing the *theoretical* framework, was not in favour of allowing kings to become *in practice* as directly associated with any type of a genuine Devarāja cult as has been assumed in the case of the kings of Angkor.³⁸ But obviously Rājarāja and his son had tried to establish a new and in South India hitherto never practised type of royal deification, associated with Śīvaism and focussed on the new "imperial" temples which were directly linked to the rulers. But as newly erected temples, they were not yet embedded in the network of the religious topography. Rājarāja's famous temple inscriptions provide a good picture of his rather hectic activities to create a new network linking the new imperial temple at the centre with the outer provinces of the empire.

It is therefore not surprising that Rājarāja's and Rājendra's new ritual policy was discontinued by their successors. Instead of patronizing the temples at Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram or constructing new ones³⁹ and imposing their cult on, and linking it with, the already existing network of indigenous religious centres, the later Cōḷas shifted their religious activities and royal patronage to these centres of an already established "greatness" (*māhātmya*) and their networks of pilgrimage. Whereas Rājarāja's inscriptions in Tanjore had propagated an alleged association of the new temple at Tanjore with the much older "Golden

³⁷B. Stein, "Integration of the Agrarian System of South India", *op. cit.*, p. 24.

³⁸Elsewhere it has been shown that even in Angkor there existed no genuine royal Devarāja cult because Śīva himself and not the king of Angkor was the "King of the Gods" (*devarāja*), although apotheosis of living kings was still stronger in Angkor than in India. H. Kulke, *The Devarāja Cult*, Data Paper No. 108, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1978.

³⁹There was, however, a revival of the earlier tradition under the later Cōḷa monarchs Rājarāja II (1146-73) and Kulottuṅga III (1178-1218) who built the royal temples at Darasuram and Tribhuvanam. The Darasuram temple was even called Rājarājesvara in its inscriptions, certainly in conformity with the Rājarājesvara temple of Tanjore.

Hall" (*kanaka-sabhā*) of Siva Naṭarāja in Chidambaram in order to increase the fame of his temple at Tanjore, Kulottuṅga I (1070-1118) began to rebuild and magnify Chidambaram itself, a work which was continued by several of his successors.⁴⁰ An analysis of the Hiraṇyavarman legend of the Cidambaramāhātmya shows⁴¹ to what extent Kulottuṅga, being an usurper to the Cōḷa throne, tried to establish his legitimacy through a direct connection with this centre of Naṭarāja, the "King of Dancers", the most important manifestation of Śiva in South India. From the early 12th century onwards, Kulottuṅga's successors concentrated their main activities and royal patronage on a systematic enlargement and embellishment of the great centres of pilgrimage of the South.

In South India the early 12th century thus marked the transfer of the ideological performance to another stage and witnessed the beginning of a hitherto unknown policy of enlarging and often completely reconstructing the already existing places of pilgrimage. This change, however, was not confined to the South. King Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga, Kulottuṅga's contemporary and arch-enemy on the Gaṅga throne of Orissa, after his conquest of Central Orissa, built "his" imperial temple not in Kalinganagara, his ancestral capital in Kalinga, but in the famous *tīrtha* of Puri. The height of the temple at Puri (214 feet) nearly corresponds to that of Tanjore (216 feet). But the temple at Puri was not dedicated to an orthodox or even "royal" deity but to Puruṣottama-Jagannātha with an obviously tribal background. Whereas the imperial Cōḷas of the early 11th century had constructed new imperial temples which were meant to enhance directly the glory and divine association of their royal founders, in the early 12th century Kulottuṅga I and Coḍagaṅga enlarged those already existing *tīrthas* with which they and their successors tried to become associated. In Orissa this "popular royal" cult became the germ of the new regional tradition and the main source of legitimation of Orissa's Gajapati kings who claimed to rule as Jagannātha's son (*putra*) and military deputy (*rāuta*).⁴²

It was necessary to go into all these lengthy details in order to explain my uneasiness with Stein's notion of an alleged "discontinuity in Hinduism". Of course there was and still is discontinuity in Hinduism. But the question is whether during the period of intensive bhakti cults and pilgrimage the discontinuity was more marked than in any other

⁴⁰J.C. Harle *The Temple Gateways in South India: The Architecture and Iconography of the Chidambaram Gopuras*, Oxford, 1963.

