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Banauasia and Endo-History
European Concepts of Indian Historical Consciousness

by

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Banausia and Endo-history: European Conceptions of Indian Historical Consciousness¹

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Introduction

Contact between cultures is often an encounter based on misconception rather than mutual understanding. Europe's colonial encounter with India is a well known case of such a contact of civilisations fraught with preconceived notions and hidden agendas. Its structural basis is a binary relationship between the self and the other, and in the case of European colonialism – probably just as the most prominent among others – the self and the other define and re-define each other in what has been called the dominant discourse of the colonial power. As an outcome of this debate, the colonisers felt ascertained that what they had done was exactly what they had been compelled to do. But the “white man's burden” in the colonies was not only to uplift the colonized other, but also to do what was necessary to meet economic or imperial pressures, do what one's religion prescribed, or what History and the World Spirit itself demanded.

In this paper I want to pursue one specific aspect of this colonial frame of mind, the one that can be found in the writings of western historians about India. There is a specific manner in which historians of the west thought (and sometimes still think) about the place of history in Indian society. It is clear to everybody that India has developed a mode of thinking about its past that is different from European, especially 19th-century academic, history writing, which will be the main focus of this paper. The crudest way of putting the result of such a search for India's past is to say that India has no history, because it has no historical

¹ The present paper has first been read in a preliminary version at a conference in Bhubaneswar in 1998, organized by Prof. P. K. Nayak, Dept. of Anthropology, Utkal University. It has then been printed as ASAFAS Special Paper No. 8, Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies (ASAFAS), Kyoto University, 2001. It is reprinted here in a slightly revised version. The author thanks Dr. Akio Tanabe, Kyoto, PD Dr. Volker Huth, Freiburg, and Nicole Merkel, Heidelberg, for help and suggestions.

writing.

Much has been said about this misconception but I think it is worthwhile to add two more aspects to the debate. This I shall do in the first part of this paper from the European side and shall continue to a second part in which I shall propose a possible explanation of the misunderstandings between Indian and European historical thinking.

The self and the other: the binary frame of mind

I should like to start with two examples of cultural encounters which show how the binary frame of mind works. Both are from the very beginning of the European colonial experience in India. The first is rather famous, the second less well known, at least among European scholars.

When the first European seafarer, the Portuguese Vasco da Gama, came to Calicut in 1498, he was surprised and angered about the number of Muslims he found in that city. The paradigmatic other of the southern Europeans, the Muslims, were clearly dominant there. Later, when he saw a Hindu temple on his way to an audience at the Zamorin's palace, the non-Muslim place of worship was seen by him as a church.²

But it would be wrong to interpret such a confusion of the self and the other as a typically European characteristic. It rather seems that human perception treats the unknown other fairly regularly as something known. A few decades before Vasco da Gama, the Chinese Muslim Ma Huan, a participant on three of the seven Chinese expeditions under admiral Zheng He to the Western Oceans (in 1413, 1421 and 1431), did exactly the same. The unfamiliar sight of a Hindu king performing Hindu rituals prompted him to believe that he observed a Buddhist ceremony. Again, the unknown other took the shape of the already known other.

We can therefore assume that the phenomenon called cognitive dissonance by social psychologists, according to which the perception of a phenomenon is shaped to correspond to one's preconceived notions, should be taken into account when interpreting historical sources. The unknown phenomenon is either associated with something already valued as positive or it is condemned beyond the measure of critique it deserves. In our example, both men see what they were used to see: The Chinese Muslim observes his brethren in faith and transforms the unknown other – the Hindus – into the known other – the Buddhists. For the European seafarers, the Muslims are the paradigmatic enemies. In their eyes, the binary world of Christendom and Islam continues on Indian soil, where a new and unknown chapter is being opened. The book, however, in which this new chapter has been written, is seemingly a well known one which appears to contain nothing but the old story. Thus, what Vasco da Gama perceives is not a Hindu temple, but a church. One with strange saints worshipped in strange ways, but since it was clearly not a mosque, what could it be, if not a Christian place of worship?

