



DIALECTICS OF CHANGE AND READING ALTERNATIVE HISTORIES: IDEOLOGY, MODES OF PRODUCTION, AND SOCIAL FORMATION IN EARLY SOUTH-CENTRAL ASIA *

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ABSTRACT

This is a study based on the ancient material culture and classical texts of the first millennium BCE pre-urban and pre-state social formations in the Gangetic valley and South India. It highlights the dialectics of change and the material, socio-cultural, and ideological formations within designated eco systems leading to uneven development and the emergence of complex societies. The study is argued on the theoretical premise of historical and dialectical materialism, aimed at understanding modes of production and hegemony in early social formations. It questions ideology and inverted notions of exclusive histories introduced through colonialism, Orientalism, and post-colonial parochialisms. It calls for an unbiased perception on history in the study of contested pasts and alternative histories.

Keywords: South Central Asia, pre-colonial social formations, ideology, modes of production, labour

“History is not information that is handed down unchanged from generation to generation.

Historical situations need to be explained and explanations draw on analyses of the evidence; interpretations have to conform to the basic requirements of using reliable evidence. Historiography therefore becomes a prelude to understanding history as a form of knowledge” (Romila Thapar 2002, p. xviii)

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INTRODUCTION

This is an overview study covering the geographical scope of South Central Asia (hereafter SCA) with special reference to the Gangetic valley and South India. It represents a geo-physical region with a sharp biological contrast and cultural diversity. The chronological scope covers the early first millennium BCE pre-urban and pre-state societies, identified as the Formative Period. Sri Lanka is one among many segments in the SCA mosaic. Cross regional cultural pollination emanating from SCA and Indian Ocean Rim lands successfully blended with the indigenous for over thousands of years in this island. This convergence resulted in multiple histories, material, socio-cultural, and ideological formations in Sri Lanka, a land that shares commonalities with other regions in SCA. There is a need therefore to question inverted notions of an exclusive history that often disregards intrusive technological formations and peopling in Sri Lanka (and elsewhere in SCA). The history of Sri Lanka is often studied through the prism of SCA, while dynamics of change are less understood from the point of dialectical materialism. As such, an unbiased perception on historical dynamics of SCA provides an entrée to Sri Lanka's pre-modern material and social formations and its ideological bases including contested pasts leading to alternative histories.

Viewed through this lens, several issues emerge that are central to past perceptions of SCA (and Sri Lanka). They are modes of production, labour, and production including hegemonic ideology and constant change. Often such critical issues are forgotten or ignored in the narrative, especially with special reference to Formative and subsequent Early Historic societies.

SITUATING DIALECTICS OF HISTORY

The year 2018 commemorates the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx. The duo, Marx and Engels, are perhaps the most outstanding and uncompromising philosophers on dialectical and historical materialism. Their thinking subsequently revolutionized the Social Sciences and Humanities on the dialectics of social and material formations, cognition, and change in history. In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx (1887) notes his work as a critical analysis of capitalist production and situates it as a mode of production in historical motion. Marx also stated that "the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history...where present society.... is...an organism capable of change and is constantly changing." He further emphasized that every historically developed social form is in fluid movement.

Historiographical studies on colonial and post-Colonial India and Sri Lanka share a similar fate on misunderstood histories and subversion of the past. From the 1950's, South Asian intellectuals, more specifically Indian scholars, had great success dealing with problem-oriented and issue-related studies in reading the past. This was largely conditioned by relooking at the past from a point of dialectical and historical materialism and as a response to contradictions posed by colonialism, Orientalism, imperialism, and capitalism (Thapar 1992). Scholar-scientists such as D.D. Kosambi unfolded a new chapter in interpretative material history, a perspective that was continued and fine-tuned by scholars such as Rahul Sankrityayana, R.S. Sharma, and Romila Thapar who may be listed among a long list of post-Independence historians in India. Sri Lanka, except in the case of a few historians (such as G.C. Mendis, Lakshman Perera, and RALH Gunawardena to name a few), made little impact questioning the past through historical