⁴¹H. Kulke, "Funktionale Erklärung eines südindischen Māhātmyas. Die Legende Hiraṇyavarman's und das Leben des Cōḷa-Königs Kulottuṅga I", in *Saeculum*, XX, 1969, pp. 412-22.

⁴²H. Kulke, *Jagannātha-Kult und Gajapati-Königtum. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte religiöser Legitimation hindustischer Herrscher*, Wiesbaden 1979; D.C. Sircar, *Studies in Religious Life of Ancient and Medieval India*, Delhi, 1971.

given world religion, excluding perhaps only Islam, but certainly including medieval Christianity. Most likely we have to distinguish carefully between the various cultural regions of India, and it may be true that a discontinuity might have existed to a larger extent in South India than, for example, in Orissa. But, generally speaking, discontinuity in Hinduism seems to have been particularly minimal in the ideological aspect of Hinduism wherever kings patronized popular indigenous local or regional cults which bridged the gulf between the high and the low.

This conclusion is of great importance for the evaluation of B. Stein's concept of the segmentary state in South Indian history. Its main features are as much the political and territorial segmentation, both horizontal and vertical, as the "ritual sovereignty" which formed the overarching ideological element and "converted a congeries of local political systems into a segmentary state". We are able to follow Stein up to this point without any hesitation. But our doubts arise against his strict differentiation between actual political control and ritual sovereignty. In connection with the eleemosynary inscriptions he writes:

The thousands of Chola inscriptions which are distributed unevenly over the vast macro-region of the southern Indian peninsula are taken in the conventional view to be evidence of the direct control of the Chola state. In fact, they are not evidence of political control, but of ritual sovereignty. The difference between viewing inscriptions on stone and copper as evidence of control and viewing them as ritual documents is fundamental. . . Once the idea of ritual sovereignty as distinct from political sovereignty or control is considered, many aspects of Chola history take on a plausible pattern lacking in the conventional view of the Chola state.⁴³

The distinction between political control and ritual sovereignty is certainly of great heuristic value and it has indeed been neglected or even completely overlooked by conventional historians. But we have to ask whether there is sufficient evidence to substantiate such a general statement as given by B. Stein who is rather reluctant to assume any direct political authority in those Cōḷa inscriptions which are found outside the central "segments" controlled by the Cōḷas. Generally speaking and as already mentioned above regarding the function of land grants in the context of "Indian feudalism" one has to check each inscription separately, particularly with regard to the intention of the donation, which in many cases might have been of much greater political relevance than can be inferred from the standardized ritual message of the inscriptions.

But I am here not so much concerned with problems of detailed

⁴³B. Stein, "Integration of the Agrarian System of South India", *op. cit.*, p. 17.

interpretation of the inscriptions. I should like to ask the more general question how far we can apply this heuristically valuable distinction to a structural analysis of the medieval Hindu kingdoms.

According to Stein this "fundamental difference" is an essential part of the concept of the segmentary state which is based on the notion of a congeries of local political systems consisting of "units" or "segments". They remain basically autonomous because according to Stein the royal orders which are sent to them through royal officers and which are inscribed in the inscriptions are "not evidence of political control but of ritual sovereignty". Even if we accept the relevance of this distinction and concede that many inscriptions might have been intended to show ritual sovereignty instead of direct political control, we should ask whether this type of ritual sovereignty did not have a direct consequence for the political control, too. In a traditional society, particularly in India, ritual sovereignty seems to be an integral part and sometimes even a pace-maker of political power. Even in today's India one can observe for instance the seemingly unnecessary and tiresome touring programme of the Ministers and their participation in each and every meeting which follows a very distinct and "ritualistic" manner. Even more obvious are the "rituals" which have to be followed during meetings of some local associations, the complicated arrangements on the "dais" which often remind one of the durbar tradition, and the standardized speeches. Participation in a "political ritual" itself is obviously not only an important display of power but also seems to be an important means to enhance personal influence and power. In a traditional society with its very clearly defined norms, display of political power therefore should not be confined only to direct command over men and means.