² Cf. for this and the next episode Richard M. Eaton's description and deep analysis of such misunderstandings ("Multiple Lenses: Differing Perspectives of Calicut," in: R. M. Eaton, (ed.) *Essays on Islam and Indian History*. New Delhi, Oxford, New York 2000, p. 76-93).

Two things are to be learned from this. First, there is not only a binary opposition of the self and the other, but a self that sees itself confronted with two different others: the known other and the unknown other. And second, and this is more specifically European: a character trait which comes with the conviction to be morally or technically more advanced than the others. Believing this, one has no need to play the game according to rules made by others. This has been demonstrated by the second voyage of the Portuguese to Calicut in 1500. Pedro Cabral did not come merely as a merchant, as was the custom of the time in Calicut, but also as a soldier, who did not hesitate to use the power of his ship's guns.

The two conclusions derived from this introductory story of Calicut can be used to interpret the larger problem of the European self and the Indian other. The present discussion of the Westerners' inability to see Indian historical thinking as what it is – history told or written in a code different from their own – is part of this much discussed question. It is still a common notion among educated Westerners that Indians are not interested in their own history. Even many people who have no doubts about the merits of the study of South Asian culture did not accept the idea that pre-colonial, written history of South Asia should concern “us” Westerners at all, much less so such other repositories of knowledge about that foreign past which are so difficult to transform into a narrative that follows European ideas of historiography. It seems to me that the educated public in the West in general has still problems to accept that it may be worthwhile to study Indian history just for its own sake, instead of using it as a case study for a comparative world history or for a stepping-stone in the development of mankind's collective linguistic, religious, philosophical or social capabilities, which inevitably tend to find its apex in modern western society.

According to these implicit western paradigms of India's intellectual pristineness and/or incompleteness, the subcontinent is seen as a country with a very long and unbroken cultural tradition, a place where ancient customs and rites are still alive, where social changes are gradual and leave the basic characteristics of culture and society virtually unaffected.³ This is what one can read in travel advertisements inviting tourists to see the exotic, eternal, and unchanging India. They use symbols which depict an ancient culture that had developed for some time on its own and later became stuck somewhere between caste system and Hindu idolatry. Modern society had to be introduced by European colonialists. No wonder that this idea about modern India nourishes the widespread notion that there is no history in India before a certain historical “period”, Muslim or colonial, which alone is worth the effort of studying.

³ There is an anthology available in German which contains the voices of many writers and philosophers who express their fascination or aversion of India in ways which give the reader the feeling that some of these writers were in a never-ending state of culture shock. Others never overcame their preconceived notions of what India should be, never understood the most basic

European ideas of history-writing

The European incapability to recognize Indian historical thinking is part of the colonial frame of mind which has been debated extensively over the last couple of decades. My impression is that one has to look at the European side as well as the Indian, in order to find an explanation for this European conviction of the nonexistence of Indian historical thinking. There is also the idea that India's civilisation is the only one on earth which has not developed a science of history and therefore has a deficient way of looking at itself. The roots from which those notions rose are clearly older than the academic subject of history at European universities.

But I do not want to start out with ancient Greek historians or Al Biruni who has already remarked on this, but with the European Renaissance in the late Middle Ages. At that time a canon of fine arts was being established at the new European universities, according to which the history of a discipline was an integral part of that discipline itself. History, therefore was also a tool to reconstruct what once was known by the ancient thinkers of Greece and Rome. According to them, foremost in history was the knowledge about the past of the state (*res publica*), the extended kin-groups of the nobility (*gentes*) and the people (*natio* in the sense of "those sharing a common place of birth"). Then came the knowledge of the ancients necessary to study the arts, such as mathematics, philosophy or medicine.