materialism for a greater understanding on formative societies (Seneviratne 2001; Seneviratne 2006). Significantly enough, India also has the advantage of a preexisting argumentative tradition on dialectical discourses and materialism dating to c. 6th century BCE. Most representative of this tradition are pristine Buddhism (*vibajjavada* i.e. doctrine of dialectical analysis) and more dominantly, *Charvaka/ Lokayata* or the philosophy of materialism (Chattopadhyaya 1973). Much later, Buddhist philosophers such as Nagarjuna, Asanga, Vasubandu, and Dinnaga redefined logic and abstract dialectical philosophies of liberation, but they were devoid of political content needed for social liberation (Chattopadhyaya 1973; Sankrityayana 1973).

Dialectics of the past is studied herein from a trajectory i.e. past in the present and present in the past. It is considered from a cross regional perspective, focusing on early material and social formations as well as cognitive responses spread over time and space. The study provides horizontal and vertical dynamics and underlying changes in history, and simultaneously looks at human interactions embedded in its natural and social environment in pre-state formations as a prelude to the emergence of state societies. It recognizes simple pre-state societies that provided a social, cultural, mental, and material matrix for the consequent emergence of complex state societies.

SOUTH ASIAN SCOPE

Human history in SCA dates to the Paleolithic (Old Stone) Age. It represents various phases in techno-cultural and social formations from Stone Age to metal-using societies (Sundara 2004). SCA also represents a conglomeration of multiple segments of cultures, biological entities, languages, and belief systems that evolved in history. The region itself has a vivid array of pre-colonial material culture, a rich corpus of literature,

folk lore, and memory. Its landscape presents multiple histories and identities spread over time and space (Malik 1968). Studies on this period also question Orientalist and colonial constructs of unchanging pre-modern social formations in SCA.

FORMATION OF SIMPLE (NON COMPLEX) SOCIETIES

SCA's history (as in elsewhere in the world) unfolded long term consequences resulting in institutional formation and change. However, this historical reality is viewed at the popular level through the lens of romantic notions and parochialisms not entirely based on tested empirical and scientific information. The Formative Period, representing simple societies, is used often to 'discover' origins of 'imagined' communities, language, racial and hegemonic identities and conversely as a source marginalizing the other (Anderson 1983; Thapar 2008; Renfrew 1990; Kennedy 2000).

The epoch of complex formations, on the other hand, is represented by state, class, and urban societies (also identified as Riverine Civilizations) that evolved out of pre-existing formative societies. This epoch is also subverted as a platform to idealize an "elitist, heroic and golden age" (Wolf 1982, p.). Often, contemporary societies draw inspiration from the past as a basis for making claims on contested space and legitimation of power and hegemony. Those who do not read historical texts and inscriptions in the originals and are unfamiliar with ancient material culture retrieved through scientific studies, tend to embrace misunderstood and romanticized histories and not a critical evaluation reading the past (Seneviratne 1996, p. 266-270).

Rudimentary production associated with the production of stone tools and even artistic expressions are identified in SCA with Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) and Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) communities. It, however,

did not release a ripple effect nor carry long term structural changes in nomadic societies leading to sustainable institutional formations. Such changes initially evolved in conjunction with the techno-cultural epoch of the New Stone Age (Neolithic). For the first-time it witnessed economics of foraging based on exploitation of plants, domestication of animals, and greater sedentation. Eventually it released slow but perceptible changes transiting to a higher stage of material and social formation (Childe 1985; Allchin 1963; Harris & Hillman 1989).

These changes may be identified as rudimentary surplus production, gradual demographic expansion, harnessing energy and semi specialization in craft and agricultural production, a relative intensification of exchange systems including establishment of earliest village settlements and identifiable ritual structures, and a semblance of political organization under clan and later (segmentary) lineage chieftains (Fried 1967; Thapar 1984). SCA material and social formations of Neolithic, Chalcolithic (copper-bronze), and later Megalithic Iron Age cultures occurred within the above context representing simple societies.