Despite the undeniable progress of B. Stein's analysis compared to previous explanations of the structure of medieval Hindu kingdoms, his sharp differentiation between actual political control and ritual sovereignty therefore has its disadvantages too. By questioning the direct political effect of the "ritual documents" (as he calls the Cōḷa inscriptions), he separates the imperial level and the local political systems, confining their relations to the sporadic ideological performances of the centre. The problem is obviously whether we have to view these "ritual documents" as "*ritualised substitutes*" for a genuine policy of coercion or whether we interpret them as documents of a "*ritual policy*" which is not a substitute for, but part of a genuine policy. I personally prefer to interpret them as documents of a systematic ritual policy which was as much a part of the general "power policy" as, for instance, economic or military policies.

If we accept this inference, it has some implication for the structural analysis of the medieval Hindu kingdoms. It shows that there might have been a more direct political relationship between the imperial level and the local segments than conceded by B. Stein, even if it manifested

itself in documents of ritual policy. The intensity of these relations certainly varied from kingdom to kingdom and within a kingdom from ruler to ruler and should be analysed accordingly. But display of ritual sovereignty should not be denounced *a priori* as a weak substitute but analysed as one of the genuine political means in a traditional society of implementing political authority.

VII

After raising my doubts against too strict a differentiation between alleged imperial ritual sovereignty and local political control I also wish to question the *degree* of alleged rigid segmentation of medieval Hindu kingdoms as explained by B. Stein in his concept of the segmentary state in South Indian history.⁴⁴ Though I do feel much indebted to his structural analysis, I am afraid that the "analytical scalpel", which he otherwise handles in so masterly a manner, seems to miss or to even dissect an important inherent *integrating* element of the medieval Hindu kingdoms. Throughout the period with which we are concerned here, integration operated on several levels, e.g. on the territorial, cultural, social and economic level. I shall deal here with the first two aspects and substantiate my delineations with examples from Orissa.

Orissa provides an excellent example of a continuous and stepwise territorial integration. In its early history, Orissa had formed for a short period the province of the great empire of the Mauryas in the 3rd century B.C. and, in the late 1st century B.C., was the centre of a shortlived empire under king Kharavela. Apart from a few historically isolated archaeological finds in the neighbourhood of Bhubaneswar, we possess little evidence to understand the legacy of these early empires in the early centuries A.D. In any case, the process of indigenous state formation began only a few centuries after the vanishing of Kharavela's kingdom on the subregional level with an obviously different character. The basis of the principalities and small kingdoms of Orissa of the early centuries A.D. usually were "nuclear areas" near the heads of the deltas along the coast of Bengal or, further upstream, in the riverine basins.

"In his article on "Agrarian Integration in South India" Stein is not as rigid. He shows that agrarian integration operated till the early 14th century particularly within the nuclear areas and their tribal borderland through expansion of irrigated rice cultivation under the "rule" of the *periyanaḍu* assemblies. Economic integration beyond the nuclear areas was brought about through the great itinerant merchant guilds (*nānādesī*). Summarizing the basic features of the nuclear areas, Stein even mentioned as one of their characteristic features "religious bodies which were linked to other similar institutions in other nuclear areas" (p. 188). But this important integral aspect evidently has not become part of his concept of the Segmentary State. Here he seems to confine "cultural communication" to the "overarching ideological element".

The most significant economic feature of these nuclear areas was irrigated rice cultivation. They were usually separated by mountains of jungles which were still inhabited by aboriginal tribes.

