

AperTO - Archivio Istituzionale Open Access dell'Università di Torino

For a New Periodization of Indian History: The History of India as Part of the History of the World

This is the author's manuscript

Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/145772> since

Terms of use:

Open Access

Anyone can freely access the full text of works made available as "Open Access". Works made available under a Creative Commons license can be used according to the terms and conditions of said license. Use of all other works requires consent of the right holder (author or publisher) if not exempted from copyright protection by the applicable law.

(Article begins on next page)

Studies in History

<http://sih.sagepub.com/>

For a New Periodization of Indian History: The History of India as Part of the History of the World

Michelguglielmo Torri

Studies in History 2014 30: 89

DOI: 10.1177/0257643014520737

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://sih.sagepub.com/content/30/1/89>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Studies in History* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://sih.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://sih.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [Version of Record](#) - May 12, 2014

[What is This?](#)

For a New Periodization of Indian History: The History of India as Part of the History of the World*

Studies in History
30(1) 89–108
© 2014 Jawaharlal Nehru University
SAGE Publications
Los Angeles, London,
New Delhi, Singapore,
Washington DC
DOI: 10.1177/0257643014520737
<http://sih.sagepub.com>



Michelguglielmo Torri

University of Turin

Abstract

The model of periodization that is nowadays hegemonic in Indian history, squarely based on the colonial model first articulated by James Mill, is both heuristically unsatisfactory and politically dangerous. From a heuristic viewpoint, it refers only to the 'religious' composition of the 'ruling class' (and, by the way, not even the whole of the ruling class). From a political viewpoint, it stresses the divisive elements present in the Indian historical tradition, by implicitly equating 'Hindu' with 'Indian' and 'Muslim' with 'invader/foreigner'. The present article aims at sketching out a scientifically more inclusive and politically less dangerous new model by building on the assumption that Indian history is part of world history and, consequently, that the main socio-economic developments in the Indian subcontinent are part and parcel of the most relevant socio-economic developments world-wide. The resulting model de-emphasizes the divisive elements of the Indian experience, represented by the separate religious strands historically present within the Indian society, and, by focusing on socio-economic evolution, makes obvious both the fundamental unity of Indian history and its relationship with the history of the remainder of the world.

Keywords

Periodization, Indian history, world history, grand narratives, James Mill

The Relevance of Periodization

In the past decades the possibility of 'grand narratives', aimed at explaining history in its totality, has been put in doubt. Personally, I think that 'grand narratives'

*This article is based on two lectures, the first given at the 17th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Heidelberg, 9–14 September 2002, and the second at the University of Delhi, 28 October 2003. The lectures themselves were based on Michelguglielmo Torri, *Storia dell'India* [A History of India] (Bari: Laterza, 2000).

are what gives history its meaning and make history a worthwhile enterprise. In turn, grand narratives need appropriate categories. Most particularly, the general history of a people, which is a 'grand narrative' *par excellence*, needs a proper periodization. But, in striving to delineate a proper periodization, we must be aware of two problems. The first is that the categories that we employ must be powerful enough to organize in a meaningful way, if not all, at least as many significant phenomena as possible. The second problem is that any category we make use of—and, therefore, any periodization—carries with itself its own hidden—or not so hidden—agenda.

If we keep these caveats in mind, it becomes immediately clear that the periodization model now hegemonic in Indian history, squarely based on colonialist categories, is both heuristically unsatisfactory and characterized by a (not so) hidden agenda that is politically dangerous. An effort must be made at building a new model, which might be both sounder from the scientific viewpoint and less dangerous from the political standpoint. It is my contention that this is a result that can be reached by relating Indian history to world history, and viewing the history of India as part of the history of the world. Accordingly, in the remainder of this article, I will start by dwelling both on the colonialist roots of the periodization nowadays prevailing, and on the reasons why such a periodization should be discarded. From there I will move on to discuss the relationship between world history and Indian history. In so doing, I will sketch out a new model of periodization, with the explicit aim to make it scientifically more inclusive and politically less dangerous than the old model.

James Mill's Periodization

The most commonly accepted and less controversial periodization of Indian history is still based on the one proposed by James Mill in his *History of British India*.¹ As everybody knows, such periodization sees Indian history as articulated in a Hindu, a Muslim and a British period. Since Mill's time, the only change has been a cosmetic one: the Hindu Period has become the Ancient Period, the Muslim Period has become the Medieval Period, and the British Period has become the Modern Period, whereas for the period after Independence the label 'Contemporary Period' is sometimes made use of.

