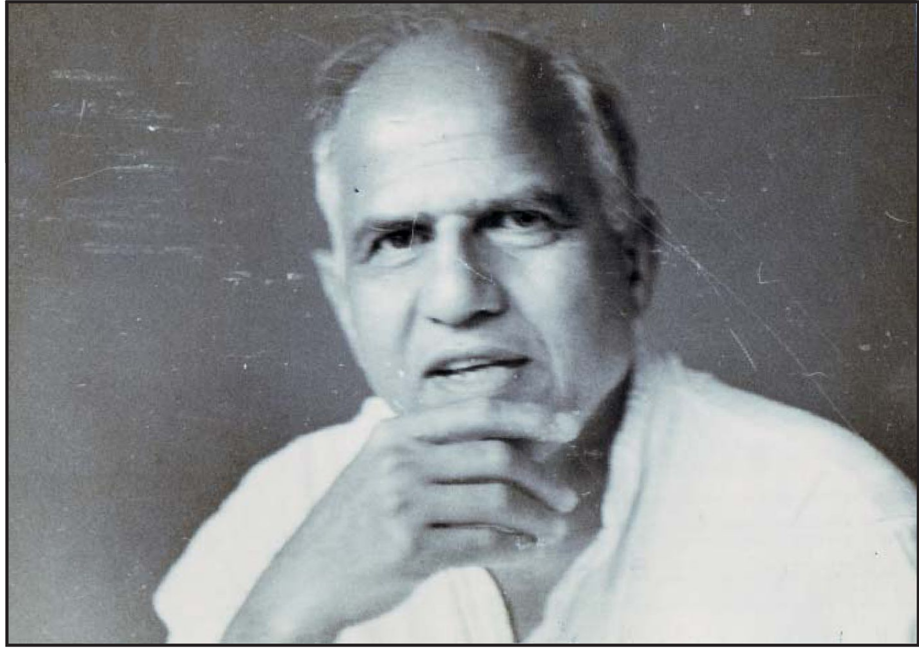
ESSENTIAL WRITINGS OF DHARAMPAL



Essential Writings of Dharampal

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Contents

Preface vii

A Tribute ix

Introduction 1

1. Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity and their Relevance to the Present (1986) 31
2. Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century (1971) 83
3. Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition (1971) 119
4. The Madras Panchayat System, vol.II (1972) 165
5. The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century (1983) 191
6. India's Polity, its Characteristics and Current Problems (1992) 271
7. Bharatiya Chitta, Manas and Kala (1991/1993) 307
8. Reconsidering Gandhiji, 1915–1948 (1984) 355

Dharampal's Life and Work: A Chronology 379

Dharampal's Bibliography 385

Preface

Humanity on this planet earth has witnessed a rapid change during the last two and a half centuries. This change is taking place in the form of modernization through science, technology and industrialization—a transformation which has destroyed the basic quality of human experience and sensitivity. In the process of such change in the name of development, humanity has faced two world wars and many continued conflicts in the form of declared and undeclared wars or acts of terrorism. Millions of people have perished as a direct result of this violence. Today, direct, indirect and structural violence has reached an extreme. Economic disparity, environmental degradation, civilizational conflicts, etc. threaten the survival of humanity and the very existence of the planet earth. In such a 'Dark Age', a miracle happened. That was the appearance of a unique individual, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Despite having received, albeit partially, a modern western education, he was not deluded by western and modern civilization. Thanks to his unique wisdom and intellect, he was able to discriminate between truth and falsehood. Thus, he had the courage to renounce modern civilization in its totality, and he worked unceasingly to awaken the inner wisdom and restore the lost sensitivity integral to the human community. The concept of Swaraj, on the basis of truth and non-violence, was established by means of Satyagraha, civil disobedience and non-cooperation movements. Gandhi's teachings and practical experiments have created a completely new paradigm in human history. The non-violent revolution has enabled many people and nations to become free from external as well as inner domination. But unfortunately, many people could not understand Gandhi's philosophy either due to the inadequacy of their spiritual strength or due to their self-centered motivation. After Gandhi's martyrdom, the Indian leadership conveniently reduced the Mahatma to an object to be remembered occasionally by erecting his statues and garlanding them. Faced with this predicament, a great sage, Shri Dharampal, opened countless peoples' eyes by giving them the most appropriate method and information to understand Gandhi. Dharampal's tireless efforts in finding and documenting the irrefutable evidence for substantiating Gandhi's statements and discourses are remarkable. Persons like me, without the help of Dharampal's guidance, would not have been able to understand the deepest and subtlest philosophy of the Mahatma. Therefore,

I consider the corpus of Dharampal's written work to be of equal importance to that of Gandhi's own writings.

I am overjoyed to hear that the Publications Division of the Government of India is publishing Dharampal's Essential Writings with the cooperation of his daughter Shrimati Gita Dharampal and his other close associates. I feel honoured to pen these few words in remembrance of late Dharampal, who was for a long time my revered friend, philosopher and guide. I wish and pray that the entire work of Dharampal could be published for the benefit of humankind.

Samdhong Rinpoche
First elected Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in exile,
Founder and First Director of the Tibetan Institute of Higher Studies in Sarnath.

A Tribute

Undoing Intellectual Schizophrenia

India is a civilization which is most misunderstood by its own people. Colonial scholarship for more than one hundred and fifty years (under the auspices of the historian James Mill) created an imaginary India which, though not really existing anywhere, was, nevertheless, forced to exist in the minds of the urban English educated Indians through the education system which was put in place by the colonial rulers. These so-called educated Indians have lived in one India, and yet carried an altogether different India in their minds. But this was not due to their own choice. It was a kind of precondition of their life. To paraphrase T.S. Eliot, between the reality of India and its idea fell the big shadow of modern Indian education. It did not allow anglicized Indians to come to terms with the reality of India. Mahatma Gandhi was perhaps one of those very few thinkers who tried to undo this strange intellectual schizophrenia suffered by the Indian educated class, but could succeed only partially. One would have expected certain corrective measures to be taken by the ruling elite after India had attained freedom from colonial rule under the unique leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in 1947. But their self-interest and forgetfulness were so strong that we were forced to continue to live in the same schizophrenic situation that was prevailing before the independence of the country. The same was the case with me. I, too, was educated in a more or less colonial way and was living with an artificially constructed India in my mind. I used to feel a little uncomfortable living in one India and carrying another in my head. Then appeared—like some kind of miracle—the texts of Dharampal into my life. The inside India started changing. I started understanding lots of things about the outer India which I used to find either idiosyncratic or unexplainable. Being a remarkable historian, Dharampal presented us with certain salient features of India through the medium, in certain cases, of colonial documents, which made us realize the falsity of the image of India with which we were living. His way of writing is such that he could successfully inculcate in us the same curiosity about our civilization which had inspired him throughout his entire creative and intellectual life. Instead of going into intricacies about his enormous work, in these few lines of deep appreciation, I will only express my humble gratitude to him for his work which rescued Indian writers and intellectuals like me from the debilitating schizophrenia about our civilization under whose influence we

were all suffering. Let me add that his works are like signposts which may direct us towards understanding and realizing the Indian civilization which may actually have throbbed for centuries in this part of the Earth. But these works are signposts and need to be explored further as Dharampal himself wanted to all his life, particularly in his last decade. Yet another thing to be said is that Dharampal never saw Indian civilization in isolation. He, as a true thinker, saw it in its relationship with all other civilizations, particularly in relation with western civilization. Thereby he also succeeded in presenting to the intellectual world a slightly different image of the west. His works are a great reminder to all of us that in the aftermath of colonialism a lot of intellectual work has to be done in disciplines such as History, Sociology, Philosophy, etc. to get rid of the effects of colonization in order to create new ways of surviving in the contemporary world.

Udayan Vajpeyi
Hindi poet and essayist, teaches Physiology in Bhopal

Introduction

In the Footsteps of *Hind Swaraj*[1]
The Oeuvre of the Historian and Political Thinker Dharampal

I

Engaging with the oeuvre of one's father in the public sphere, albeit a difficult task, is essential given the crucial significance of Shri Dharampal's research. As a provocative Gandhian thinker with a creative and imaginative intellect, Shri Dharampal (19th February 1922–24th October 2006) engaged in extensive archival research in British and Indian archives which revolutionised our understanding of the cultural, scientific and technological achievements of India at the eve of the British conquest. However, the enormous portent of his discoveries still needs to make more of an impact on conventional perceptions of pre-colonial India. These commonly held assumptions of underdevelopment and degeneration before the advent of the British Raj—refuted by his painstaking historical investigations—had been induced (as he stated time and again) by colonial indoctrination and were maintained in place by a persistent sense of subservience to the modern west experienced, unfortunately, by too many so-called 'educated' Indians. According to my father, until his very last days in Sevagram Ashram, an 'intellectual-psychological unburdening' was a matter of urgency, so that 'India could come into its own', as he phrased it, and in doing so, bring to fruition Gandhiji's vision of *Hind Swaraj*. This entailed that Indian societal organisation, its polity as well as its cultural and economic institutions would become regenerated, locally and nationally, from within—and after intense self-reflection, determined by the needs of the people concerned.