As far as our historical knowledge goes, these nuclear areas were under small Hindu rājās who ruled their territory with the help of newly settled Brahmins according to the Hindu *śāstras*. But, as pointed out elsewhere, the early inscriptions of these rājās make it clear that most of them originated from one of the tribes which surrounded these nuclear areas.⁴⁵ Security and legitimation of Hindu rule under these circumstances depended largely on the loyalty of these tribes which was enhanced through the acknowledgement of one of the tribal deities as tutelary deity by the new rāj families. Examples are the god Gokarṇeśvara, who was worshipped on the Mahendragiri mountain as the tutelary deity by the Gaṅgas of Kalinga-nagara and Stambheśvarī, the "Lady of the Pillar" who was acknowledged both by the Śūlkī kings (obviously a dynasty of the ancient śaulika tribe) and the Bhañjas of Central Orissa. Generally speaking, and contrary to B. Stein's findings in South Indian history, the nuclear areas in Orissa throughout their history were centres of integration of tribal elements rather than of their "sustained displacement" as Stein has stated in connection with South India.⁴⁶ The early history of these nuclear areas and their rulers is largely unknown.⁴⁷ But in the middle of the fourth century A.D., Samudragupta during his conquest of the "southern region" defeated three chiefs in Western Orissa (Dakṣiṇa Kosala) and, on his march further South, four chiefs or small rājās on the coast between the Mahendragiri and the Godavari rivers. Though we do not know much more than their names and their location, Samudragupta's famous Allahabad inscription shows that at least in those portions of Orissa which he had passed through there existed many small principalities in the middle of the 4th century A.D. However, it is mainly after the downfall of the Gupta empire in the early 6th century that indigenous epigraphical sources on the development of the nuclear areas of Orissa are available.

From these inscriptions we know about four such nuclear areas on the Orissan coast, three in the valleys and one on the upper plains of the highlands of Orissa. On the coast we find the following nuclear areas (from Southwest to Northeast):

⁴⁵H. Kulke, "Early State Formation and Royal Legitimation in Tribal Areas of Eastern India," in *Aspects of Tribal Life in South Asia I: Strategy and Survival*, R. Moser and Mohan K. Gautama (eds.), *Studia Ethnologica Bernensia*, I, 1979, pp. 29-38, reprinted in *Sidelights on History and Culture of Orissa*, M. N. Das ed., Cuttack, 1978, pp. 104-14, see also J.G. de Casparis "Inscriptions and South Asian Dynastic Tradition", in R. J. Moore, *op cit.* pp. 103-27.

⁴⁶B. Stein, "Integration of the Agrarian System of South India", *op. cit.* p. 185.

⁴⁷I am not concerned here with the alleged rule of the Kuṣāṇas, Murundas and Guptas over parts of Orissa and the temporary conquest of South and Central Orissa by the Maṭhāras of South Kalinga.

(i) *Kalinga*, centred in the delta area of the Nagavali and Vamshadhara rivers in the Srikakulam district of northern Andhra Pradesh. Though outside Orissa proper, Kalinga was of great importance for the further development of Orissa after it had become the nuclear area of the Eastern Gangas at the end of the 5th century A.D. Their capital Kalinganagara was situated on the bank of the river with the significant name "bearer of the dynasty" ("*vaṃśa-dhara*");

(ii) *Koṅgoda Maṇḍala*, situated on the western coast of the Chilka lake and in the lower valley of the Rishikulya river is identical with present-day Ganjam District. It was the homeland of the Śailodbhava dynasty since the late 5th or early 6th century A.D. and was elaborately described by the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang in the early 7th century.

(iii) *Dakṣiṇa* ("South") *Tosala* in the southern Mahanadi delta had been the centre of the Mauryan province of Kalinga with its capital at Tosali (=Dhali?) near Bhubaneswar and also of Kharavela's empire with its capital at Kalinganagara—near Bhubaneswar. Though for a short period in the late 6th century A.D. small dynasties tried to establish themselves here (e.g. the Vigrahas), *Dakṣiṇa* / *Tosala* remained for centuries the bone of contention between neighbouring dynasties. The Mahanadi delta as a whole was too large to be ruled and defended by the early small medieval kingdoms.

(iv) *Uttara* ("North") *Tosala*, situated in the northern delta area of the Mahanadi and in the Brahmani delta, is identical with the modern Cuttack and Balasore districts. Its chronological and territorial demarcations against Odra and Utkal which later came to be known in this area are still disputed. After short-lived dynasties in the late 6th and early 7th centuries (*Mānas* and *Daṭṭas*) the most important dynasty which came up in this region was the Bhauma Karas since the late 7th century.