Other types of knowledge had been excluded from the canon of the arts which could be studied at the universities. Crafts, for instance, and their traditions were considered as *banausia*, knowledge not worthy to be studied by learned men of nobility and only fit for those low types who had to work for a living.⁴ The high arts or *technai logikai*, which were in the value system of the ancient Greeks fit for a person of noble birth and, together with agriculture and warfare belonging to the *technai eleutherioi* (arts befitting a freeborn), were being opposed to the low crafts and tasks of slaves and servants, the *technai banausoi*.⁵ This distinction between "high" arts and "low" crafts permeates all of European intellectual history and can be traced even to the modern education system: at a university, one can learn all about the architecture and physics of a furnace or the way how the skin of a goat functions, but in order to find out about how to work a piece of iron or how to tan the goat's hide one has to go to a polytechnical school, a "lower" kind of educational establishment or alternatively undergo other forms of vocational training.

For history, when it came into existence as an academic subject of its own in the 18th and 19th century, this traditional restriction as well as the political and legitimacy necessities

principles of present Indian society, much less of its past. Cf. Veena Kade-Luthra, *Sehnsucht nach Indien. Ein Lesebuch von Goethe bis Grass*. Munich 1991.

⁴ Cf. the article on education ("Bildung") by Johannes Christen in: Hubert Cancik, Helmut Schneider (eds.), *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*, Vol. 2, Ark-Ci. Stuttgart, Weimar 1997, cols. 664-673, esp. the part on *banausia* (col. 667); and the article "*banausia*" in Henricus Stephanus (ed.), *Thesaurus tes Hellenikes Glosses. Thesaurus Graecae Linguae. Volumen secundum*. Paris 1833, col. 104.

⁵ *Banausia* in its original sense is an "*ars quae ad caminum exercetur*" (an art which is being exercised at the furnace) and therefrom includes all kinds of degrading work (H. Stephanus, *ibid.*).

of that time made scholars to do research in topics already sanctioned by tradition. The canon included political and military history, national history, ancient and medieval history of Europe, biography, history of science, historiography. The manner of writing such texts was also modelled according to the critical style and the figures of rhetoric that can be found in the text of ancient writers such as Thucydides, Cicero, Pliny etc. It was assumed that there can be written sources containing historical truth without taking the context of their time into account, only based on supposedly eternal laws of society such as World Spirit, *Heilsgeschichte*, unilinear cultural evolution, and the nation as an almost biological entity. This scientific paradigm, fully established in the 19th century in the nation-states of Europe, was considered the only valid way of doing historical research.

According to this paradigm, one of the major tasks of an historian was to produce different kinds of narratives, such as critical treatises for academic circles, school textbooks and books for the educated layman. The topics included accordingly the history of the nation and its people, the history of the state and its institutions such as administration, law, the military, etc., economic history, history of ancient and medieval times and history of the fine arts and other subjects taught at a university, including historiography.

And then there were, according to this paradigm, other topics a historian should not write about. This included anything that was considered as trivial and also critiques of the ruling class, especially Marxist historical analysis. While socio-political issues brought about the first blows to the paradigm, the history of the common people and other socio-cultural phenomena remained outside the scope of established university teaching.

In the nineteenth century, the heyday of nationalist historiography as well as colonialism, scholars at European universities were mostly supposed to stick to the topics of the classical canon of the fine arts as it had been established in the Renaissance. They were required to take the side of *sophia* (wisdom, general knowledge) against the side of *banausia* (here in a more general sense the limited knowledge necessary to be familiar with in order to earn one's daily bread). History embedded into the main academic discourse of the 19th century produced in the last analysis general knowledge for the educated public in a clear frame of reference: the nation-state. In this framework, historians construed narratives useful for the formation and reproduction of group identity of the ruling elites of the European nation-states.⁶ There the self and the other play a similar role in terms of class antagonisms as

⁶ In this context, "history" in the European sense is meant to be the scientific endeavour to collect, preserve and construct narratives and to make them meaningful to an audience not belonging to the social group who have created the original narratives about their own past. Writing history is thus a process of finding, transforming and re-interpreting narratives about the past. While the sources were originally produced by members of a community for reasons defined by itself and done according to certain rules imposed on itself, the writing of history in the European academic way is done according to different rules. These rules decide not only whether contemporary European writers produce history or fiction, but also, whether some narratives from the canon of the "others" are accepted as "true" sources and or rejected as "false". See in this context Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London, New York 1991, and Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History. The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*. Middletown 1968.