Besides reappraising a selection of his publications, such as *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century* (1971), *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition* (1971) and *The Beautiful Tree* (1983), this introductory essay, in tracing the genesis of Shri Dharampal's historical research, simultaneously discusses the intellectual as well as the political implications of his oeuvre: As an

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1 Gandhiji's political manifesto, first published in 1909, proclaimed that real *swaraj* (signifying more than political independence) could only be achieved by bringing about a regeneration of Indian society through its own indigenous resources and in tune with its people's cultural ethos. Constituting simultaneously a radical contestation of modern civilisation, this revolutionary pamphlet served as a source of inspiration for Shri Dharampal's life journey.

endeavour to challenge or delegitimise the historical master narrative relating to India's pre- and early colonial past, his research aimed to initiate further studies into remapping history with a view to accordingly reshape contemporary Indian society and polity.

II

Originating from Kandhala, a small town in the Muzaffarnagar district of western Uttar Pradesh, but having been educated in Lahore,[2] Dharampal belonged to a generation of young Indians who were deeply inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's propagation of *swaraj*. Responding to Gandhiji's call for individual *satyagraha* in 1940, he joined the freedom movement, abandoning his B.Sc. studies in Physics,[3] and became actively involved in the Quit India movement, initiated in August 1942.[4] After a short term of imprisonment,[5] his nationalist fervour was channelled in the direction of Gandhiji's constructive programme which involved strengthening the decentralised social, political and economic village organisation. Intent on regenerating India's rural population, Dharampal became associated in 1944 with Mirabehn (the British-born disciple of Gandhiji) in a village development project near Haridwar.[6] His participation in this experiment in community revitalisation was interrupted by portentous political developments: During the Partition upheaval, in 1947-48, he was put in charge of the Congress Socialist Party centre for the rehabilitation of refugees coming

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2 In Lahore he attended the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School (matriculating in 1938), and considered himself a child of the Gandhian era, as rendered explicit in his own words: "My first glimpse of Mahatma Gandhi was in December 1929 at the Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress. I had gone there with my father who—like thousands of other young people at the call of Mahatma Gandhi—had abandoned his university education. Those were days of great excitement for me and many of my age (I was barely eight!)." Dharampal: *Understanding Gandhi*, Other India Press, Mapusa, 2003, p.1.

3 Begun at Fergusson College, Lahore, Dharampal then shifted to Meerut College to facilitate entrance to the Engineering College at Roorkee. Shortly after, in October 1940, he abandoned his studies altogether.

4 Having heard as a fervent spectator Gandhiji's speech, given at the Congress session in Bombay (Gowalia tank maidan), he joined the Quit India movement as an underground member of the AICC run by Sucheta Kripalani; carrying messages and literature on behalf of the AICC between Meerut, Varanasi, Patna, Bombay and Delhi, he also came in contact with Girdhari Kripalani (a nephew of Acharya Kripalani) and Swami Anand, among others.

5 April–June 1943, in a Delhi police station, where he met Sadiq Ali (1910–1977), the then office secretary of the AICC.

6 Near the Roorkee-Haridwar highway, Mirabehn had been given (on government lease) a piece of land where she established the Kisan Ashram, assisted by Dharampal from October 1944 until August 1947.

from Pakistan. Working in the make-shift camps on the outskirts of Delhi,[7] he came in close contact with Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, as well as with numerous younger friends, such as L.C. Jain, in Delhi; subsequently in 1948, he functioned as a founding member of the Indian Cooperative Union (ICU).

Figuring prominently in these various activities was his endeavour to sustain Indian community structures, both rural and urban, through social, political or economic means; for he was convinced about the central role of the community in the ongoing nation-building enterprise. In search of communitarian initiatives —also in the global arena—which could possibly serve as a model for Indian rural reconstruction, he decided at the end of 1948 to go and study the much acclaimed kibbutzim experimental system in Israel. However, due to the partial closure of the Suez Canal, he had to reschedule his sea voyage via England. There, as chance would have it, in an educational and agricultural reconstruction programme in post-war rural Devonshire, Dharampal met and decided to marry Phyllis (my mother), a cultured and altruistically oriented English lady who shared his commitment to rural reconstruction. Paradoxical as this marital union may have appeared in the historical context of Indian Independence from the British Raj, nonetheless, the pioneering spirit of this intercultural couple does underscore in exemplary fashion the immense attraction exercised by their mutually shared humanistic-communitarian visions: So intense was their idealism that it not only transcended nation-state boundaries but also challenged conventional norms.

Yet, alongside and perhaps superseding these universalistic aspirations,[8] a strong sense of commitment to the cause of Indian rural regeneration instigated Dharampal to travel back to India with his acquiescing young bride in the autumn of 1949. Choosing the overland route with the intention of visiting Israel, he was eventually able to familiarise himself with the organisation of the oldest kibbutz, Degania Alef,[9] set up by Russian Jews. However, after a short stay, he realised that their highly regulated communitarian life-style would not function as an appropriate blue-print suitable to Indian conditions which were defined by divergent social and cultural constellations. The task of understanding Indian historical configurations was to constitute a primary incentive and focus of his subsequent research which took concrete shape a decade and half later.

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7 In Kurukshetra, where he organised a co-operative rehabilitation camp for about 400 families who had been displaced from Jhang.

8 Interestingly, during his stay in Britain, he enrolled as an occasional student at the London School of Economics to attend courses on diplomacy and world affairs.

9 Founded in 1910 on the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

However, in 1950, having gained valuable insights from observing and comparing temporally parallel but culturally and politically distinct endeavours in societal reconstruction in Britain, Israel and independent India, Dharampal felt the urgent need to resume his work with Mirabehn. Above all, he was convinced that 'ordinary' Indians were as capable and innovative as their European or Middle-Eastern counterparts; yet due to colonial subjugation and exploitation, having lost all personal initiative, they had been reduced to their present state of apathy and destitution. Hence, summoning the support of a group of dedicated social workers, Dharampal, propelled by idealistic zeal, set about constructing the community village of Bapugram near Rishikesh,[10] constituted of about fifty resourceless agricultural families. However, after many years of strenuous and often frustrating work (due partially to the lack of creative dynamism emanating from the artificially created community whose structures were not organic), Dharampal became increasingly disillusioned by the futility of this idealistic experiment in village development. And all the more so since his endeavours in rural regeneration seemed to have no impact on the post-Independence mainstream that was mesmerised by the Nehruvian industrialisation agenda.

Notwithstanding his decision to leave Bapugram early in 1954, Dharampal continued to be preoccupied with India's rural regeneration. After a three year interlude in London where he had joined his wife and two small children,[11] he returned to India in late 1957[12] to work towards the realisation of this essential task. From 1958 until 1964, based in Delhi with his family, he pursued endeavours in this field more intensely: His overriding aim was to impact upon policy-making in order to attenuate the dichotomy between 'Bharat' and 'India'. This he hoped to achieve in his capacity as General Secretary of the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD).[13] Founded in 1958 by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, AVARD, as the first Non-Government Organisation (NGO) in independent India, played a path-breaking role, presided over by Jayaprakash Narayan (known as JP), with whom Dharampal developed a very close

10 As part of the Pashulok Trust which consisted of 700 acres of land leased to Mirabehn by the government.

11 In London, working with Peace News (a journal published by the War Resisters International, focusing on peace issues and nonviolent social change), he reflected on India's role in global developments (formulated in letter-form to Shri Ram Swarup, and as a separate note in January 1957).

12 By ship, visiting several Buddhist and Hindu holy places in Sri Lanka and South India; in Dhanushkodi and Rameswaram, in particular, he was impressed by the traditional hospitality of the temple pandas.

13 Its stated objective was the "promotion and strengthening of voluntary effort by helping in the exchange of experiences and ideas and by conducting research and evaluation studies."

relationship of mutual respect and appreciation. His appointment at AVARD provided him the opportunity to get first-hand insights into pan-Indian rural conditions as well as into the (mal-) functioning of institutional frameworks. Dharampal's critical reflections about misconceived governmental planning and development projects were articulated with stringent precision in leading articles to the *AVARD Newsletter* (later renamed '*Voluntary Action*') where, to cite one example, when writing in the context of the Lok Sabha debates on the draft of the Third Plan, he castigated the status-quo view as follows:

> "[…] the people for whom we plan and weave our dreams are seldom anywhere in the picture. More often they are just labourers, wage-earners, with little sense of participation or adventure in the India we plan to reconstruct. The reasons for such apathy are perhaps very deep, somewhere very near the soul of India. Yet that soul has to awaken, before we proceed from dams and steel plants to the flowering of the human being, of the Indian we have deemed to be ignorant, of the people of India whom we describe as 'teeming millions' equating them with ant-heaps. Such awakening, however, is not impossible—Gandhiji did it against heavier odds. All of us in a way are heir to Gandhiji, what we lack is proportion and humility."[14]

In an attempt to comprehend the immediate causes for the disoriented functioning of Indian state and society, he began examining the proceedings of the Indian Constituent Assembly (1946–1949). This investigation was published as a cogent monograph in 1962. That it was entitled *Panchayat Raj as the Basis of Indian Polity*[15] rendered explicit his prime concern: In reproducing extracts of the Constituent Assembly debates, the failure of the Constitution to incorporate the indigenous administrative and political structures is highlighted. And the poignancy of the matter is underscored by prefacing his introduction with the following quote by Gandhiji:

> "I must confess that I have not been able to follow the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly […] [The correspondent] says that there is no mention or direction about village panchayats and decentralization in

14 "A Surfeit of Planning: Where are the People?" *AVARD Newsletter*, New Delhi, July-August 1960, republished in: Dharampal, *Rediscovering India. Collection of Essays and Speeches (1956–1998)*, SIDH: Mussoorie, 2003, pp.129–131, quoted phrase on p.130. Intent on influencing political opinion, Dharampal sent this article to all members of the Lok Sabha. It also reached E.F. Schumacher who used parts of it in a lecture delivered in 1962 at the Gokhale Institute of Economics and Politics, Pune.