The acceptance of this periodization has been made easy by the fact that, in order to study each of the periods singled out by Mill, different languages are needed (respectively Sanskrit and Pali, Persian and Urdu, English and the modern vernacular languages). However, as already stated above, the traditional periodization proposed by Mill, is both heuristically unsatisfactory and politically dangerous.

¹ James Mill, *The History of British India* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1817), 3 vols.

Heuristically, Mill's classification, while it refers *only* to the *religious* composition of the *ruling class*, is unsatisfactory even from such a limited standpoint. In fact, if we consider the great merchant–financiers and the hereditary landed aristocracy (*rais*, *raos*, *ranas*, *chaudhuris*, and *khuts*, lately collectively designated with the term *zamindars*) as part of the ruling class, it is clear that no 'Muslim' state in India was ever ruled by a class that was completely Muslim. But even if we refer to the composition of the upper crust of the ruling class and define it as made up by the *noblesse d'épée*, namely the great nobles that controlled the military might of the sultanates and, later, the Mughal empire and its successor states, Mill's religion-based classification does not apply. Already during the Delhi Sultanate, the religious composition of the military nobility started to change, particularly from Ala-ud-din Khalji's reign onwards, with the inclusion of recently converted Muslims and some non-Muslims among the closer advisers of the Sultan and the governors of the provinces. Later, during the Mughal Empire, starting with Akbar's reign, the military nobility became composite from a religious standpoint, a sizeable and influential part of it being made up by Hindus, and remained so even under the reign of such an orthodox Islamic ruler as Aurangzeb. The same was true of the successor states.²

Once all this is said, even if the ruling class of the Indian 'Muslim' states were completely made up by Muslims, the net built by Mill would be unable to catch most of the relevant economic, political and social facts, a result which, anyway, would make it largely irrelevant. However, at the end of the day, what should induce us to discard Mill's periodization is less its irrelevance from a heuristic viewpoint than the fact that it is politically dangerous. In fact, it stresses the divisive elements present in the Indian historical tradition, by equating 'Hindu' with 'Indian' and 'Muslim' with 'invader/foreigner'. It is no wonder that this colonial categorization of Indian history has been going through a new lease of life following the rise of Hindu fundamentalism—both in its 'hard' version and its 'soft' one—since the late 1980s. But, the results of Hindu fundamentalism at work—which include civil strife and wanton killings—are there for everybody to see. Any intellectual worth his/her salt should strive to get rid of any categories that are consonant with these results. Hence, the importance of showing the irrelevance of Mill's periodization and providing a more satisfactory, secular rather than religion-based, periodization.

In order to do it, we have to cast our heuristic net much wider than what has been done by Mill and his epigones. As anticipated, I will try to reach this result by falling back on world history. More specifically I will base my discussion on the methodological teaching of the Chicago world historians, particularly—even

² M. Athar Ali, 'Encounter and Efflorescence: Genesis of the Medieval Civilization', *Social Scientist* 18, nos. 1–2 (1990): 13–28; M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) (1st ed. 1966).

if not exclusively—William H. McNeill and Marshall G.S. Hodgson,³ and on those of other world historians, not necessarily belonging to the Chicago school, such as Janet L. Abu-Lughod,⁴ Andre Gunder Frank,⁵ and others.⁶ In other words, I will propose a periodization based on the assumption that Indian history is part of the world history.

Accordingly, the remainder of this article will be divided into two parts:

- (a) the sketching out of a periodization relevant to the history of the world;
- (b) a discussion of the relevance of the above world periodization for Indian history.

In doing this I will make use of the traditional categories utilized by the historians of the West, namely ‘Ancient Era’, ‘Medieval Era’, ‘Early Modern Era’ and ‘Modern Era’. However, this must not be considered a falling back on Eurocentric categories: the assumption is that, *if European history is part of World History, changes and continuities in Europe are bound to be part of changes and continuities worldwide.*

The Periodization of World History

The Ancient Era

The ancient era can be seen as included between the ninth millennium BC and the late fifth or early sixth century CE. It begins with the agricultural revolution, which made possible the development of the first civilizations created by settled populations. Between the late sixth millennium BC and the middle of the first millennium BC all the major civilizations—Western, Middle Eastern, Indian, Chinese—took shape. Following McNeill, I will call the sum of the civilizations created by settled populations ‘Ecumene’.