IDEOLOGY, MODES OF PRODUCTION, AND LABOUR

From its very inception, past societies had their survival strategies based on subsistence - to cater to social demands and harness the technological capacity to achieve multiple modes of sustaining livelihood. This entailed how work as a physical expression was translated through labour and its changing rhythm; consciousness, ideology, and structures of organization in production leading to transformations from simple to complex societies. The latter looked at labour and production beyond the individual and alternatively at the larger society. Importantly, even in formative societies there was a semblance of domination, and consciousness

through which structures of power and ideological mechanisms of hegemony were imposed over those engaged in processes of production (Kahn & Llobera 1986; Barry & Hirst 1975).

Synergy between ideology and production as a critical change agent is not studied much in contemporary SCA archaeological and historical research except by those who read the past from the perspective of historical materialism. The past often is read along lines of cultural studies per se, and is situated devoid of material, environment, and social bases, as well as cognitive values. This ideological basis is also embedded in the contemporary mind-set sub consciously inherited from pre-colonial, colonial, Orientalist, and post-colonial perceptions.

Ideology needs to be contextualized within the duality of material-mental existence and social formation. It is a necessary ingredient in the reproduction of productive forces and relations of production which also witnesses the reproduction of relations of domination (Althusser 2014). Consequently, the underlying reality is the connection between the mental and the material and all its dimensions that play a central role in the production of social relations (Godelier 1988). That is "...to explore the relations between thought, the economy and society, and to analyze the respective weight of the mental and material in the production of social relations, in the motion of societies, in history at large" (Godelier 1988, p.). The study of history needs to be based on concrete social conditions and should eventually move from "social history to the history of society" (Hobsbawm 1971, p.). With the emergence of complex societies in antiquity, this process was translated in to power and enforced by the ruling ideology. Ideology represents the production of ideas, conceptions, and consciousness, and the superstructure of a civilization driven by ruling ideas of a given

epoch i.e. dominant material relationships and ideas of dominance. The goal of ideology is to legitimize those forces in a position of hegemony (Marx & Engels 1947; Gramsci 2010).

Human society sustains itself in an individual capacity or as a group engagement on production for creative purposes and subsistence. Labour, social organization, language, and consciousness are the distinctive characteristics of humans, inseparably linked each with the others and mutually determining one another (Mandel 1971). Production based on several conditions, not in a deterministic manner, transitioned labour from a simple undertaking to a complex enterprise. In simple societies, production created objects of utility value, functionally usable within a limited space. Contrary to this, in complex societies, production was designated, ordered, patronized, and funded to sustain a larger society. Such societies had a wider spatial distribution with varying demands extending to all creations, including art.

The process of production organized under hegemony, domination, and its ideological manifestations therefore influenced those who were engaged as primary producers (Godelier 1977). Gramsci noted how power is wielded through ideas and knowledge by consent and not necessarily force (Gramsci 2010). With the formation of the state, the ruling elite succeeded in transmitting an "ideology of work" to their subjects, thereby ensuring their "dependence" (Classen & Oosten 1996).

Work and production may take many forms in simple and complex societies. That is semi specialized to specialized labour; division of work based on age and gender; demand for surplus production; ritual structures associated with labour and production; alienation of labour (i.e. loss of control over labour by primary producers); technology and

production; marginalization of individuals; and community ownership over production. This also includes leisure enjoyed by those who did not involve themselves in productive work.

CONTEXTUALIZING IDEOLOGY IN SOUTH-CENTRAL ASIA

Over decades, scholarly studies in SCA attempted to identify ideology at multiple levels in history. At one level, it had a focus on historical narratives of elite groups inscribed in the classical texts, ancient material culture, inscriptions, and oral traditions. There is also the reconstruction of history associated with pre- colonial/ colonial/ Orientalist/ Utilitarian/ Antiquarian ideology (Thapar 1992; Cohn 1996; Mackenzie 2009). It continues to be sustained with post-colonial ethno-nationalist and religio-political ideologies. There is also a serious ideological impediment conditioned by subaltern, postmodern/ post-colonial studies coupled with the neo-liberal agenda that has multiple blind spots in reading the past. This dual thrust has intellectually retarded studies on historical consciousness, thereby cultivating an a-historical psyche negating dialectics of the past (Blackburn 1972; Chibber 2013).