15 *An Exploration into the Proceedings of the Constituent Assembly*, AVARD: New Delhi, 1962.

> the foreshadowed Constitution. It is certainly an omission calling for immediate attention if our independence is to reflect the peoples' voice. The greater the power of the panchayats, the better for the people."[16]

Yet Dharampal's political intervention in public affairs was soon to take on a more assertive form: In November 1962, incensed by the debacle of the Indo-Chinese war, he wrote an open letter[17] to the members of the Lok Sabha calling for Jawaharlal Nehru's resignation on moral grounds. For this castigatory act, Dharampal (along with two friends, Narendra Datta and Roop Narayan, who were co-signatories of the letter) was arrested and imprisoned in Tihar jail, but released after some months due to the intervention of Lal Bahadur Shastri, the then Home-Minister, and Jayaprakash Narayan. Besides underscoring Dharampal's impetuously forthright nature, his provocatively critical stance succeeded in sparking off a public debate, partially carried out in the press.[18] The issues raised were of fundamental importance in the post-Independence political arena—such as the need for patriotism (as distinct from nationalism), the deconstruction of the personality cult around political figures, in particular Nehru, and the importance of freedom of expression in a democracy.

Dharampal's sincere patriotic commitment coupled with an unerring talent for striking a sensitive chord in public discourse was exhibited time and again. The cogency of his arguments as well as his search towards fathoming 'the soul of India' (as he phrased it), however, were to receive more historical depth as a result of archival research carried out in the Tamil Nadu State Archives: It was as Director of Study and Research of the All India Panchayat Parishad (1963–1965) that he produced a detailed examination of the Madras panchayat system.[19] This pioneering study—of which short sections are being reproduced in this volume[20]—underscores how the indigenous panchayat-based polity was

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16 *Harijan*, December 21, 1947, quoted ibid, p.15. The fact that this omission was not remedied, according to Dharampal, contributed towards incapacitating rural Indians from participating in the mainstream of post-independence India.

17 This is accessible in digitised form in the archival collection of the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library [NMML], New Delhi.

18 In particular, in the *Blitz Weekly*, November/December 1962. There followed an extended debate in the *National Herald*, Editorial, 22.12.1962; rejoinder by Acharya Kripalani, 27.12.1962; further statements by L.M. Tripathi, 28.12.62; Banarsi Das, 02.01.63; B.P. Sharma, 07.01.63; P.D. Tandon, 08.01.63; this critical intervention was even mentioned on the front page of the *New York Times* (late December 1962).

19 Later published as Dharampal, *The Madras Panchayat System: A General Assessment,* Impex India: Delhi, 1972, vol.II.

20 See below Chapter 4, *The Madras Panchayat System*.

destroyed: According to his findings, the colonial land revenue system, introduced at the beginning of the 19th century, sapped the resource base of the local polity. This economic extraction was further compounded with systematic political and bureaucratic intervention. Then, towards the end of the 19th century, a colonially defined bureaucratic apparatus was set up which remained out of synch with the real needs of local communities.[21] That this dysfunctional system was maintained even after Independence, more or less unchanged—despite its debilitating influence—constituted, according to Dharampal, one of the main causes for the highly detrimental disjuncture between the need for self-empowerment at the grass-roots level (as propagated by Gandhiji) and Nehruvian centralised statist planning.

III

Having appraised remnants of pre-colonial structures,[22] Dharampal realised that these findings were indicative of well-functioning societal mechanisms for maintaining a beneficial social and economic equilibrium among diverse local communities. Consequently, he became increasingly convinced about the urgent need for an objective understanding regarding the detailed functioning of Indian society before the onslaught of colonial rule. Not only was he deeply sceptical about conventionally held assumptions concerning pervasive destitution at the eve of the British conquest. Perhaps even more crucially, he was seriously concerned about the concrete repercussions these assumed 'degenerate' conditions in the recent past had in the policy-making of modern India. About this detrimental state of affairs he formulated the following lucid statement:

> "This picture usually implied that our village folk and their ancestors had wallowed in misery for a thousand or more years; that they had been terribly oppressed and tyrannised by rulers as well as their social and religious customs since time immemorial; and that all this had mostly left

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21 This was elaborated in a preliminary note entitled "In-built contradiction between the British structured Indian state and indigenous, or even statutory, local communities or Panchayats", July 1-5, 1965, 55 pp; later incorporated in *The Madras Panchayat System*, ibid.

22 Such as the *bees-biswas panchayat* (= village council of 20 parts) which was still (in the early 1960s) partially operative in some villages of Rajasthan, as well as the organisation of Tamil rural communities as *samudayam* villages in which individual shares in the cultivable land were redistributed periodically (a practice known as *kareiyeedu)* in order to maintain a degree of equity of livelihood among all members of the village community; according to local reports, *samudayam* villages had still been in existence in the 1930s; and British revenue surveys from the late 18th century mentioned that 30% of all villages in the Thanjavur district were of the *samudayam* type.

> them dumb or misguided, or victims of superstition and prejudice. From this we assumed that what we had to deal with was like a blank slate on which we, the architects of the new India, could write, or imprint, what we wished. We seldom thought that these people had any memories, thoughts, preferences, or priorities of their own; and even when we conceded that they might have had some of these, we dismissed these as irrelevant. And when we failed in writing on what we assumed to be a blank slate, or in giving such writing any permanence, we felt unhappy and more often angry with these countrymen of ours for whom we felt we had sacrificed not only our comforts, but our very lives.[…]".[23]

Recalcitrantly not accepting the modernist developmental notion of a "blank slate", he adamantly considered "a more exact knowledge of the past" to be "a necessary foundation for future development".[24]

Unfortunately, historical sources in Indian languages relating to the pre- or early colonial period were relatively inaccessible in the early 1960s. Yet, fortuitously, he had become briefly familiarised in the Tamil Nadu State Archives with some insightful British colonial records. Hence, from the mid 1960s, living in London for family reasons, Dharampal decided to embark single-handedly on an exploration of British-Indian archival material. His archival research focused on documents emanating from the first commissioned surveys of the East India Company, lodged in various depositories spread over the British Isles. The principal ones he consulted were the India Office Library and Records and the British Library in London, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh, as well as important collections in the libraries of the universities of Leeds, Nottingham, Sheffield and Manchester. This extensive archival record, indeed, constitutes one of the (only) positive inheritances of colonial rule.[25]

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23 Extract from Dharampal: "Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity and their Relevance to the Present", a series of three lectures delivered on 4th-6th January 1986, Pune,; these lectures have been reproduced in this volume (Chapter 1) as an extended essay, first published in *New Quest*, 1987, Nos.56, 57 & 58. Also translated into Hindi, Marathi & Tamil (for details, see below), and republished in: *Essays on Tradition, Recovery and Freedom*, vol.V of Dharampal, *Collected Writings*, 5 vols, Other India Press & SIDH: Mapusa, Goa, 2000, repr. 2003, 2007, pp.1-49.

24 Quoted extracts from an unpublished note "The Problem of Apathy: En Enquiry into the Beginning of British Rule", written in March 1965, 12 pp.

25 Admittedly, though a lot of this material (as well as other even more substantial documentation) is also lodged in various Indian national and state archives, it is unfortunately less accessible there.

When reviewing Dharampal's pioneering historical research, we need to evaluate this against the background of historical studies in the period of the 1960s itself, in India and the west. At this epoch, the analytical studies and innovative theories to be developed by Hayden White, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, Ranajit Guha or others of the Subaltern Studies School[26] (just to name a few great minds that revolutionised historical scholarship) were still in the making and yet to influence the intellectual sphere. What's more, not being a historian by training, nor for that matter a scholar belonging to academia, Dharampal, as he himself formulated it, "launched on a programme of somewhat laymanish archival research"[27] to discover or rather re-map the lie of the land in pre- and early colonial India. His search was inspired by Gandhiji's conviction about the basic viability of Indian society and culture. Reinforcing this firm belief was his intuitive appreciation for the seminal role and function of history. He fully realised the crucial impact and significance history had for understanding a society's past, and in particular the pre-colonial past of a colonised society such as India's. Perhaps he was partially influenced by the Indian concept of *itihasa* with regard to its didactic function. In any case, viewing history as a record or narrative description of past events,[28] Dharampal considered it his role as a historian-in-the-making to reveal how Indian society had functioned at the eve of the British conquest and 'to show what actually happened'.