Since the rise of the first civilizations and up to the eighteenth century CE, a main dynamic of world history was represented by the interaction between the

³ William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) (1st edn., 1963); Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). See also Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History. Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History*, ed. with an Introduction and Conclusion, by Edmund Burke III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁴ Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁵ Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient. Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁶ A particularly illuminating short monograph, which I read after completing the first drafts of the present article, is that of Robert B. Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World. Fate and Fortune in the Rise of the West* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007).

Ecumene and the nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples that lived either outside or in the interstices of the world inhabited by settled peoples.

During the Ancient Period, world civilizations were characterized by the fact that, although based on agrarian economies, the locus of power was represented by the cities. The cities were the loci where the agriculturally produced economic surplus was concentrated and put to use in order to support the political, intellectual, administrative and military élites and their dependents. In other words, the cities were not only the centres of political and military power, but also the residence of literate classes, which means that the cities were the centres of elaboration of high culture. Moreover cities were important economic centres, as it was in the cities that part of the agriculturally produced surplus was transformed into manufactured goods. These were partly consumed by the urban population, particularly the élites, and partly channelled into long-distance trade. Of course, this was made possible by the existence of intermediate social strata of merchants, financiers and artisans, and presupposed a flourishing monetary economy.

In sum, during the Ancient Era, in the Ecumene—namely in the geographical spaces inhabited by settled populations—cities dominated the countryside economically and politically and were the mainstays of the existing kingdoms and empires.

Up to the end of the first millennium BC, there were limited but unmistakable contacts among the civilizations that stretched from the Mediterranean to the Indian subcontinent. These civilizations made up the Western side of the Ecumene. The contacts between the Western side of the Ecumene and the Chinese civilization, which represented the Eastern side of the Ecumene, were limited, although not absent, as shown by the diffusion of Buddhism from India to China. This changed in the period encompassing the first century BC and the first century CE, when economic and cultural connections were established between the two sides, particularly with the opening of the ‘Silk route’, connecting the Mediterranean world and China.⁷ All this means that, by the beginning of the Christian era, a set of economically and, to a lesser extent, culturally interlocked world civilizations came into being. These interlocked world civilizations stretched from the Mediterranean world to China, and included Iran, Central Asia and India. In the remainder of this article, following less the definition given by Immanuel Wallerstein⁸ than those proposed by Janet Abu-Lughod and Andre Gunder Frank,⁹ this set of interlocked world civilizations will be identified with the term ‘World System’.

The World System created in the period beginning with the first century reached its apex during the first two centuries of the Christian era. Then, beginning with the third century, a process of decline began in different parts of the

⁷ McNeill, *The Rise of the West*, ch. VII.

⁸ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 3 vols. (New York: Academic Press, 1974, 1980, 1989).

⁹ Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*; Frank, *ReOrient*.

civilized world. The reasons for this phenomenon are not completely clear, but plague and attacks from nomadic peoples loom large among the possible explanations.¹⁰ Moreover, in a world where long-distance trade played an important economic role, it makes sense to assume that the economic collapse of certain parts of the *Ecumene* must have had a negative impact on the remainder of it.

The Medieval Era

The downward trend that set in during the third century CE manifested itself through the interlinked and intertwined processes of de-urbanization, decline and collapse of long-distance trade, and shrinking and quasi-disappearance of the monetary economy.¹¹ By the late fifth and the early sixth centuries, this process became so pronounced that it is safe to claim that those decades marked the end of the Ancient Era. A new era did start, which was bound to last up to a period encompassing the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (the exact moment is different in the various parts of the *Ecumene*). This period which, following the prevalent Western periodization, may be called the Medieval Era, was characterized by the localization in the countryside of both political power and economic activities. As long-distance trade dramatically shrunk and, in some parts of the *Ecumene*, almost disappeared, the surviving civilizations lost most of those economic and cultural connections that had previously united them. Of course, it is true that, in some parts of the world, big cities and long-distance trade did not disappear completely. However, these cases were indeed exceptions, which cannot change the general picture in any significant way.