The past, thus perceived, is located by various schools of thought within the following context (for critical assessments see Thapar 1971; Thapar 2002; Thapar, Mukhia & Chandra 2000; Ali 2002; Cohn 1996; Seneviratne 1996; Seneviratne 2008):

- Linear and symmetric histories presenting uniform or blanket developments spread across time and space.
- Periodization identified after great men or women, hero kings or queens, religions, ruling dynasties, great cities and catastrophic events.
- History as a narrative of elites in society and their habitat associated with

palaces, central places of worship, garden complexes (all appendages of conspicuous consumption), luxury lifestyles, and luxury objects as opposed to the culture of the “marginalized other hidden in history”. The marginalized remained outside the pale of civilization and did not share the elite language and culture of the “civilized”.

- Identification of an idealized “Golden Age” and its achievements reflected in monumental architecture and classical literature, and associated with the social apex thinly spread over elite groups that included the clergy (mainly monastic dwellers) as against the multitude of common folk.
- Racialization of monuments (e.g. megaliths) with social, ethnic, and language identities (Seneviratne 2006) distinguishing the civilized from the *mleccha* or barbarian (Thapar 1971; Parasher 1991).
- Pre-colonial society as an unchanging and static entity with little or no trade & commerce, devoid of money economies, and urban centers (other than garrison cities) ruled by despots who wielded power over the mass of peasantry through state controlled hydraulic systems and military-bureaucracy i.e. Oriental Despotism (Wittfogel 1975; Gunawardene 1976).

Clearly, such views tend to blur an objective take on SCA's past, especially in former colonies. It deflects a proper understanding of modes of production i.e. differentiated levels of production, consumption, functional technologies, and socio-economic change within time and space (Banaji 2011). Such processes must be recognized with different forms of labour, work, and production at the grass roots level and transient societies. As against asymmetric, linear, static, and elitist perceptions of history, one needs to view history from ground level up and as

a dynamic process triggering off vertical and horizontal change spread unevenly. Periodization contextualized within technocultural formations needs to move in to the realm of alternative, multiple, in-between, and sub layers of histories associated with technocultural communities and their cognitive values. Additionally, one also needs to consider uneven and parallel institutional formations, production relations and productive forces, and the co-existence of different and parallel production techniques (uneven & combined development especially during the period of State formation). This also entails ecological adaptations and demographic fluctuations resulting in multiple and variable social demands (and supply) as a critical change agent. These impacted differentiated levels of consumption, production of food, luxury, and utilitarian and ritual objects including technological change and innovations. As a consequence, it released social change, varying social formations and vice-versa, and most importantly dynamics of power and ideology of hegemony (Service 1975).

Work, labour, and production in formative societies and even in antiquity may be contextualized within the following framework. Why did people work and produce? What work did they perform? What are the social and economic compulsions prompting production? Whom did they work for or who assigned them with work? What were the tools and the functional technologies applied in work? What was the nature of associated workers or the labour pool and gender-based production? (Gero & Conkey 1991). Did the position of women (as stakeholders of the labour pool) deteriorate in the early State? The role of women in production and society in general, especially in state societies, needs to be studied and evaluated in relation to gender hegemony, division of labour, and decision-making processes. Under what conditions did amorphous household units of production were transformed/ absorbed

into organized wage-earning labour, catering products to regular consumer markets in state societies? Who distributed their products and/or what were the technological and human agencies or logistical mechanisms through which their products moved? What was the impact of the cash nexus on value added services of labour? What were the socio-political and ideological justifications imposed for purposes of appropriating means of production, labour, and products? What was the extent of alienation of labour?