Impelled by the impression gained from his initial forays in the Tamil Nadu State Archives, he was intent to discover the following: namely, to what extent the empirical reality of early modern India—as depicted in the historical documentation—was at odds with the conventional but hegemonic image of a dysfunctional society propagated by late 19th century colonial historiography. And it was this master narrative which still exercised enormous influence that had to be contested, provided historical documentation revealed a different picture. The irony of the matter is that Dharampal attempted to achieve this contestatory goal by painstakingly deconstructing the official documents dating from the

26 A few crucial titles may suffice: Michel Foucault's *L'archéologie du savoir* [The Archaeology of Knowledge] (1969), Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1975), Michel de Certeau's *L'écriture de l'histoire* [The Writing of History] (1975), Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983), *Subaltern Studies* (1982 ff).

27 Quoted from a slim brochure by Dharampal entitled: *India before British Rule and the Basis for India's Resurgence*, Gandhi Seva Sangh: Wardha, 1998, p.9.

28 Indeed he understood *itihasa* not as mere historical legend, but more so as the narrative of what happened, which is strikingly similar to the Rankean explanation of history 'Geschichte' as a narration of what happened, 'wie es eigentlich gewesen ist'. Thereby he was perhaps attempting to dissolve the asymmetrical distinction between *itihasa* and the modern enterprise of History.

17th century onwards, generated by the British themselves in the process of their reconnaissance and subsequent conquest of the subcontinent.

Moreover, he soon realised that during the extended stages of colonisation (from 1600 until 1947) a heterogeneity of reports had been generated. This existing diversity made him intent on tracing the shifts in the British perspective on India that had taken place during a period of three and a half centuries. It was not long before he discovered that the records for the early years of British administration in India were the most revealing. Henceforth, he began to "treat the mid-18th century [...] as a sort of benchmark point for the understanding of Indian society and polity".[29] The wealth of first-hand accounts by zealous British officials—striving to gain a foot-hold in the recently acquired territory (commencing in Bengal, and quickly proceeding through the south to the west and the rest of the subcontinent)—contained not only detailed descriptions regarding the functioning arrangements of regional polities, but also empirical data on the political, economic and ideological strategies used to counter and undermine indigenous institutions. By critically 'revisioning' this historical documentation, and allowing the sources themselves to speak, Dharampal started engaging in an archaeology of knowledge (*à la* Foucault). His archival excavations uncovered a wealth of astounding material that had later been discarded, or disregarded, in the construction of the subsequent hegemonic colonial historiography whose influence still held sway in mainstream academia, to a greater or lesser extent.

The revolutionary portent of the discoveries made by Dharampal's expedition into the not-so-distant past—of a functioning and relatively prosperous society—became forcefully apparent to him. Significantly, they belied the hitherto propagated images of pre-British India as a poor, disorganised country, lacking in political, economic and social vitality. Simultaneously, he was astutely aware of the political impact these historical revelations could have for the present. This explains his urgent need to communicate to his contemporaries back home the findings made during this archival voyage back in time: "What I learnt from day to day", he writes in one of his essays, "I tried to share with some friends in India including Sri Annasaheb Sahasrabuddhe, Sri R.K. Patil, Sri Ram Swarup and Sri Jayaprakash Narayan."[30] The thrill of excitement he experienced through

29 "Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity", op. cit., p.12; cf. the essay in this volume, Chapter 1. This crucially valid evaluation has become current in academic history, but only during the last decade.

30 *India before British Rule,* op. cit., p.9. The note he circulated was entitled "Nature of Indian society (ca.1800) and the foundations of the present structure: A note and some illustrative material", April 1967, i-ix & 1-74 pp.

his archival findings can still be sensed in his writings written 30 years later. The history of 18th century India was being remapped: A new territory was unfolding before his eyes. Some British reports he also sent to Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia who quoted from them in a Lok Sabha debate in the spring of 1967. The discussion concerned in particular the revamping of the Delhi police; thanks to the historical record supplied by Dharampal, the stark equation to Lord Ellenborough's reorganisation of the Indian army after 1857 could be pointed out: Dramatically, Dr. Lohia highlighted the colonial heritage of independent India's law and order measures to the assembled parliamentarians.

Appreciative of the political insights that could be drawn from his findings, including their applicability as caustic criticism of contemporary undemocratic developments, Dharampal pursued his archival mission with renewed zeal. With meticulous precision and scholarly integrity he ploughed through thousands upon thousands of pages of British documents, getting Xerox copies, and otherwise copying the historical sources word for word in long hand, and then back home typing them out on a small Olivetti type-writer (in those antediluvian days without digital cameras, laptops and scanning). This constituted the beginning of his own archival collection that was to amount to ca. 40,000 sheets of precious documents, a large amount of which is still waiting to be closely analysed.[31] So consumed was Dharampal by the desire to know every inch of this territory of the past, that day after day, despite many adversities (including lack of funds), he would commune 10 to 12 hours at a stretch with his archival treasures. The routine of his life was determined by the opening hours of the libraries and archives. His regular absence from the family home led my younger sister to state one day in kindergarten that her father was 100 years old, for he was a resident of the British Museum!

IV

What did this life of research actually produce? Broadly speaking, the archival collection assembled over a decade and a half was tripartite in

31 Stored away in steel cupboards of the Gandhi Seva Sangh library in Sevagram (Wardha, Maharashtra), I would like this valuable archival collection (along with a sizeable number of books, journals and letters) transformed into a research library, in the very near future. In the meantime, large sections have been digitised (a digital copy being held by the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library [NMML], New Delhi, as well as by the Gandhi Research Foundation, Jalgaon) so that this historical material, once catalogued and indexed, can be more readily accessible to interested researchers. Moreover, an original version of the archival material is lodged in the office of the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), Chennai, of which digitised copies are accessible through their website: http://cpsindia.org/index.php/dh-archive.

perspective: Firstly, it contained documents (in particular, commissioned surveys) dating mainly from the late 17th century up to the middle of the 19th century relating to descriptions of different regions of India, its physical landscape, the manners of its people, their public life, festivals, cultural and educational institutions, the nature and extent of agricultural and industrial production, of sciences and technologies. In short, this diverse documentary material mapped out the cultural, social and political history of the subcontinent in the pre- and early colonial period.

Secondly, reams of official correspondence between authorities in Britain and India (with detailed instructions, sometimes controversial enough to be copiously debated) delineated the instrumentalities and modalities for the preparation and consolidation of the British conquest of India, in which sufficient evidence is to be found of the long arm of the British state from the 17th century onwards—a fact which was emphasised by Dharampal over and over again. For, from his reading of the archival records, the East India Company [EIC], empowered from the very outset in 1600 by royal charter, was acting in accordance with instructions from the British State. From the middle of 18th century the EIC was explicitly carrying out orders of the British government, exemplified concretely by parliamentary acts from 1784 onwards, after the establishment of the statist Board of Control.[32] The official records, labelled the Board's collection (of correspondence between the Directors of the East India Company and the Commissioners of the Board of Control, including reports, instructions, etc.), contained details about the process of subordination and control of its rulers, of the recruitment for the army, and of the establishment of a

32 In 1784 the British Parliament passed an act, which constituted a Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India (commonly referred to as the Board of Control) with a British cabinet minister as its president. Initially the British Prime Minister was also a member of this Board. For most of its 74 years of existence (1784-1858), the Board had six members, all of them British privy councillors, out of whom three were cabinet ministers. It was this Board, which governed India from 1784 to 1858 when a British Secretary of State for India replaced it and India began to be formally considered by Britain as a part of the British Empire. During the 74 years (1784-1858), while the East India Company (EIC) prepared the initial drafts of all the instructions to be sent to India—in any of the governmental departments either at the Presidency levels or at the all-India level—the Board of Control in every single case was responsible for the finalisation and approval of each and every instruction. Yet the instructions, though finalised and approved by the Board, were, however, formally conveyed to the British Presidency governments in India under the signatures of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman and some twenty members of the Court of Directors of the EIC. In a way the job of this Court was similar to the job of an under secretary to the Government of India today, who ordinarily conveys all governmental orders and instructions under his own signature, in the name of the President of India.

government apparatus whose structure and function continued more or less unchanged after Independence.

Thirdly, the documentation comprises statistical data with regard to economic policies and measures, including protracted deliberations about the amount of land revenue, the manner in which it was levied, with information also about numerous other taxes and levies, such as those on beggars, which were introduced more as disciplining measures for controlling and harassing the population.[33] Related to this domain are extensive documents underscoring the crucial need for – and the heavy reliance on – forced labour, in particular for the construction of railways and roads, as well as the supply of bullock-carts and bullocks for the transportation of the British army and administrative personnel.