After a first phase, the Medieval Era saw the emergence of a counter-tendency to the prevailing process of localization of both the political power and the economy. This counter-tendency started to manifest itself in the seventh century, with the rise of an Islamic world system centred in the Middle East but stretching to North Africa and Spain in the West, and Central Asia and the Indus Valley in the East. Among the characteristics of this Islamic world system were: the growth of new cities, the concentration of political and economic power in these cities, the flourishing of long-distance trade and the rise of a new monetary economy.¹²

Beginning with the eleventh century, signs of positive economic change started to become visible even outside the Islamic world. These processes came to their

¹⁰ On the role of plagues see William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City: Anchor Press and New York: Doubleday, 1976).

¹¹ Two penetrating studies focussed on this process in the Roman (and Byzantine) world are J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) (1st ed. 2001) and Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹² Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1, 301–05.

fulfilment during the thirteenth century. At that time the coming into being of a new world system, stretching from Europe to China, became apparent.¹³

Among the characteristics of this new world system were the rise of new cities, the revival of some of the old cities, the development of long-distance trade, a new rise and the spreading of the monetary economy and, last but not the least, the attempt on the part of many of the ruling monarchies to concentrate in their hands an increasing share of political power. This last development was made possible by a growing economy, where monetary circulation became widespread. It was the growth of wealth and its concentration under the form of coined precious metals, namely money, that made possible the attempt at centralization by the monarchies.

All the above amounted to a process that saw the shifting of the locus of the political and economic power from the countryside back to the cities, most particularly those that became the capitals either of centralizing kingdoms or new small but wealthy states where—as in Italy and in the Low Countries—the political power was in the hands of a rising merchant class. However, beginning with the 1320s, this process was brought to a sudden halt by a pandemic plague and a series of agrarian crises that hit some of the historically most productive agricultural areas of the Ecumene.¹⁴ As a consequence, this period—the central part of the Middle Age—reached its end. The final part of the Middle Age set during the second half of the fourteenth century and was characterized by the loss of political and economic power of the cities and the shift back to the countryside of much of it. In other words, the closing of the Middle Age saw the reassertion of many of the social and economic features that had characterized its beginning.

The Early Modern Age

In the early fifteenth century, the consequences of the plague and the agrarian crises were on wane. Once again economic and demographic growth reasserted themselves.¹⁵ The clearest symptom of the turning of the tide is represented by the launching of two ambitious programmes of geographical reconnaissance at

¹³ On this, the reference work is, of course, Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*. But see also John Obert Voll, 'Islam as a Special World-System', *Journal of World History* 5, no. 2 (1994) and Ravi Arvind Palat and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Of What World-System was Pre-1500 'India' a Part?* This paper was kindly sent to me by Dr. Palat when still unpublished. It has now been published in Sushil Chaudhury and Michel Morineau, eds, *Merchants, Companies and Trade. Europe and Asia in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 21–41.

¹⁴ McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 143–51; Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 170–75; Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. II, 387–91.

¹⁵ See Frank, *ReOrient*, ch. 2.

the two extremes of the Ecumene, in Portugal and China.¹⁶ The Chinese effort was abandoned soon enough, but the Portuguese endeavour continued for the whole century and beyond. It was causal in spawning first the Spanish discovery of the Americas and, as a consequence, the Dutch, English and French enterprises both in the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. The result of all this was both the opening of the new high-sea routes and, eventually, the European conquest and colonization of the American continent. For a variety of reasons—economic, political, cultural—this last development was a very significant one, both for Europe and the world at large. Accordingly, Columbus's arrival in the New Continent in 1492 can be maintained as a highly symbolic dividing point between the Middle Age and the Early Modern Age.

As summed by John Richards,¹⁷ the characteristics of the Early Modern Age are as follows:

1. the continuous growth of the world population (in spite of the demographic catastrophe in the Americas, directly or indirectly caused by the European conquest);
2. the recreation in the fifteenth century of a world system that, in the sixteenth, grew to include the Americas;
3. the development of new military technologies, based on the utilization of increasingly efficient firearms;
and, as a consequence of the spreading of efficient firearms,
4. the rolling back of external and internal frontiers,
and, last but certainly not the least,
5. a new—and this time unstoppable—process of centralization of the state power.

According to many, the period starting with the European discoveries is characterized by the worldwide rise of European hegemony. In my opinion, however, Andre Gunder Frank and Robert Marks, among others, have challenged this assumption in a very effective way, showing that China and India had economies that were more advanced than the contemporary European economies.¹⁸ In fact, till the eve of the first Opium war, the standard of living of the average

¹⁶ See C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415–1825* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973) (1st ed. 1969), and Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405–1433* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁷ John F. Richards, 'Early Modern India and World History', *Journal of World History* 8, no. 2 (1997): 197–209.