in the context of the colonial encounter. The quintessential narratives within this paradigm of national history are, as far as I can see, the great general theories and world histories of the most eminent thinkers of the time, such as Thomas Macaulay, Georg Friedrich Hegel, Henry Lewis Morgan, Karl Marx, Leopold Ranke, and later – and to a lesser extent – Arnold Toynbee, Oswald Spengler and Max Weber. Within these historical constructions of the European Self, attempts were made to construct the other. The colonial, imperialist and racist other were necessary to legitimize the politics of the nation-states and their colonial empires. Recent observations and criticisms were made on Orientalist constructions,⁸ imagined communities⁹ and national historical writing.¹⁰

I shall now use the example of Hegel's philosophy of history in order to arrive finally in India in the course of my present narrative.

India

Since European history of the nineteenth century had this canon of sanctioned literary styles and topics discussed above, great writers, historians and philosophers such as Macaulay and Hegel were looking for exactly this type of narrative in India. In vain, as we know. We also know that this is only partly their fault. They were dependent on sources produced by missionaries and members of the East India Company's administrative staff. Both these groups were not much interested in the history of India per se, and if they were, they did the same as the great European thinkers at home: they compared Indian classical literature with European classical literature and contemporary European historiography with Indian historiography. Not many Europeans of the nineteenth century, it seems, ever bothered to take the context of these texts into account when writing their often very sarcastic remarks about Indian historical writing.

It is true, there is not much in the field of historiography in pre-modern South Asia. But does that mean there is no history in India because Indians had no "sense" for it or were

⁸ Cf. the seminal work by Edward W. Said (*Orientalism*. New York 1979) and later contributions in the same vein more specifically on India, e.g.: Bipan Chandra, "Nationalist Historians' Interpretations of the Indian National Movement," in: Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Romila Thapar (eds.) *Situating Indian History. For Sarvepalli Gopal*. Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta 1986, p. 194-238; Vinay Dharwadker, "Orientalism and the Study of Indian Literatures," in: Carol A. Breckenridge, Peter van der Veer (eds.) *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*. Philadelphia 1993, p. 158-185; Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*. Oxford 1990. See also the criticisms of this paradigm in Richard M. Eaton, "(Re)imag(in)ing Other²ness: A Postmortem for the Postmodern in India," in: R. M. Eaton, *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, New Delhi 2000, 133-155.

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism*. New York 1997; Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power Vol. 2: The Rise of Classes and Nation-states, 1760-1914*. Cambridge 1993. Cf. also Louis Dumont, "Nationalism and Communalism," in: *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 7, 1964, p. 30-70.

¹⁰ On the role of national sentiments in Orissa see G. N. Dash, "Jagannatha and Oriya Nationalism," in: Anncharlott Eschmann, Hermann Kulke, Gaya Charan Tripathi (eds.) *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*. New Delhi 1986, p. 375-410; Nivedita Mohanty, *Oriya Nationalism*. New Delhi 1982.

not interested in their own past? Of course, there are no narratives of history in India in any way similar to what these Europeans were looking for. But as soon as one uses other methods than the one suggested by the traditional paradigm of *sophia* against *banausia* to look into the past, there is plenty to behold. What is it then, they were looking for?

In India, other themes as the ones traditionally accepted by European historians as fit to be included into their canon, were considered to be worthy of being cast into narrations and remembered over a long time by a large number of people. Among them, as Thomas Macaulay rightly remarked in his famous *Minute on Education* (1835)¹¹ were purāṇic renderings like the often quoted kings twelve feet high and living three thousand years.