In the valleys of the rivers Mahanadi and Brahmani three important nuclear areas were situated:

(v) *Dakṣiṇa Kosala* comprised in its Orissan part mainly the fertile plain of the Mahanadi valley the region between the present Hirakud reservoir and Sonpur and included the Tel valley south of Sonpur. Since the early 6th century parts of *Dakṣiṇa Kosala*, together with some of its neighbouring tracts, were ruled in succession by the Śara-bhapuriyas, Pāṇḍuvaṃśīs, and the Somavaṃśīs. The latter became most important for the whole of Orissa when they conquered coastal Orissa.

(vi) *Khiṅjali-Maṇḍala* lying between *Dakṣiṇa Kosala* and coastal *Tosala* in the less prosperous Baudh valley region of the Mahanadi. It was ruled by a Bhañja dynasty in the 8th and 9th centuries.

(vii) *Kodālaka Maṇḍala* in the lower Brahmani valley in the present Dhenkanal district formed the home of the Śūlkī dynasty (8th/9th centuries).

In the highlands of Orissa we know of several smaller nuclear areas of early principalities. Most important among them was:

(viii) *Khijjīngakoṭṭa* in the present-day Mayurbhanj district of North Orissa with Khiching as its capital, famous for its temples. It was ruled by another Bhañja dynasty since the 8th century. To the west of Khiching in the surroundings of the later feudatory state of Keonjhar, epigraphical findings (Sitabhinji and Asanapat) prove that this whole area was under the control of some otherwise unknown Bhañja kings as early as the 4-6th centuries A.D.

The history of medieval Orissa from the 6th to the 16th century is characterized by a stepwise yet continuous process of territorial integration of these nuclear areas. During the 5th and 6th centuries none of the rulers of these areas was able to extend his power permanently into a neighbouring nuclear area. In all cases, their power was still confined to their own homelands. Obviously the socio-economic development of these nuclear areas had not yet reached a stage which permitted a considerable extension of their political power. It was only in the 7th century after Orissa had been drawn temporarily into the great North Indian power struggle between Harṣa, Śaśāṅka and Pulakeśin II, that the Śailodbhavas of Koṅgoda were able to extend their power into Dakṣiṇa Tosala or today's Puri district. The next step towards territorial integration took place under the Bhauma Karas of Uttara Tosala in the 8th century. They extended their sway from their capital Jajpur over the whole coastal region of present-day Orissa, including the northern parts of Uttara Tosala, Dakṣiṇa Tosala and Koṅgoda in the South. Furthermore several rulers of smaller nuclear areas in the hinterland acknowledged their sovereignty (e.g. the Śūlkīs of Kodālaka Maṇḍala and the Bhañjas of Khiñjali Maṇḍala). The main achievement of the Bhauma Karas, however, was the permanent unification of three nuclear areas (Uttara and Dakṣiṇa Tosala and Koṅgoda) under one rule.

The next step of territorial integration took place in the 10th century A.D. when the Somavaṃśīs of Dakṣiṇa Kosala conquered Khiñjali Maṇḍala and coastal Orissa and unified them for the first time with their homeland in Western Orissa. Thus they ruled over the three riverine nuclear areas (Dakṣiṇa Kosala, Khiñjali and Kodālaka Maṇḍala) and the three coastal areas (Uttara and Dakṣiṇa Tosala and Koṅgoda). It is therefore not inappropriate to call them the forefathers of modern Orissa. However, their kingdom fell apart in the 11th century when a branch again began to rule independently over its western parts.

In c. 1112 King Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga, one of the Eastern Gaṅgas of Kalinganagara in Kalinga, conquered central Orissa and extended his rule in the following decades from modern Midnapur district in West Bengal up to the northern banks of the Godavari in Andhra Pradesh. His career marked the beginning of the great regional kingdom of Orissa under the Gaṅgas and the Sūryavaṃśīs (1112-1568 A.D.). Under their rule the four major coastal nuclear areas i.e. Uttara and Dakṣiṇa Toṣāḷā, Koṅgoda and Kalinga were permanently integrated. Their sway over the peripheral coastal areas of Dandabhukti (Midnapore) and South Kalinga (Vizagapatnam) was unchallenged, although we don't know the exact nature of their relations with them. The lower riverine nuclear areas of the Mahanadi and Brahmani rivers were also ruled directly, whereas Kḥiṅjali Maṇḍala and particularly Dakṣiṇa Kosala in the upper Mahanadi valley were only temporarily conquered.