Fourthly, this material is supplemented with evidence of continued Indian resistance which took various forms throughout the period of colonial rule. Fifthly, there is a select collection of documents concerned with indological research, which highlights the rationale behind such scholarship, initiated by Warren Hastings, the first Governor General in 1784.[34] Lastly, a sizeable set of documents, beginning in the first decade of the 19th century, provides details of British government policy concerning the Christianisation of India which was initiated in 1813 after lengthy parliamentary debates.[35]

This, in a nut-shell, constituted the substantial contents of Dharampal's efforts at remapping Indian history from the 17th into the 20th century, and thereby contesting the hitherto historical master narrative. Only some of the material has become known to the public through three pioneering books which have now become classics within the framework of the recent ongoing reappraisal of the early modern period. The topics of these publications were determined both by the wealth of archival material on the subject, as well as by urgent concerns of the post-Independence period: His first two books, both published

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33 Dharampal has collected substantial material on taxes levied on trades and professions known as *mohturpha and veesabuddy* in South India; it constituted a complicated graded tax to be paid by all non-agricultural people; for more details, cf. his extended article: "Erosion of Norms and Dignity, and the Origins of Callousness, Pauperisation and Bondage in Modern India", first written in 1981, and published in: *Rediscovering India*, op.cit., pp.27-92.

34 Cf. the founding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (January 1784), with William Jones as the primary British orientalist.

35 The chief proponent for the 'Propagation of Christianity' was William Wilberforce whose two crucial speeches (on 22.06 and 01.07.1813) have been republished and commented in Dharampal: *Despoliation and Defaming of India: The Early Nineteenth Century British Crusade*, Bharat Peetham, Wardha/Other India Press, Goa, 1999, pp.49-61, 63-146.

in 1971, on *Indian Science and Technology in the 18th century*[36] and *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition*[37] created quite a stir.[38] The first title comprises a discerning selection of British primary documents dating from the 18th and early 19th century relating to applied sciences and technologies as observed in various regions of the subcontinent. In his informative and well argued introduction (reproduced in this volume[39]), whilst contextualising the historical sources, Dharampal also explains his choice of the time-frame—1720 until 1820—as follows:

> "Practically all European scientific and technological accounts relating to the sciences and technologies of non-European countries (including the ones reproduced here) are an outcome of the seventeenth and eighteenth century European quest for usual knowledge in these fields. [...] It is in the context of this widening horizon, coupled with growing sophistication and the urgent need (partly resulting from constant warfare in which Europeans were engaged during the greater part of the eighteenth century) for materials and processes that accounts like most of the ones presented here were written and submitted by individual Europeans to their respective patrons. It is thus in the European writings of the period (i.e. from 1720 to 1820) that one discovers the European observed details about non-European science and technology as well as about the societies, institutions, customs and laws of various parts of the non-European world. Before this period the European ability to comprehend this world was limited; and after about 1820 the knowledge and institutions of the non-European world began to have much less usefulness to the problems of Europe. Further, by the 1820s, most parts of the non-European world are no longer themselves. Their institutions, sciences and technologies are not what they were 50 or 100 years earlier, and have met the same fate as their political systems and sovereignty. By the 1820s or so, most of the non-European world had become, at least in European theory and most history texts, if not altogether in actuality, 'backward and barbarian'."[40]

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36 With the subtitle *Some contemporary European accounts*, Impex India: Delhi, 1971

37 Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan: Varanasi, 1971

38 In particular, *Indian Science and Technology* was widely reviewed, and is considered as a seminal study for gaining insights into Indian scientific and technological achievements in the early modern period.

39 See Chapter 2.

40 *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century*, op.cit., extracts from pp. XXVII-XXX.

Indeed, by focusing on 18th and early 19th century British reports on Indian scientific and technological achievements, Dharampal initiated a process of delegitimising the master narrative of the rise of the west, in particular concerning the domains of science and technology. This was a radically innovative intellectual perspective in the 1960s which was only to acquire more widespread currency a few decades later. His incisive insights about the (often inadequate) modalities and yet far-reaching repercussions of European intellectual and political interactions with the Indian subcontinent underscore the formers' deleterious impact for the latter. Resulting as these negative repercussions did from a historical process of intercultural 'entanglement',[41] Dharampal, from his critical perspective, underscored the need for undertaking a more historically nuanced analysis in the field of transcultural studies that have gained such academic prominence during the last decade.

Of the seventeen documents presented in this book, six deal with science (focusing on complex astronomical calculations, appreciative evaluations of the observatory in Benares, and on achievements in algebra, such as the binomial theorem). The eleven documents in the longer section devoted to technology describe a wide variety of implements and practices observed in different regions of the subcontinent, among which figure prominently the practice of smallpox inoculation in Bengal as well as the familiarity with plastic surgery in western India; the use of the drill-plough and other sophisticated agricultural implements including irrigation techniques; detailed descriptions of iron and steel-making in various parts of India; the technique of ice-making in Allahabad and Calcutta, that of mortar production in Madras, and of widespread paper-making from *san* plants. Accompanying many of these detailed accounts (originally intended for a British scientific readership and sometimes even presented to parliamentary committees) are intricate diagrams illustrative of the exact construction of the observed apparatus. This fact in itself would seem indicative of the latter's subsequent appropriation and further development in accordance with British industrial requirements at the turn of the 19th century. Although the compactness and simplicity of fabrication—as of the mobile iron and steel furnaces (numbering up to 10,000 with each producing 20 tons annually) or the ingenious drill-ploughs—may have appeared crude to some British observers, Dharampal contests this impression by maintaining that the inherent simplicity

41 In the last decade, post-colonial studies have described the historical process of intercultural interaction in terms of entanglement, and thereby highlighted its dynamic, hybrid qualities with positive overtones; contrastively, Dharampal is fully cognisant of its overriding negative repercussions for colonised societies.

> "[…] was in fact due to social and political maturity as well as arising from an understanding of the principles and processes involved. Instead of being crude, the processes and tools of eighteenth century India appear to have developed from a great deal of sophistication in theory and a heightened sense of the aesthetic."[42]

Needless to say, his ulterior aim in publishing this documentary evidence of the relatively high level of Indian scientific and technological achievements in the 18th century was to initiate a paradigm shift in India's modernising agenda: According to him, the still existing indigenous expertise needed to be taken into serious consideration in order to stimulate innovation and creativity—inspired by the grassroots—in the ongoing developmental enterprise.[43] Although high-profile seminars were held, no concrete action was taken. The project to found an institute (which would have enabled more extensive research to be done and could have led to an Indian pendant of Joseph Needham's multi-volume oeuvre on China) was unfortunately never brought to fruition. Nonetheless, Dharampal's book did have another lease of life a decade later: It inspired young IIT scientists from the PPST group[44] to engage in innovative *swadeshi* research into indigenous scientific and technological practices.

Dharampal's second, slimmer book on *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition* is equally significant, albeit in a different manner, and yet has not received due recognition until today. As elucidated in the introduction, which has been reproduced in this volume,[45] the book underscores the Indian embeddedness of Gandhian *satyagraha*. But in doing so, it constitutes a strong refutation (supported by historical empirical evidence) of conventional views regarding the origins of civil disobedience in India: According to mainstream opinion, Gandhiji had either appropriated this non-violent technique of protest from western

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42 *Indian Science and Technology*, op. cit., chapter 2 of this volume.

43 This crucial aspect is elaborated further in: Dharampal: "Indigenous Indian Technological Talent and the Need for its Mobilisation", lecture delivered at the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum, Calcutta, October 4, 1986; published in *PPST Bulletin* (Chennai), No.9, December 1986, pp.5–20; republished in: *Collected Writings*, op.cit., vol.V, pp.50–108. Other lectures with a similar bearing were "The Question of India's Development" (IIT, Bombay, January 1983), "Some Ideas on the Reindustrialisation of India", published in: *Rediscovering India*, op. cit., pp.172–184 & 185–191, respectively.

44 An acronym for the *Patriot and People-oriented Science and Technology* group of enterprising young scientists, founded in the late 1970s; cf. above reference to the *PPST Bulletin*, to which Dharampal made regular contributions.

45 See Chapter 3.

luminaries such as Thoreau or Tolstoy, or he had invented it himself. Consequently, it was commonly considered that ordinary Indians possessed no fundamental understanding of the philosophical and organisational principles governing *satyagraha*. How misconceived these views were is explicitly shown by this exceptional documentary analysis.

The historical evidence is provided by British administrative reports of a major non-violent protest against the imposition of a house-tax in Varanasi and neighbouring regions. This massive movement of resistance was organised and carried out extensively between 1810 and 1811. In reproducing the detailed reports written by perturbed colonial officers, Dharampal's succeeds above all in underscoring the perspective of the protestors. Thereby, he exemplifies, by means of the empirical data presented, how socio-political and cultural expressions of popular demands not only explicitly aimed to safeguard the interests of the governed, but also were simultaneously attempting to redress the balance of power between the rulers and the ruled. Moreover, as documented in the British reports, the massively organised resistance testified to the fact that traditionally the 'consent of the governed' constituted an integral element validating the political authority's legitimacy. This, in itself, underscored that the moral right to exercise state power was, or ought to be, derived from the people over whom power was exercised. And in the negative scenario, the right to protest or to enact a revolution formed part of this quasi social-contract theory, according to which people were entitled to legitimately instigate resistance if the government misused its authority in acting against their interests. As averred by Dharampal, such assertions of legitimate rights were recognised as such by pre-colonial political authorities themselves, besides being shared and enacted by the community at large; for they were influenced by prevalent and mutually acknowledged religious and ethical-philosophical conceptions of justice and societal well-being. The basically non-violent nature of the documented protests in Varanasi—described as being meticulously organised and exhibiting political skill—testified first and foremost to the peoples' self-assurance in their own legitimate cause and its strength. Equally significantly, the fact that these protests were initially staged without fear of reprisals—Dharampal perspicaciously deduces—epitomises the belief in the hitherto enjoyed relationship of mutuality and trust between the rulers and the ruled.