At about the same time when Macaulay summarily rejected the traditional writings of India in his *Minute on Education*, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel outlined in his *Philosophy of History*¹² an evolutionary typology of historical consciousness. There he utilized the colonial other for attributing certain stages of development to certain “nations” of the world. This was a kind of “armchair ethno-history” which had its shortcomings in both Hegel’s adherence to the paradigm of academic history I just outlined, and in the information he had to rely on. How much he was a child of his time becomes evident from the following passage which links the concepts of history and nation in the way that was paradigmatic for 19th-century Europe:

But history is always of great importance for a people, since by means of that it becomes conscious of the path of development taken by its own spirit, which expresses itself in Laws, Manners, Customs and Deeds. Laws, comprising morals and judicial institutions, are by nature the permanent element in a people’s existence. But History presents a people with their own image in a condition which thereby becomes objective to them. Without history their existence is in time blindly self-involved – the recurring play of arbitrary volition in manifold forms. History fixes and imparts consistency to this fortuitous current – gives it the form of Universality, and by so doing posits a directive and restrictive rule for it. It is an essential instrument in developing and determining the Constitution – that is, a rational political condition; for it is the empirical method of producing the Universal, inasmuch as it sets up a permanent object for the conceptive powers. – It is because the Hindoos have no History in the form of annals (historia) that they have no History in the

¹¹ Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Minute of 2 February 1835 on Indian Education,” in: *Macaulay, Prose and Poetry*, selected by G. M. Young, Cambridge MA, 1957, p. 721–9 (also on the internet in the *Modern History Source Book* (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook.html>)). Cf. also the chapters on Hegel and Macaulay in Balachandra Rajan, *Under Western Eyes. India from Milton to Macaulay*, Oxford 1999

¹² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, (German ed.: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Werke Bd. 12, Frankfurt am Main 1989 (2nd ed.), p. 203. On Hegel and India in general cf. Hans Bakker, “Die indische Herausforderung. Hegels Beitrag zu einer europäischen kulturhistorischen Diskussion,” in: J. Schickel, B. Nagel, H. Bakker (eds.), *Indische Philosophie und europäische Rezeption*, Cologne 1992, p. 33–56; Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe*, Albany 1988; Balachandra Rajan, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 100–17.

form of transactions (*res gestae*); that is, no growth expanding into a veritable political condition.¹³

Here we are encountering the same vicious circle as in the case of Ma Huan and Vasco da Gama: the expected answer shapes the question. What Hegel could find in his material were only the answers he was already looking for; he could ask only such questions which were permitted within the paradigm of academic history. In the case of China he found a lot of answers to his questions. In China, according to Hegel, the pre-modern Chinese state and Chinese history were congruent, as it is also the case in modern 19th-century European nation-states. This, however, was not the case in pre-modern India. There, as he critically remarked, historical accounts are largely legendary tales about kings and dynasties, but do not contain the history of the state and the people. Hegel, therefore, saw Indian historical consciousness in his evolutionary sequence of the development of the world spirit at the very beginning. Here, Indian historical consciousness represented a kind of childhood state of European historical consciousness.

I have chosen Hegel as an example of a 19th century thinker because his ideas are both in their original form and through their Marxist reinterpretation still of a very high importance. I do not intend to do any grandfather-bashing, but one has to keep in mind that his writings are even nowadays most influential among those who claim that there was no historical consciousness in India before colonial times. Hegelian ideas can be found for instance in Egon Friedell's erstwhile popular *Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit*.¹⁴ The author writes: "... the Indian, deeply convinced of the meaninglessness and unreality of existence, decided to believe further on only in Nothingness, and his belief became reality: untouched by the changes of History, this great country was and is a gigantic Nothing."¹⁵

Other examples from popular works by contemporary writers which criticise the ancient Indians' neglect of their own past can be found in books by Juan Mascaró and Alfred L. Basham. In the preface to a popular English translation of the *Bhāgavadgītā* the editor Mascaró informs the reader: "There are, however, two great branches of literature not found in Sanskrit. There is no history and there is no tragedy : there is no Herodotus or Thucydides; and there is no Aeschylus or Sophocles or Euripides."¹⁶ A. L. Basham is of the same opinion when he states that India was "having no real historical tradition".¹⁷ In other words: both authors observe a lack of that form of historical consciousness which may have brought forth historical and historiographical literature or any other form of historical thinking as it is known in western tradition.

¹³ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 203-4. English translation quoted from G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*. New York 1956, p. 163.