In 1436 Kapilendra, an army officer and son of a local chieftain (*nāyaka*), usurped the throne and established the Sūryavaṃśā dynasty. He became the most powerful Hindu king of his time in the whole of India. Under him and his two successors the Orissan empire extended from the Ganges down to the Krishna and, temporarily, even to the Kaveri in the far South.

In connection with our discussion on the structure of medieval Hindu kingdoms it is not so much the remarkable extension of the Orissan empire which matters here. The novelty of Kapilendra's success was his *usurpation* of the throne. All the previous dynastic changes had taken place after a successful *military* conquest, led by an already established king who was in full command of the means of his own dynasty. Each conqueror from the Śailodbhavas to Coḍagaṅga came "from outside", uniting his own homeland with the conquered areas and thus carrying on the stepwise process of territorial integration. Kapilendra on the other hand seized power without domestic troops of his own and was able to keep it against a strong opposition of members and followers of the overthrown dynasty. And what is most surprising, against all expectations the Orissan kingdom did not disintegrate into the previous nuclear areas. Though it is likely that the priests of the state deity Jagannātha at Puri played an important role in this *coup de'tat*⁴⁸ Kapilendra's success shows that during the previous centuries territorial integration had taken place which had led to the erosion of the autochthonous political power of the former nuclear areas. Although no detailed research has yet been done on the structural changes from the early (perhaps truly segmentary) kingdoms such as the Bhauma Karas to the Gaṅgas and Sūryavaṃśīs, the change is obvious. Parallel to the

⁴⁸G. N. Dash, "The Evolution of Priestly Power: The Sūryavaṃśā Period," in Eschmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-22.

stepwise territorial integration of new nuclear areas into the kingdom of Orissa, at least in some cases local rulers are known to have been replaced by governors and officials of the central kings. Similar to the practice which meanwhile prevailed in the Muslim states and the Vijayanagara empire, the Sūryavaṃśīs furthermore seem to have introduced a system of allotting districts, particularly in the hilly hinterland, to local chiefs or military officers in order to create a "cordon sanitaire" around the vulnerable central Mahanadi delta. It is significant that many of the later feudatory states of Orissa trace their history back to the time of the Sūryavaṃśīs.⁴⁹

VIII

Integration as a major factor of medieval Hindu kingdoms, however, was not confined to territorial integration. It was supplemented and supported by cultural integration which operated mainly through religion and language. Regional traditions became the backbone of this cultural integration and communication. They existed "below" the official "overarching ideological element" (p. 253), though of course they were tapped by the rājās for their ideology, because, the integration of local traditions into regional traditions, meant that local loyalty became supplemented by a regional loyalty.

Orissa provides an excellent example of cultural integration through a regional tradition. The core of this tradition was the cult of Jagannātha who was acknowledged by the kings of Orissa since the 13th century as their overlord (*samraja*). It has been shown elsewhere to what extent the Jagannātha cult as a state cult became part of the royal policy and legitimation.⁵⁰ But the Jagannātha cult was never solely the overarching royal ideology. It was the central part of the regional tradition which operated and integrated on several levels "outside" or "below" the official ritual sovereignty. I shall try to explain this in a short and, perhaps, too systematizing way.

In large parts of Orissa we can trace at least four "levels" of divinity. The "imperial" level is represented by Jagannātha, the "Lord of the World". The state cult of Jagannātha itself integrates various aspects of Hinduism prevalent in Orissa, i.e. Viṣṇuism, Śivaism, Śāktism and tribal or village cults and to some extent even aspects of Buddhism. The regional level of Orissa finds its expression in the concept of the "Five Deities" (*pañcadevatās*) which integrates the most important cults of Orissa, i.e. Śiva-Liṅgarāja of Bhubaneswar, Durgā-Virajā of Jajpur,

⁴⁹L.E.B. Cobden-Ramsay, *Bengal Gazetteers: Feudatory States of Orissa*, Calcutta 1910; H. Kulke, "Kshatriyaization and Social Change. A Study in Orissa Setting", in *Aspects of Changing India: Studies in Honour of Professor Ghurye*, S. Devadas Pillai ed, Bombay, 1976, pp. 398-409.