¹⁸ Frank, *ReOrient*, and Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*. See also Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Chinese was well superior to the standard of living of the average European.¹⁹ Moreover, few doubts are possible about the fact that the Chinese polity, in the eighteenth century, was more efficient than anything existing in Europe, which—significantly enough—was clearly understood by most of the main representatives of the European Enlightenment. Summing up, once all the above is taken into account, it is difficult to accept the idea that the sixteenth century was the starting point of a worldwide European hegemony. As it shall be argued in the following section, European hegemony on the rest of the world and, most particularly, on Asia came to be established only in the period encompassing the closing decades of the eighteenth century (the retreat of the Ottoman Empire in the face of the Russian onslaught, sanctioned by the treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774) and the fifth decade of the nineteenth century (the first Opium War, 1839–42).

The Late Modern Age

What we can define as the Late Modern Age—and is usually categorized as the modern age *tout court*—is habitually seen as starting with both or either of the following developments:

1. the fulfilment of the Industrial Revolution in England, in the second half of the eighteenth century;
2. the French Revolution (late eighteenth century) and his Napoleonic sequel (early nineteenth century).

Whereas I am fully aware of the pivotal importance of both developments, I think that they must be put in a wider perspective. This wider perspective is given by the fact that the European states did begin to impose their hegemony on Asia *before* either developments, and *independently* from them. In fact, some of the European states that were starting to extend their political and economic hegemony on parts of Asia—or the European parts of a non-European power as the Ottoman Empire—not only did that before either the fulfilment of the Industrial

¹⁹ In this perspective it is illuminating to read the excerpts of a diary kept by G. Stanton, a member of the Amherst mission which visited China in 1816. Writes Stanton,

Tranquillity seemed to prevail, nothing but contentment and good humor... It is remarkable that in so populous a country there should be so little begging... Contentment and the enjoyment of the necessities of life [suggests that] the government cannot be a very bad one. *The lower orders of the Chinese seem to me more neat and clean than any European of the same class ... Even torn, soiled, or threadbare clothing is uncommon...instead of mud cabins, the houses of peasants are built in a neat manner with brick.*

G. Stanton, Notes of Proceedings During the British Embassy to Peking in 1816 (London: Murray, 1824), 153–225, *passim*, quoted in Rhoads Murphey, *A History of Asia* (HarperCollins Publishers: New York, 1992), 241 (emphasis added).

Revolution or the playing out of the French revolution, but also were never on the forefront of the developments started by either revolutions. This is certainly the case with both Russia—which conquered a huge part of Asia and overawed both the Ottoman and Iranian empires—as well as Austria, which occupied a considerable swath of the European part of the Ottoman Empire.

Taking all the above into account, my contention is that the Late Modern Age started with the imposition of the political and military hegemony of the West on the remainder of the World. Accordingly, we could legitimately define it as the age of Western hegemony. In turn, the rise of Western hegemony is a process that began in the period encompassing the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, with the rolling back of the Ottoman Empire in Europe, the temporary French conquest of Egypt, and the imposition of British hegemony in the Indian subcontinent (with the third Mysorean war, 1799 and the second Maratha war, 1803–06).

It is worth stressing that the rise of Western hegemony was not the by-product of any superiority acquired by the Europeans, thanks to the results of either the Industrial or the French revolutions, but the consequence of the new way of war, which, in turn, was not the result of superior weaponry but of superior organization. As shown by O’Connell, this was based on a methodical and brutal form of training, which transformed individual soldiers into human automata, who would fight according to a pre-established sequence of movements in all circumstances and on any terrain.²⁰ Originally conceived in the late sixteenth century by Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange and Stadtholder of Holland, during the eighteenth century this new system was adopted by all the main European armies, becoming even more lethal with the introduction of the bayonet, and the subsequent removal of the need to integrate detachments of pike-men and halberdiers into infantry formations with the function of protecting the fusiliers from assaults made from close quarters. In this way European infantry troops acquired such a flexibility of manoeuvre and such an ability to maintain a constant volume of fire that they became practically invincible in head-on clashes with armies such as the Asian ones, which lacked the same type of organization. It was at that point that the rolling back of the Turkish Empire in Europe and the European conquest of India began in earnest.