¹⁴ Egon Friedell, *Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit* (Cultural History of Modernity), Munich 1996; 1st ed. 3 vols., 1927-1931.

¹⁵ Friedell, *Kulturgeschichte*, p. 267 (author's translation).

¹⁶ Juan Mascaró, "Introduction", in: J. Mascaró (transl., ed.), *The Bhagavadgita*, Harmondsworth 1962, p. 9S10.

¹⁷ A. L. Basham, "Mediaeval Hindu India," in: A. L. Basham (ed.), *A Cultural History of India*, Delhi 1975, p. 54.

As in the case of Hegel, it is the comparison with western classical forms of historical writing which makes the authors mentioned above come to the conclusion that Indian historical consciousness is somehow deficient. The usual explanation for this is the alleged otherworldly orientation of Indian civilization, where, since the times of the Vedas, “the search for Light”, “the sublime sense of Infinity” or the “joy of the Infinite in the inner world”¹⁸ are seen to have been more important than rational conduct of daily life and political affairs. As in Hegel, the authors were looking for something they already knew from their own culture and assumed it should exist everywhere on the globe in the same form: the same structural law of cognitive dissonance rules that a house of god is a church and not a temple, and history is part of *sophia* and not of *banausia*.

Since I have said that those authors who believed that there is no history in India are wrong, the next question we have to tackle now is: Where in India can historical consciousness be found? The most common answer to the question – despite Mascaró’s remark about the absence of history in Indian literature – is that history in early and classical India has been encompassed into other forms of literature: genealogy takes the form of *praśasti* (eulogy) in epic or purāṇic style,¹⁹ dynastic feuds are narrated in the plot of a drama,²⁰ Vedic ritual texts allude to events of the past,²¹ and great epics such as the *Mahābhārata* are worked out by generations of bards from tales about petty feuds of ruling chiefs. There are also literary meta-structures such as works of one genre which encompasses other literary forms, among them those which contain the historical information in question.²²

All these examples have one characteristic feature in common: none of these actually narrates history. All take the knowledge of contextual history for granted, of the past into which the plot of the text is being set. Those for whom these works of literature were produced are expected to know the events of the past and are therefore presupposed to have other, non-literary, means to acquire that knowledge. As a consequence one has to assume that access was possible to historical narratives which were considered as practical knowledge in the sense of *banausia* and thought to be too banal or too confidential to be presented to outsiders.²³

¹⁸ All quotes from Mascaró (*ibid.*), p. 10.

¹⁹ Most early medieval royal copper plate inscriptions contain such a – often very long – description of the deeds of the ancestors in a style known to the reader from the classical epics, especially the *Mahābhārata* and popular *Purāṇas*.

²⁰ The drama *Devi-candragupta* contains important information on the history of the Gupta Dynasty. Cf. Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi, “Some Aspects of the Ramagupta Problem,” *Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda*, 19, 1/2, 1969, p. 139–51.

²¹ E.g. the battles mentioned in ṚV VI, 27 and VII, 18–19.

²² This is the case in many inscriptions. The best known literary example is the epic poem (*mahākāvya*) *Navasāhasāṅkacarita* by Padmagupta (end of the 10th cent. AD) which contains in its 11th canto the lineage (*vamśāvali*) of the Paramāra kings of Malwa in form of an eulogy (*praśasti*; XI, 64–102).

²³ The *Arthaśāstra* alludes to such forms of knowledge which a prince is required to study when Kauṭilya says that the prince in training should listen to *itihāsa*, which is said to include Purāṇa, Itiṅṛta (“events”; the commentary explains it as “Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata etc.”), Ākhyāyikā (“history of gods, men etc.”), and other forms of knowledge based on traditional lore (Aś 1.5.13S14). These

Most recent historical thinkers look at history in a different way and believe that there never can be found anything like objective truth in historical research. The past is a field of contested claims that are used to construct the present of a society by constructing narratives of the past. Generally, this canon of narratives is shared by a majority among the group of reference – or at least among the ruling elite and its clients.