As becomes apparent from a close reading of the documents, the colonial intervention changed the customary 'rules of the game' of negotiating political asymmetries of power: On the one hand, by illegalising such traditionally exercised

'trials of strength', and, on the other, by redefining relationships between social groups and—more importantly—by foregrounding the starkly rigid asymmetry between colonial authority and the colonised populace.

Dharampal poignantly highlights the discrepant views concerning the appropriate relationship between state and society: In the first instance, as expressed by the protesting inhabitants of Varanasi who considered that the legitimacy of their demands should be acknowledged; secondly and contrastively, by the British administrators who demanded obedience and submission to their authority. For the British were above all intent on establishing 'law and order'. Outlining this antagonistic scenario constitutes the crucial contribution of this volume. As a result, the reader not only gains a better understanding of India's recent past, but is also sensitised to its significant political relevance to the present. Concerned with the need both to acknowledge the legitimate rights of the Indian populace as well as to facilitate ordinary citizens' active participation in national politics, Dharampal formulates the fundamental political message of the book at the end of his introduction as follows:

> "It is suggested that non-cooperation and civil disobedience are integral to the well functioning and even to the security of a free and democratic society. In a way, they are even more crucial than stratified courts of law, the present forms of periodic local, state-level or national elections, or the rather stilted and constrained debates and considerations within such elected bodies. Instead of being hostile and inimical, those who resort to non-cooperation and civil disobedience against callousness, authoritarianism and injustice are the protectors of their state and societies. Without them, a society will end up at best performing some mechanical ritual; or, more often, in tyranny, leading to anarchy and armed insurrection."[46]

Dharampal's third major book *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the 18th century*,[47] was published in 1983, and was perhaps the most acclaimed of all his publications. The tome, comprising ca.450 pages, provided documentary evidence of the widespread prevalence in late 18th and early 19th century India of educational institutions. These schools taught a sophisticated curriculum, with daily school attendance by about 30% of children aged between 6 to 15 years. Astoundingly the majority of students belonged to

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46 *Civil Disobedience in Indian Tradition*, op. cit., p.LXI; reproduced in this volume.

47 Biblia Impex Private Limited: New Delhi, 1983; reprinted by Keerthi Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.: Coimbatore, 1995. Its extensive introduction is reproduced in this volume, cf. Chapter 5.

communities who were classed as *shudra* or even lower. In some areas, for instance in Kerala, even Muslim girls were quite well represented. This data was a real eye-opener for the reappraisal of the historical tradition of education in India. What's more, the findings conclusively refute the hitherto widely accepted assumption that, before the British Raj, education in India was the sole prerogative of the twice-born castes, if not exclusively of the Brahmins. Ironically, this undemocratic and unequal social prioritisation became the state of affairs only after the establishment of English medium schools towards the end of the 19th century—a skewed situation which persists in large measure in contemporary India.

Dharampal's research into the field of indigenous education was instigated by the following statement made by Mahatma Gandhi during a speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in 1931:

> "I say without fear of my figures being challenged successfully, that today India is more illiterate than it was fifty or a hundred years ago, and so is Burma, because the British administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that, and the beautiful tree perished."[48]

Subsequently, Sir Philip Hartog, former vice-chancellor of Dacca University and chairman of the auxiliary committee of the Indian Statutory Commission, contested this claim and requested written evidence which Gandhiji (being preoccupied with the Independence struggle in the 1930s and 1940s) was unable to provide to the former's satisfaction. Dharampal's book, deriving its title "the Beautiful Tree" from Gandhiji's metaphor and in providing statistical proof to substantiate Gandhiji's statement, can also be seen as a delayed response to Sir Hartog's query.

The substantial documentary evidence contained in the book originates from various administrative sources, namely official surveys of indigenous education in the Presidencies of Madras (1822–26, commissioned by Governor Sir Thomas Munro), Bengal (1835–38, known as the William Adam's Report), and in the Punjab (1849–1882, penned by G.W. Leitner).[49] The volume also

48 Quoted in *The Beautiful Tree*, ibid., p.355.

49 Though these official surveys had all been published, and extracts of Munro's survey were even available in the House of Commons Papers of 1831-32, it is astounding that their factual portent was not heeded by previous scholars concerned with the history of Indian education.

includes reports from Malabar by a Carmelite missionary, Fra Paolino da Bartolomeo, in 1796 referring among other matters to the famous monitorial system, as well as by Alexander Walker in 1820 on traditional practices in education and on the wide prevalence of literary learning. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the conclusive statistical data of relatively widespread 'liberal' education in village elementary schools and institutions of higher learning enjoyed by large sections of the population[50] refers to periods several decades after the conquest of these regions. Hence, this empirical evidence leads one to assume that the level of education provided must have been even higher before the advent of British rule. Such an assumption is substantiated by the collector of Bellary who graphically describes the state of decay into which the schools had fallen because of their neglect by the British administration and as a consequence of the "gradual but general impoverishment of the country."[51]

Notwithstanding this noticeable degeneration, it is astounding that acclamatory statements such as Governor Munro's estimation in 1826 (on the basis of the extensive surveys received from the diverse districts of the Madras presidency) that "the portion of the male population who receive school education to be nearer to one-third than one-fourth of the whole"[52] could be made. No doubt, the colonial governor's appreciative stance needs to be understood against the backdrop of the comparatively low level of contemporary British education, about which Dharampal, in his extensive introduction, provides a critically discerning overview: He avers—citing statistical data relating to the British Isles—that "school education, especially elementary education at the people's level, was rather an uncommon commodity until around 1800".[53] In all due

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50 The Madras Presidency survey (1822–1826) gives concrete statistical data stating that 11,575 schools and 1,094 colleges were still in existence with the number of students being 157,195 and 5,431 respectively. Further that *sudras* and castes below them formed 70%-80% of the total students in Tamil-speaking areas, 62% in Oriya areas, 54% in Malayalam areas, and 35% in Telugu areas. In Malabar, 1,222 Muslim girls, as compared to 3,196 Muslim boys, attended school; the representative curriculum taught comprised, besides the three Rs., also disciplines such as literature, astronomy, law and sciences; data extracted from *The Beautiful Tree*, ibid., pp.1–251.

51 Report of the Collector, Bellary to the Board of Revenue, 17.8.1823, ibid., p.182.

52 Ibid., p.20 (reproduced in this volume, Chapter 5). This estimation was made after taking into consideration the sizeable number of boys (from upper as well as other castes) being taught at home, over and above the statistical data providing evidence that one fourth of all boys between the ages of 5 and 10 years were attending village schools.

53 Ibid., p.6; reproduced in this volume, Chapter 5.

fairness, he does go on to trace the subsequent novel development of publicly institutionalised school education in the first half of 19th century Britain. Yet, in sketching this early modern Indo-British comparative and diachronic educational scenario, Dharampal succeeds in underscoring the rationale behind British administrators' avid interest in reporting about prevalent Indian schools, including the reasons for their being impressed by their findings[54] despite the observable decline.

Admittedly, the primary objective governing this study was to dispel the all-too pervasive myth about India having received the boon of education from the British as part of their civilising mission. At the same time, the politically contestatory nature of his intervention, with a view to overhauling the contemporary pedagogic system, is succinctly formulated in a concluding paragraph of the book's introduction:

> "What India had in the sphere of education two centuries ago and the factors which led to its decay and replacement are indeed a part of history. Even if the former could be brought back to life, in the context of today, or of the immediate future, many aspects of it may no longer be apposite. Yet what exists today has little relevance either. An understanding of that which existed and of the process which created the irrelevance India has today, in time, could however help devise what best suits India's requirements and the ethos of its people."[55]

This clarion-call has subsequently instigated many to rethink the definition and content of present-day education:[56] Such inspired educationalists aim to reinstate a pedagogy that equips children to be able to more fully participate in and work towards the well-being of their local communities and regions. Educational programmes of this nature are striving to provide a corrective to the present dilemma created by semi-westernised schooling which tends to alienate the youth from their familiar environments and to produce (mostly unemployable) graduates for a job-market determined by the globalised economy.

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54 According to the Adam's Report, there were 100,000 schools in Bengal and Bihar in the 1830s, and in the Madras Presidency in the early 1820s, according to Governor Munro, there was "a school in every village", Ibid., p.73.