PRE-STATE SOCIAL AND MATERIAL FORMATIONS IN SOUTH-CENTRAL ASIA

Interactive symbiotic processes between resident communities and the natural environment in SCA was expressed through 1. Subsistence patterns 2. Resource-use & exchange systems 3. Technology and 4. Settlement patterns. Each of these avenues required individual or communal work/ engagement for the sustenance of the resident community. The emergence of social, economic, political, and religious-cultural institutions in formative societies was a consequence of this interlocking and overlapping processes.

Evidence on work, labour, and production within formative agro-pastoral economies in SCA may be drawn from material culture and oral/ textual information i.e. Sanskrit Vedic hymns in North India (Thapar 2002) and Tamil Cankam poetry in South India (Kailasapathy 1968). Excavations done over 50 years at Chalcolithic (copper-bronze) and Early Iron Age (EIA) sites in North, Central, and South India have yielded material evidence providing greater clarity on formative societies (Sundara 2004). The word *go* (i.e. cattle) in the Vedic context is a prefix reflecting affinity with socio-economic activity. *Go-tra* (family unit), *ga-visthi* (lit. "...to go in search of cattle" / later "to fight"), *go-pura* (entrance to settlement) are some terms from a long list of such pastoral

situations. Cankam texts mention pastoral activity and family as the unit of production-consumption. The term *kuti/ kudi* derived from *kud* meant "to join, hut where family and cattle lived together" (Seneviratne 1995, p. 57-77). The term *ko* originally implied herdsman and later identified with King/ God. In the *Agganna Sutta (Digha Nikaya)*, the Buddha has mentioned formative societies living on harvested wild grain having sufficient surplus for leisure time (Rhys 2014).

It is suggested that hunter-gatherers and Neolithic farmers (man or woman) may have 'worked' approximately three hours a day, 20-35 hours a week, and not more than 1200 hours of work per year (Sahlins 1978). *Capital* accumulation/ formation and economic output was at a low key. Semi or full time nomadic life could not provide a high level of efficiency due to dependence on limited raw material or primitive tools such as stones, arrowheads, hoe sticks, and wooden ploughs. Capital accumulation through gift-giving exchange systems remained irregular. It was largely based on reciprocity and in a constant flux within familial, clan, and lineage systems including dangers posed by predatory raids and environmental fluctuations (Sahlins 1968; Seneviratne 1994; 1995,).

The availability of so-called leisure time is a contested feature. 'Leisure time' away from subsistence activity is an investment on activities relating to creative work (Sahlins 1978). Fresco-painting, production of terra-cotta images, toys, beads, utilitarian pottery, weapons, burial construction, and even indulging in warfare – especially predatory raids encroaching on pasture land and looting of prestige items having social and economic value (e.g. cattle, animal skins, semi-precious stones, etc.) may be listed as such enterprises (Seneviratne 1994). In predatory warfare, *mleccha* (Vedic Sanskrit term literally meaning "barbarian" or those who did not speak the correct language), (Thapar 1971;

Parasher 1992) were conquered and used for basic household work. In later Vedic texts, *Nishaada* and *Vraata* tribes are identified as appropriated labour and slaves (Jha 1974; Chanana 1990).

Area Catchment Analysis indicates some of the primary habitats associated with exploitable resource zones occupied by the resident community, approximately covering a radius/ distance of one or at the most, two miles from the habitat or settlement (Renfrew & Bahn 2016). This spatial factor also provided an optimum distance covered each day by an individual for work-related enterprise such as hunting, herding, subsistence agriculture, and/ or obtaining raw material for crafts (Boserup 1965; Wolf 1966). Activity located beyond this distance would entail a falling rate of 'profits', both in terms of time investment and productive economic returns (Boserup's hypothesis on population pressure and spatial factor may not be applicable to every eco system). It appears that work related to agriculture in specific eco systems and the appropriate technology used therein were both time and labour saving due to strategies adopted by them. For instance, rich alluvium or black cotton (*regur*) soil (mainly in Maharashtra, India) worked by early copper-bronze using village communities did not require the plough. The digging stick (hoe) was sufficient to work the soil and cultivate *kulti*/ horse gram (*Dolichos Biflorus*) and *ragi*/ finger millet (*Eleusine Coracana*), supplemented by a base-line economy of hunting-gathering and fishing for sustenance (Davalikar 1988). Zoo archaeological studies indicate that these societies consumed less of their domesticated animals. They either hunted wild animals or exchanged their products with hunters in the hinterland who supplied them with meat.