The spatial frame of reference for which such a kind of implicit historical narrative is intended, can obviously not be an Indian state or nation, or India as a cultural sphere. Instead, the audience expected to listen to such texts (including oral texts) may be in some instances a royal court as in the case of dramas and *praśastis* which are composed by court poets, in others cases the audience might have been the devotees of a deity and the persons concerned with the affairs of its temple.²⁴ The social group expected to understand a text may also be a local or regional subcaste or a tribe, whose tales explain their origin and their present position in society. The literatures produced within such a spatial frame of reference include bardic literature, local epics, folk theatre, *kaiphīyats*, *pūrvottarams* and *vaṃśāvalis*.²⁵

All these texts have one feature in common: they are composed, improvised, written, remembered and performed by insiders for insiders. None of them are expected to be understood by someone who does not already know the local context. No key to decode the texts will be provided, no reference to the past – supposed to be common knowledge among the audience – will be given.

The kind of historical consciousness which is oriented towards a single social group, a family, a subcaste, a village or town, a regional centre such as a fort or temple, etc., I should like to call *endo-historical*. I believe that the telling of endo-historical narratives is the most common type of collective recollections and reconstructions of meaningful pasts throughout the world. Even in modern societies the histories of social phenomena such as a soccer club, a suburb, a gay club or a commercial enterprise very rarely cross the boundary between *banausia* and scientific discourse. And if they do, they usually end up among anthropologists or sociologists, but rarely among historians.

This is the consequence of the methodology generally employed by the adherents of the still existing national paradigm of historical research. Working with oral or written sources created in acts that reproduce the past within a community or social group by

texts are, in accordance to the rule of encompassing historical texts into “higher” forms of literature, considered as *Itihāśaveda* (Aś 1.3.2).

²⁴ In the case of Orissa, the Jagannātha temple of Puri and its chronicles (*Mādalā Pāñjī*) is the most prominent example of such a text in a local context. But most other temples also have this kind of *sthala-māhātmya* (temple chronicle) which offer a context for the rituals within a *purāṇic* history of the shrine in a local frame of reference (Hermann Kulke, “The Chonicles and the Temple Records of the Mādalā Pāñjī of Puri - A Reassessment of the Evidence,” in: Harish Chandra Das, S. Tripathy, B. K. Rath (eds.), *Kṛṣṇa Pratibhā – Studies in Indology. Prof. Krishna Chandra Panigrahi Commemoration Volume*, Vol. 2, Delhi 1994, p. 395–414; Kulke, Hermann: “Historiography and Regional Identity – The Case of the Temple Chronicles of Puri,” in: Hermann Kulke, Burkhard Schnepel (eds.), *Jagannath Revisited. Studying Society, Religion and the State in Orissa*. New Delhi 2001, p. 211–225.

members of that community requires anthropological understanding and ethnohistory as a methodological background. Endo-history therefore is a combination of both social anthropology and history, but in contrast to classical ethnohistory, endo-history does not attempt to reconstruct the history of the social group in question, but uses the sources internally produced within the group and for the group to achieve an understanding of the historical consciousness of that group. Narrating these texts for the scientific community does not give an explanation, but merely provides an insight into the cultural structure²⁶ and offers data for further research.

Conclusion

As a consequence, I should like to postulate that there was indeed not one historical consciousness in pre-modern India: there existed many. They had a common structure, different from the one dominant in Europe, but many and often conflicting contents. They were shaped by the specific conditions of single social groups from which a particular text in form of a ritual, a temple, a book or a song was collected by some outsider. These groups may be members of Vedic schools, *jātis* (“castes”), villages, guilds, monasteries, royal courts, or many others. The repertoire of historical images used by these groups reflect the social context of their daily life, which makes the sphere of their historical consciousness highly localized. They narrated history within this context and never transcended it into a supra-local meta-narrative in which the factual contents of localized endo-histories merged into an all Indian sphere of historical consciousness.