⁵⁰H. Kulke, see F.N. 42.

Viṣṇu-Jagannātha of Puri, Sūrya of Konarak and Gaṇeśa-Mahāvināyaka at a place of the same name in North Orissa. Three of the *pañcādevatās* had very distinct associations with ruling dynasties of Orissa: Virajā and Liṅgarāja were the tutelary deities of the Bhauma Karas and the Somavaṃśīs respectively, and Jagannātha, as mentioned before, of the Gaṅga dynasty. Sūrya was included because of the monumental sun temple of Konarak, built in about 1250. Gaṇeśa is worshipped as Mahāvināyaka in a flat unhewn stone in the sanctum sanctorum of a classical Hindu temple and represents the dominant tribal aspect of Orissa's religion among the *pañcādevatās*.

On the third, "sub-regional" level we find a group of very powerful indigenous goddesses, many of which have been the tutelary deities of the former feudatory states of Orissa. Most of them are still worshipped in aniconic idols which bear witness to their pre-brahmanic origin. The most important among them form a group of the "Eight Mothers" (*aṣṭamātṛka*). The link between these "Mothers" and the state deity is described symbolically through the picture of a great tent, Jagannātha being the tent pole and the Eight Mothers representing the tent's pegs.

Below these "subregional" deities we find on the local level the village goddesses (*gramadevatā*). Clusters of local village deities are often associated with the nearby subregional deities, though their relations are less codified than the interrelations of the subregional and regional deities,

Apart from their horizontal integration these four levels are linked vertically, too, inasmuch as Jagannātha as State Deity is also a member of the "Five Deities", and Virajā-Durgā at Jajpur, who belongs to the same regional group, figures also prominently among the subregional "Eight Mothers". All these gods and goddesses of Orissa are furthermore interlinked in a very elaborate system of ritual relations which finds its expression in a very dense network of pilgrimage as a major factor of the cultural integration of various nuclear areas of Orissa into a cultural unity.⁵¹

All over India, the early centuries of the second millennium A.D. (which coincide with the Cōḷa period from which Stein derives his conclusions) witnessed a period of intensive activities to compile local legends and traditions in works which became most important for the growth of the regional traditions. They were written down both in regional languages (e.g. the *Periya Purāṇam* in Tamil) or in Sanskrit, as for instance in the Utkala Khaṇḍam of the *Skanda Purāṇa*. Many of these Sanskrit collections of local *Purāṇas* (*Sihala-Purāṇa*) often became part of the great *Skanda Purāṇa* or at least were termed as parts of it. These compilations were read out or recited by pilgrim guides, and on

⁵¹J. Preston, "Sacred Centres and Symbolic Networks in India", paper presented at the Xth Int. Congress of Anthropol. and Ethn. Sciences, Delhi, 1978.

the occasion of local festivals. Furthermore it has been shown that they acted as an important means in the process of "Sanskritization" of tribes in the late medieval period.⁵² Generally speaking they had a tremendous influence on the development of the regional traditions which integrated—but certainly not eliminated—the traditions and legends of the local nuclear areas.

IX

At the end of these rather sketchy delineations we may arrive at the following conclusions. The heuristic value of the concept of the segmentary state for a structural analysis of medieval Hindu kingdoms is undeniable. However, two objections have been raised here against its unmodified application to Indian history as a whole. Firstly it puts emphasis on the distance between the "imperial" level from the local level through the concept of ritual sovereignty. Secondly, the various segments or units of the medieval Hindu kingdoms are isolated rather strictly. The regional traditions played an important role in our present discussion because of their vertically and horizontally integrating function. They bridged the gulf between the "high" and the "low", thus modifying the function of "ritual sovereignty" to "ritual policy". Horizontally, the regional traditions helped to integrate the segments of the regional kingdoms. The example of Orissa shows therefore that the structural development of medieval Hindu kingdoms should not be viewed only under the aspects of decentralization or fragmentation and segmentation but also under the aspect of integration.