The circumference of excavated circular one-roomed (wattle and daub) huts at habitations (taken along with textual data and ethnographic

information) indicate an approximate diameter of +5 meters occupied by 5-6 members of the nuclear family. Based on material evidence retrieved (from flakes, stone tools, beads, slag and potsherd, hearths, and micro furnaces) in and around these huts, households may have functioned as the unit of production. The primary unit of consumption was also the family and the resident lineage group within the settlement. On some occasions, it included extended families located within the segmentary lineage territorial unit where multiple exchange systems supplied required demands. Some essential dry food items like salt, raw material, fuel wood or (rare) prestige objects (e.g. semi-precious stones) moved via a network of exchange that linked different settlements and eco systems, and at times from distantly located places and resource zones (e.g. lapis-lazuli or jade).

The following case studies indicate the nature of work and labour carried out during the formative period by the individual or nuclear family in the processes of production. Their engagement was mediated through 'interventionist technologies' at the environmental, social, economic, and political levels.

STONE TOOL WORKING

The production of stone tools entailed acquisition of raw material, manufacture, use, and distribution that engaged the individual or family/ extended family. It is estimated that the production of a stone arrowhead took at least 2-3 work hours of work input. Locating raw material and securing the necessary tools of production required for its fashioning need to be added to the time spent. There were multiple functions and purposes of such tools i.e. hunting, chopping, scraping, ornamentation, exchange, etc. Most appropriate raw material was often secured from distantly located sources (e.g. jade or fired agate to produce carnelian) through 'down the line' exchange mechanisms, and

at times forcibly removed. The possession of extractive technology was a critical factor to retrieve raw material. Means of transportation was obtained by harnessing wind-power for small vessels, human portage, or using other sources of energy such as beasts of burden. Paleo-osteological studies have revealed heavy wastage on the shoulder blades of cattle, indicating the use of beasts of burden in transportation and possibly agriculture (Sahlins 1968; Sahlins 1978; Renfrew and Bahn 2016).

METALLURGICAL PRODUCTION

During the latter half of the Neolithic Age (in South Asia and elsewhere), copper and slightly later bronze technology gradually came in to use. Archaeo-metallurgical studies indicate residue of different types of metal working unearthed in early dwellings. The earliest metal smiths may have worked all metals (iron, gold, copper, silver, etc.). The Pali term *kammaara* in the earliest Buddhist texts indicate a pre-existing situation. Texts record that metal smiths worked all varieties of metal, hinting at a pre-urban situation that had less demand on specialized work required by resident communities. In fact, a pre-state (c. 2nd Cent. BCE) inscription from Sri Lanka mentions a *cara tisa*, who is identified as a *kabara (kammaara)* "Tissa, the itinerant smith" (Paranavitana 1970, p. 1196).

Gordon Childe identified the metal smith as the first expert worker during the Formative period (Childe 1985). Metal enhanced the capacity to work. It could undertake new forms of production related work over stone technology. It also released long-term social change. The transition from stone tools to metal technology was a conscious shift for several reasons. Despite its somewhat complex production technique, metal was selected and preferred over stone technology due to its efficiency as an extractive, production, and logistical technology, its malleability turning out a wide range of tools

for a variety of activities in production, and its striking power in warfare (in predatory raids) and social control. A large section of South Asian historians and archaeologists are yet to appreciate the significance of technology and social change spread over time and space.