55 Ibid., p.79; reproduced in this volume, Chapter 5.

56 An exemplary case in point would be the educational work initiated by SIDH, Mussoorie, in the Himalayan region.

V

All in all, these three pioneering publications (constituting only part of Dharampal's endeavour to delegitimise conventional History[57]) represent historiographical documents *par excellence* in which the reader is confronted with the original official British sources describing crucial societal achievements in the different regions of 18th and early 19th century India. Hence, the factuality of the picture that emerges appears even more convincing, for, presumably, a British administrator would have had no reason to exaggerate the positive features of Indian society—quite the contrary. Yet these British reports, according to Dharampal (who was for ever self-critically reflective), also had certain draw-backs: Firstly, according to him, the topics that were being written about had been selected in accordance with the interests of the British observers (who would have been influenced by various concerns, political, cultural or scientific). Secondly, and more significantly, the specific emphasis or interpretation given to the objects described would have been determined by the socio-cultural background of the writer, if not by contingent political factors of the immediate colonial-political context. Hence, not only would inadvertently (or often, advertently) misinterpretations or distortions have crept into the descriptions, but also the matters selected for description would not have represented the total picture of a functioning society.

For such a canvas to be portrayed, Dharampal was absolutely convinced that large-scale research needed to be undertaken in the subcontinent itself. He, thus, attempted to pave the way for future scholars by presenting a critical but also dynamic overview of the momentous developments that had taken place in

57 Another important publication, belonging to a later date and also contesting hegemonic assumptions, is Dharampal and T.M. Mukundan: *The British Origin of Cow-Slaughter in India with some British Documents on the Anti-Kine-Killing movement 1880–1894*, Society for Integrated Development of Himalayas, Mussoorie 2002. Besides providing historical British documentary evidence about the genesis of mass cow-slaughter under British auspices, this volume presents extensive documentary material about one of the most significant resistance movements in India against kine-killing (perpetrated by the British) during the years 1880–1894. By highlighting the support given by some prominent Muslims during phases of this mass protest as well as by emphasising the crucial fact that it was the British and not the Muslims who were the main consumers of beef, Dharampal is able to dispel one of the deep-seated myths perpetuated in the interest of reinforcing divisive colonial strategies—with the aim of assuaging communalist tensions. This was also his underlying intention through the stand he took with regard to the controversial debates in the wake of the Ramjanmabhumi/ Babri Masjid issue at Ayodhya, cf. his contribution "Undamming the Flow", in: J.K. Bajaj (ed.): *Ayodhya and the Future India*, Centre for Policy Studies, Madras, 1993, pp.213–238. As recognition of his historical research, in 2001, he was appointed Chairman of the National Cattle Commission set up by the Government of India.

India from the 18th into the 20th centuries—in his many essays, lectures and newspaper articles.[58] Simultaneously, he exhorted research-minded Indians to make a concerted effort to gain access to indigenous regional testimonies from varying sources, written, oral and inscriptional. As possible repositories of valuable historical data he suggested that researchers consult the annals of religious and cultural centres, the libraries of royal or aristocratic families, the records of banking and merchant families, registrars and account-keepers as well as village records and histories[59] (as preserved in the Rajasthan state archives at Bikaner with which he was familiar). These and varied documents from many other sources would contain essential data that could corroborate or amend and supplement the British testimony to subsequently provide a more holistic understanding of India's recent past and the functioning of its society.

In view of this crucial desideratum, he emphasised that his work constituted just a beginning,[60] and that his findings should serve to instigate and inspire others to focus on and investigate the wealth of historical material lying at their doorstep. This is what he surmised 30 years ago, and he has been proven correct, now that the National Manuscript Mission has located thousands, if not millions of manuscripts throughout India. That means that there exist a multitude of documents in Indian regional locations just waiting to be researched into by hundreds of budding grass-root social historians, or Indian *Le Roi Laduries*,[61] whose contribution he considered essential towards developing a more differentiated sense of Indian cultural identity.

From another perspective, one of Dharampal's underlying aims in pursuing his historical research (as I understand it from frequent conversations with him) was to indulge in a sort of hermeneutics of historical knowledge. Let me spell

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58 Cf. the lists in the appendix to this volume. Some of these lectures have been published in Dharampal: *Essays on Tradition, Recovery and Freedom*, Vol. V of Dharampal: *Collected Writings*, Other India Press, Mapusa, Goa, 2000, reprinted by Other India Press & SIDH, 2003, 2007; as well as in: Dharampal: *Rediscovering India*, SIDH, Mussoorie, 2003.

59 In particular, *Jati puranas* which he maintained contained a wealth of data about community practices and beliefs. He himself started this research by consulting the volumes of the *People of India: Anthropological Survey of India*, Delhi 1985 ff. whose voluminous empirical data, according to him, required more in-depth analysis.

60 In recognition of his research work, in the early 1990s, Dharampal was elected Member of the Indian Council of Historical Research for two terms, and for a third term during 1999–2001.

61 Emanuel Le Roi Ladurie is a French social historian whose work focuses on the history of the peasantry during the French *ancien régime*, in particular in the Languedoc, in southern France.

out what this entailed for him: Having provided sufficient evidence of the advanced level of Indian achievements in the various fields of science, technology, education, social and political organisation, he considered it, firstly, necessary to investigate the causes and mechanisms by which not only this knowledge had been discarded and then fallen into oblivion, but also, concomitantly, the relevant institutions had become defunct. To obtain any viable understanding would, according to him, entail in-depth research into socio-economic, political and ideological impinging factors subsequent to the advent of colonial rule. Secondly, intent on evaluating impartially the social-historical significance of his findings, he opined that this would not necessarily be obtained by juxtaposing India in competitive comparison to Europe. That is, rather than merely emphasising that India produced better steel, practised more sophisticated medicine, provided better education for its children before the onset of colonial rule—than either its counterparts in contemporary Europe, or 50-100 years later on the subcontinent itself—, it would be more worthwhile to investigate how the attainment of this relatively high level of civilisational achievement had indeed been possible. This, he insisted, could only be achieved by becoming familiarised with the complex societal, economic and cultural mechanisms that had facilitated these accomplishments. Obviously the attainment of these insights would entail doing detailed research into the functioning of Indian localities and their communities, their socio-economic infrastructure and instrumentalities. His own insights gained from a close analysis of early British-Indian historical documentation seemed to indicate that Indian society and polity in the 18th century[62] was defined not so much by categories of hierarchy and political asymmetries, but rather by ones of mutual relationships which may possibly have been of a competitive nature, but not of a suppressive subjugating one. As for the categories of hierarchy and political asymmetries, he considered that these factors had become accentuated as a result of the British-Indian encounter. The data collected from the Chingleput district of Tamil Nadu[63]—a project initiated by him in the 1980s—constitutes a paradigmatic case-study for such research into understanding the structure and functioning of Indian localities and their communities.

62 Cf. his extended essay "India's Polity, its Characteristics and Current Problems" reproduced in this volume, Chapter 6.

63 This refers to an extensive commissioned survey of about 2,000 villages carried out by a British engineer, Thomas Barnard, based on data collected during a five-year period (1762–1767) soon after the area around Madras came under direct British control. Since this survey is supplemented by detailed Tamil palm-leaf records, it contains a wealth of information not only on agricultural production and the variety of crop cultivation, but also on the very elaborate distributive system, the diversity of demographic and professional composition and the wide range of ecological habitats. The research project is being pursued extensively by two of Dharampal's close associates, Dr. M.D. Srinivas and Dr. J.K. Bajaj.

Thirdly, Dharampal wanted to trace how certain elements from this corpus of knowledge were appropriated, refined and integrated into the early modern British or European scientific and cultural institutions, a process which he considered was nothing unique but rather quite representative of the continual flow of knowledge (appropriated or exchanged) between the cultures of the world. Hence, on the one hand, he considered it essential to evaluate and comprehend the sociological as well as the psychological-cognitive portent of intercultural flows and appropriations of knowledge in which all societies of the world were participating. On the other hand, however, though he would not have been inclined to establish an exclusive right of cultural ownership on specific technologies and sciences, he did consider it important, without being chauvinistic, to study and be aware of their respective cultural embeddedness. To elucidate, he stated:

> "Every civilisation has to do its own learning and in its own way. The knowledge of what others did can only serve as one pointer amongst many. Similar understanding can be initiated in many other long neglected technologies and industries. It should not be surprising if at least some of them (with minor modifications here and there) prove to be as productive and cost-efficient as the new technologies which we have borrowed from modern world industry."[64]

In a fourth step, he attempted to understand the multifarious ways in which the fabric of Indian society had been shattered, and more significantly, to highlight the often subtle and surreptitious means by which Indian *minds* had been colonised under the impact of British rule. His objective here again was not necessarily to apportion blame to British administrators, but rather to unravel the ensconced logic of colonial operations. In historical retrospect, there was no point in being moralistic about the damage done. Rather, it was necessary to deconstruct the whole process and rationale behind the colonial endeavour. This challenging task, he urged, could be embarked upon by studying the vast collections of the Board of Control[65] which itemise the dismantling and remodelling that the colonisation process involved. Yet, according to his understanding of developments elsewhere—and his ability to discern and highlight structural linkages in the global arena—the British-Indian experience did not constitute by

64 Extract from "Indigenous Indian Technological Talent and the Need for its Mobilisation", a lecture delivered at the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum, Calcutta, 4.10.1986, quoted from Dharampal: *Essays on Tradition, Recovery and Freedom*, op. cit., p.66.