Of course it would be wrong to assume that the Gajapati kings of Orissa had been able to achieve anything like a unitary state with clearly defined territorial sovereignty, centralized government, specialized administrative staff and the monopoly of power. But if we survey the historical development of Orissa during the millennium between the 6th and the 16th centuries, we find that its main characteristics are a process of continuous though imperfect integration rather than fragmentation and segmentation. Although Orissa, as any other Hindu kingdom, did not reach the stage of a unitary state and certainly retained many characteristics of a segmentary state, its units were fused, obliterating other traits of a segmentary state as depicted by B. Stein.

In the context of medieval Indian history we will most probably have to realize very soon that it is futile to operate with one structural model only. Further research will have to distinguish between different regions and periods. Northern India after the downfall of the empires of the Guptas and the Gurjāra-Pratihāras for instance may offer a more suitable field for studies of an alleged Indian feudalism, whereas Tamil

⁵²Surajit Sinha, "Vaisnava Influence on a Tribal Culture", in *Krishna, Myth, Rites and Attitudes*, Milton Singer ed., Honolulu 1966, p. 72 f.

Nadu with its strong tradition of the *nāḍus* is certainly more suitable for the study of the segmentary state—if one is willing to modify the concepts accordingly. Orissa seems to provide an example for another still “unbaptized” model where regional integration in its broadest sense was for several centuries the main feature of political development. Only after analysing the regional varieties of the structural development we should aim at an inductive and general concept of the structure of Hindu kingdoms. This concept will have to include modes of integration as an important aspect of state formation in early and medieval India which hitherto have been neglected in the discussions about Indian feudalism and the concept of the segmentary state in South Indian history.⁵³

***Postscript:*

After his visit to Heidelberg on 11.6.80 Prof. Burton Stein sent me elaborate and in several points very revealing comments on this paper. As they are of great importance for further research I would like to quote a few passages from it: “My view is that the linkages among shrines in South India in which bhakti worship is practised (and this does not mean all shrines) had the effect in South India of enhancing or raising the salvational credentials of local (and I would call them, segmentary-linked) shrines with respect to those great shrines to which they are linked. The arguments on this question are made in the volume of essays I edited on south Indian Temples [see F.N. 36]. I accept your point about the regionalization of bhakti traditions, but insist that the cultic concomitant of this was to strengthen segmental shrines. . . [Regarding] the matter of political implication’ . . . I reiterate that I see the local level not as passive before royal pressures to control, but seeking such links (not of political but ritual subordination) for purposes of local rule. As we discussed at the seminar [at Heidelberg], I reject the idea of ritual ‘as a weak substitute’ and do see it as a genuine political means, as you put it. Do we really differ here? A similar kind of disagreement, which may be a false one, is on the matter of integration versus segmentation (or fragmentation as the title puts it). I contend that the seg. State formulation is precisely about integration, *given* segmentation. It may be a matter of where, in particular analyses, emphasis is placed, and there your treatment of Orissa with its very pronounced topographical discontinuities stresses the means of overcoming this: the point is that the saliency of integration seems to arise from social and topographical segmentation. It is not one *or* the other, but the interaction of essentially segmentary and integrating forces in the societies. In Orissa, as you point out, there is the additional difference from my South India in the standing of tribes in the society of each area. In all this I do not want to be understood as dismissing the issue of integration/segmentation; it may be of great importance which idiom dominates in the evidence which we use (and it is different), but I contend that the underlying typical problem may be the same. . . Finally, ‘integration’ is always a key factor, the problematic of these systems in the sense of a *task* with these societies and a *method/theory* within analysis because the segmentary state only exists as its constituent parts recognize a ritual center, a king, and by which recognition advance and strengthen the segmental parts. Thus I consider your title mistakes the case: it is not segmentation *versus* integration, but segmentation *and* integration.”

(B. Stein, personal communication of June 20th, 1980).