In a way similar to the rules of commensality and endogamy of the social sphere, the rules of inclusion and exclusion of historical information in the historical consciousness of a social group can be formulated. Why should a farmer who does not accept food or water from a washerman, who does not marry into that man’s family and who considers himself as higher in the social hierarchy, have an interest in the history of such a washerman? Why should a Brahman memorize the history of the Vedic texts which belong to a school that is not his own? And why should a king whose legitimation is based on the conception of the *cakravartin*, the ruler of the world and the protector of all beings, include the history of his neighbour and rival into the *prasastis* of his inscriptions?

Declan Quigley, who inspired some of these examples, points out the basic structure of the Hindu social system which also explains its historical consciousness by saying:

The secret of caste is also to be found in the relationship between polity and culture. There are, however, two essential differences between caste-organized polities and national polities. The first is that caste depends on the relative failure of centralization and the parallel persistence of kinship in shaping social

²⁵ These are village accounts such as tax records and cadastral details, local histories and narrated genealogies.

²⁶ Structure here in the sense of Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History*, Chicago/London 1985.

institutions. The second is the expression of common culture through ritual rather than through the written word.²⁸

Endogamy and endo-history are creations from the same cultural structure. The knowledge of the past is first of all the knowledge of practical issues such as marriage alliances and other caste-specific information. The historical consciousness of particular social groups is furthermore determined by their role in the community, their work relations, ritual obligations, and their access to the means of production such as land, ritual texts, knowledge and skills necessary for certain crafts etc. All this knowledge – which also includes the history of its transmission from the past to the present – remains within a social group and is only communicated therein. The experts, such as bards, genealogists and scribes are merely an extension of this structure. They are historical experts who preserve the knowledge of the past only for one or a few social groups, either in the form of oral texts or archival materials.

The relative weakness of the state in pre-modern India is one of the reasons for the strong position of the kin groups in local communities and is thus also a reason for the existence of the many parallel and conflicting traditions we find in Indian literature such as the *Purāṇas*, *Māhātmyas* and local histories. According to Declan Quigley, the common structure of Hindu rituals produces common culture, but does not determine the details of their varying content. In the same way, historical thinking is structured by the paradigmatic form of Vedic and Purāṇic literature, but not fully determined in its content. This genre of literature provides the framework in which the same story can have different meanings to different social groups.

Hegel complained about this particularisation of historical information when he remarked that the history of the Indian subcontinent is “a history of royal dynasties, but not of the nations”.²⁹ What he was looking for was the unifying meta-narrative necessary for the construction of a unified national identity. But this meta-narrative could not supersede the conflicting tales of the past before the 20th century. Therefore, Hegel and Macaulay, who were searching for the national meta-narrative, could not find what they were looking for. The meta-narrative was first constructed in the independence movement of the 20th century and only now, in the age of the mass media, it becomes an object of contention in the political arena. The dominant discourse and probably the one towards which the others will converge, is that of Hindu nationalism which utilizes one of the interpretations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a state ideology. This is indeed a modern historical consciousness, but in many respects not a

²⁸ Quigley, *Interpretation of Caste*, p. 145; Cf. his *Interpretation of Caste*, Oxford 1993, esp. ch. 7, “The Courts of Kings and Washermen”. But I am also aware of the criticisms Quigley received (cf. Hiroyuki Kotani, “Kingship, State and Local Society in Ritual Functions: Maratha Kingdom to Bombay Government,” in: Steering Committee of the Research Project ‘Institutions, Networks and Forces of Changes in Contemporary South Asia’ (eds.), *Rituals as Popular Culture: Towards Historico-Anthropological Understanding of Modern Indian Society*, p. 89–128, and Akio Tanabe, “Kingship, Community and Commerce in late Pre-modern Khurda,” in *ibid.*, p. 129–200).

²⁹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, p. 207.

very appealing one. It makes me uneasy because it reminds me too much of Nazi Germany and Milosevic's Serbia. But it is nonetheless a form of modern historical thinking.

The last word goes to Bernard S. Cohn who once remarked: "I would speculate that a society is modern when it does have a past, when this past is shared by the vast majority of the society, and when it can be used on a national basis to determine and validate behaviour."³⁰

³⁰ Bernard Cohn, "The Pasts of an Indian Village", in: B. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians*, Delhi 1987, p. 98.