65 These documents, catalogued by him with great care, are lying in Sevagram waiting to be researched into.

any means an exceptional scenario: Indeed, he perceived similar operations at work, for instance, in the British Isles from the time of the Norman conquest and in North America from the early 16th century onwards.[66] Nonetheless, the impact of the colonial enterprise he considered, in like manner to Mahatma Gandhi, had been entirely destructive to Indian society, not only because of the exploitative factor involved, but even more so because it was defined by categories alien to or at odds with the Indian cultural ethos.

VI

What the component parts of this Indian cultural ethos are (and in which manner they are at odds with modern conceptions) are spelt out in his slim volume on *Bharatiya Chitta, Manas and Kala*,[67] reproduced in this volume. By underscoring the Indian traditional conceptions of time and space as well as of the relative insignificance of man—his knowledge and his crafts in the scheme of creation—Dharampal aimed to underscore the intellectual and spiritual sustenance derived from a such world-view: A philosophical cosmology that, according to him, was defined by a totally different logic to the one operative in the modern perspective. His intention, however, was not to extract India from the modern world. Rather, his overarching concern was to instil Indians with self-confidence. For him, it was essential that Indians should have the self-assurance that their world-view was valuable, and that their contribution could perhaps influence world agendas. This was worth striving for since, according to his understanding, modernity or post-modernity was neither static nor everlasting, to say the least. In a more philosophical vein, he averred that the ways of the world were governed by a logic unfathomable to men. Yet, simultaneously, in a more practical affirmative tone, he concluded with the following reassuring prospect:

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66 "Most of what Britain did in India was not basically very different from what the British State had done in Britain since about the Norman Conquest of England in the 11th century, and which it more or less continued until after 1800. […] the same was attempted by England in Ireland from about the 16th century; or experimented upon in North America in the 16th-17th-18th centuries; and the same was continued by the successors of British power in the fast expanding territories of the USA in the late 18th and the 19th centuries." Quoted from "Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Polity and Society and their Relevance to the Present", *op. cit.,* reproduced in this volume, cf. Chapter 1.

67 Dharampal: *Bharatiya Chitta, Manas va Kala* (Hindi), Pushpa Prakashan, Patna and Centre for Policy Studies, Chennai 1991; English translation (with a preface and glossary) by Jitendra Bajaj, published as *Bharatiya Chitta, Manas and Kala*, Centre for Policy Studies, Madras 1993; reproduced in this volume, cf. Chapter 7.

> "To redefine our seekings and aspirations, our ways of thought and action, in a form that is appropriate and effective in today's world may not be too hard a task at all. Such re-assertions and re-definitions of civilisational thrust are not uncommon in world history. For every civilisation, there comes a time when the people of that civilisation have to remind themselves of their fundamental civilisational consciousness and their understanding of the universe and of Time. From the basis of that recollection of the past, they then define the path of their future. Many civilisations of the world have undergone such self-appraisal and self-renewal at different times. In our long history, many times we must have engaged in this recollection and re-assertion of the *chitta* and *kala* of India. We need to undertake such an exploration into ourselves again."[68]

This culturally and intellectually reinvigorating historical perspective embodies the reassurance that India could or would reassert itself, once Indians had understood and come to terms with their own cultural moorings. To reinforce this deeply held conviction, Dharampal's exhortation also comprised a socio-political thrust, as expressed many a time in public fora: Rather than "walking in the grooves laid down by the west, while dreaming day-dreams that our time will come one day",[69] he contended that a systematic intellectual effort needed to be undertaken. The goal of such an undertaking constituted evolving viable indigenous models of social, economic and political organisation in tune with contemporary realities so that an organic linkage between society and polity based on sounder indigenous foundations could be established.[70]

VII

It goes without saying that Mahatma Gandhi represented for him the inspirational model for this programme of civilisational regeneration. In fact, Gandhiji had been his lodestar right from his childhood days in Lahore. It was in

68 Ibid., p.64, reproduced in this volume, cf. Chapter 7.

69 Cited from the lecture entitled "Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity", *op. cit*., reproduced in this volume, cf. Chapter 1.

70 More concretely and inclusively, he urged the following: "Our essential task is to bring the innovative and technological skills of our people, those who professed them for millennia and till at least 1800, back to the rebuilding of our primary economy and industry. We have ignored this so far. Instead, we have tried to create a new economy and industry to which the primary economy has been subordinated." Cited from the lecture on "Indigenous Indian Technological Talent and the Need for its Mobilisation" (1986), *Collected Writings*, vol.V, op. cit., p.63.

the intellectual footsteps of this revolutionary personality and his conception of *Hind Swaraj* that Dharampal pursued his pioneering historical research with such commitment and zeal. As he proceeded, he also endeavoured to attain a more in-depth understanding of Gandhiji's significance. And after completing his archival research, he focussed his attention more specifically on the written documentation of the Independence struggle. Being based in Sevagram from the 1980s onwards, he also had access to some unpublished notes and letters penned by Gandhiji. The essays he wrote and the talks he gave (dating from the 1980s until about 2002)[71] provide fresh insights about Gandhiji and his outstanding achievements. One these essays, entitled *Reconsidering Gandhiji (1915-1948)*, is being reproduced in this volume.[72] In another essay, Dharampal formulated his assessment of Gandhiji's contribution as follows:

> "What is special about Gandhiji's effort is that both the attempt at salvage and the recovery of freedom were based on the spiritual view of life that he shared in a profound way with his ordinary fellow beings. It is this spiritual sharing that enabled him to help them regain their courage, fearlessness and confidence, and to resist injustice by trying, to the extent possible, to hold on to truth and to non-violence."[73]

Besides emphasising the Indian embeddedness of Gandhiji's spirituality, Dharampal considered that his extraordinary leadership qualities, too, needed to be foregrounded more explicitly which he does in the following insightful manner:

> "If we look at Gandhiji from the point of view of his being a general —like Sri Krishna of the Mahabharata—we will be able to account for practically all of his thinking and actions from 1915 to the end. Bringing about a transformation seldom before attempted by any individual required not only total dedication to the achievement of the task [...] but demanded even more a sort of communion with those for whom the end was really meant. It also depended on incomparable organisational and strategic skills. [...] Yet the 'Mahatmaship' of Gandhiji in a way seems to have made us oblivious of his approach, of the way he went about solving problems, and the designs and strategies of his battles not only against foreign yoke but also against what he treated as evil or misguided in his own people. For

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71 These were published in a small volume entitled *Understanding Gandhi*, Other India Press, Goa, 2003.

72 See Chapter 8.

73 "A Child of the Gandhian Era", in: *Understanding Gandhi*, op. cit., p.16.

> instance, his battle designs had advances as well as retreats built in them. As a superb general he knew that there can be few advances without some retreats."[74]

It was during the last years that Gandhiji was involved in one such epochal battle—attempting to extract India from the 'western orbit' and to strengthen the subcontinent's ancient links with the Asian world, as exemplified concretely by the Asian Relations Conference held in Delhi in March 1947, at Gandhiji's instigation.

This last endeavour of Gandhiji at resuscitating inner Asian unity was to provide inspiration to Dharampal, too: Towards the end of his life, broadening his horizons and transcending the shores of the subcontinent, Dharampal initiated a research project on the maritime world of the Indian Ocean. The project's overarching aim was to investigate the shared historical cultural links within Asia, with the ultimate goal of reviving past intimate Indian contacts with countries of South-East and East Asia.[75] This he envisaged as an essential and urgent enterprise he hoped many would enthusiastically take up. Given the surge in Asian maritime studies during the last decade, it seems that his innovative research initiative is bearing fruit.

Summa summarum, not only did Dharampal, in challenging and delegitimising the historical master narrative, thereby remap a few centuries of Indian history as well as retrace old seascapes, but he also attempted to design blueprints for societal renewal, i.e. to bring to fruition Gandhiji's *Hind Swaraj*. Thereby he charted out a course of research for the next few decades, or more, depending on the productive pace we—his heirs—manage to maintain.

As a non-conformist with a creative mind, he remains refreshingly accessible for the post-modern world, for he challenged the status-quo, interrogated the legitimacy of established socio-political constellations, broke through normative categories of thought, and opened up new philosophical and practical possibilities, forever intent on promoting the welfare of the common people—to achieve *Hind Swaraj*.

VIII

In this volume of the *Essential Writings of Dharampal* a small selection of his seminal contributions, extending over three decades, is being reproduced

74 "What Gandhiji Tried to Achieve", in: *Understanding Gandhi*, ibid., p.115.

75 A short proposal was formulated and a research unit was set up in Chennai.

in the following eight sections.[76] The texts have been arranged thematically, but also follow a chronological sequence.

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76 A complete list of his publications (including some unpublished writings) is given at the end of the volume.