Organization of work for metal production was qualitatively different from stone tool production. The family pool or the extended family had to engage itself as the unit of production. Steps of the metal production process involved surface collection or mining (copper ore had to be mined), fragmenting raw material into small particles by beating, collecting fuel wood or even processing animal dung as fuel cake, constructing small scale furnaces and the whole process or production of refining ore, adding flux, taking turns at the bellows, feeding the furnace with metallic ore and fuel, periodically clearing slag from tuyeres, beating the metal on the anvil, and finally the cooling process in the retrieval of a semi-finished product. This was a process that involved concerted action and continuous work until the final product was obtained (Seneviratne 1987).

POTTERY CRAFT

A general case study of pottery provides insights on additional aspects, such as gender-based work. Earliest pottery may have functionally been a social need. The transition to a liquid diet, the need to carry and consume liquids such as milk, water, intoxicating beverages (for consumption and rituals), and storage of surplus grain (gathered or cultivated) likely created a social demand for pottery. One of its advantages was the convenience of procuring raw material i.e. clay from a nearby stream, pond or marshland situated adjacent to the habitat. The earliest pots were hand-made (not turned on a potter's wheel), sun dried, and less fired. Women may have been the earliest potters, as is the case of incipient agriculture. Before the kiln was finally devised in the late Neolithic period,

rudimentary constructions of a contraption covered by fuel-wood or animal dung cakes may have served as the 'kiln' to fire pottery. Such open fire contraptions could reach a temperature of 1000 degrees Fahrenheit. Initially, pottery was not worked full time, as it was largely for local consumption. Low population habitats also did not require ongoing full-time production. During rainy seasons production was not undertaken, which is a feature common to contemporary village craft people as well. However, the large quantity and highly specialized pottery within the Early Iron Age burials and habitations points to the sustained production of pottery in pre-urban village societies.

BURIAL CONSTRUCTION

Labour and time in-put in the construction of megalithic burials and large burial -pots (jar burials) present another interesting dimension relating to division of labour, concerted work, and ideological implications relating to hegemony. Burial monuments may have been the earliest representations of 'conspicuous consumption'. Megaliths commemorated ancestors and a life after death and as lineage territorial markers. Unlike Stonehenge and the massive burrows in Europe that required heavy investment of work, time, and labour, SCA megaliths are much smaller in scale and were within the working capacity of the labour pool of small clans (Dikshit & Kumar 2014). Cankam texts describe the process of constructing burial tombs. It commenced with the selection of stones, quarrying, and transporting stones to the burial site or a sacred space. (In Britain, raw material in certain cases was transported from over 100 miles from the quarry). Following this was - placing the stones, interment of corporeal remains and burial goods (mainly food or prestige items) within the chamber or burial pot, and sealing of the tomb and periodic offerings made at the burial sites. Social archaeological studies on

Rank Societies indicate internal hierarchies recognizable at burial sites in terms of spatial location factors, the central location of more important burials, human work hours invested in the construction (mainly in terms of size), and disparity of burial goods interred within the burials indicating prestige items in some cases (Renfrew 1983).

EPILOGUE

Less complex societies did not require large time investment, labour or a wide range of products in their demand and supply dictum. New demands emerged within a different ecology. Such changes evolved in 7th/ 6th Cent. BCE in the Gangetic valley, representing complex (class) societies. It has two inter-related epochs viz. pristine state and urban formation (C. 7th - 4th Cent. BC) and advanced state formation of the Imperial State or the Magadha state (C. 4th - 2nd Cent. BC). It witnessed reorganization and diversification of agrarian and craft economies based on commodity production, distribution and consumption, full-time specialization, new division of labour, money economy, demographic changes, an increasingly efficient technology, and the assertion of coercive power and redefinition of ideological hegemony. The emergence of social philosophies or ideologies (e.g. Buddhism and Jainism including 62 doctrines enumerated in the early Buddhist texts) was a response to the structural alteration of the post-Vedic society. Secular and temporal/ ecclesiastical authorities/ powers were responsible for shifting this process to its logical conclusion and legitimizing its authority and integration, subjugation, subordination, and hegemonization of the individual, labour production, and society in general.

Reading the past in South Central Asia essentially needs to be contextualized not in isolation but as a dialectical process where social formation spread in time and space was subject to uneven development and change.

It is all about reading alternative histories.

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