²⁰ Each of these motions was strictly regimented (from the length of paces to the number of them to be taken per minute) and executed in unison by all the men making up a given unit. The individual sequences of movements, which became a kind of conditioned reflex after hundreds of hours of training, were designed to meet any eventuality that might be encountered on the battlefield: from the way in which a musket was to be reloaded and fired—through ‘a complicated set of movements’ that involved ‘a series of forty-two successive motions’—to the way in which the soldiers rotated the ranks to ensure that fire was continuous or regrouped in order to face infantry or cavalry charges. Robert L. O’Connell, *Of Arms and Men. A History of War Weapons, and Aggression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 135–36, 153–56. See also William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 130–35.

During the nineteenth century, Western hegemony, primarily grounded in the previous century in this superior military organization (an organization which, anyway, was not impossible to replicate)²¹ was to be made seemingly unbreakable by the advantages that the Industrial and French revolutions gave to the Westerners.²²

The technological armies through which the West completed the conquest of Asia and carried out that of Africa were made possible by the existence of a complex industrial system. As one Asian state after the other was bound to realize, technological armies could not be created by simply buying weaponry in Europe and not even by building a few ordnance factories. At the end of the day, a complete restructuring of the sociopolitical system was necessary in order to create an industrial state. Only this authentic revolution made possible to create new technologically armed forces, which could cope on a plan of parity with those of the West.²³

Summing up, superior military organization was what made possible the initial rise of European hegemony worldwide. In turn, this hegemony came to its fulfilment and became apparently unbreakable thanks to the dramatic and apparently unstoppable rise of power that the West experienced as a result of both the economic progresses related to the Industrial Revolution and the growth of political and organizational power induced by the French Revolution. In fact, Western hegemony has continued to characterize world history from around the year 1800 up to now, and, therefore, justifies the label 'Age of Western Dominance' as more appropriate than 'Late Modern Age' or 'Modern Age'.

Western hegemony brought about, for the first time in history, the creation of a world system that was distinctly different from all the previous world systems. In fact the new world system that came into being at the turning of the eighteenth century was characterized by two novelties:

1. it coincided with the world;
2. it was hierarchically organized around a dominant centre.

Bearing all this in mind, we can subdivide the Late Modern Age or the age of Western dominance in phases that are characterized by the fact that the locus

²¹ As, to a large extent was done by the Marathas in India. In the end the English won, but this was less the result of English superior organization than the betrayal by the European officers of the Maratha armies. See John Pemble, 'Resources and Techniques in the Second Maratha War', *Historical Journal* 19, no. 2 (June 1976): 375–404. On the attempt by Asian countries to modernize their armies by importing the new European military institutions and techniques, see David B. Ralston, *Importing the European Army* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

²² For some perceptive notes on this topic, see Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*, 115–17.

²³ These considerations are based on Giorgio Borsa, *La nascita del mondo moderno in Asia Orientale* [The Rise of the Modern World in Eastern Asia] (Rizzoli: Milano, 1977).

of power, although residing in the West, shifted in time from one area to another within it.

Accordingly we can divide the period in three phases:

1. the one from the second half of the eighteenth century up to the Second World War included, characterized by world hegemony exercised by a few European powers, to which, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, first the USA and later Japan went on to add themselves;
2. the one from the end of the Second World War up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, characterized by the world hegemony exercised by the USA and the USSR;
3. the one characterized by the world hegemony exercised by the USA, namely a situation still prevailing at the moment when these lines are written, but which, increasingly, seems to be destined to draw to its end in a not too distant future.²⁴

The Relevance of the Periodization of World History for Indian History

If Indian history is part of the world history, then the same trends that were and are apparent worldwide—which have been sketched above—should be present and relevant in the Indian subcontinent, more or less at the same time of their

²⁴ On 26 September 2005, the governor of the Bank of Korea (BOK), Park Seung, on the basis of a three-month research carried out by BOK experts, stated that China and India were bound to become the locomotives of world growth in the twenty-first century. In fact, Park pointed out, China's share of the world's gross domestic product was to increase from 4.6 per cent in 2005 to 19.6 per cent by 2040, that is to say one-fifth of the global total. On the other hand, according to Park, India's GDP was to grow from 1.9 per cent to 9.8 per cent, while the US share was to shrink from 30.8 per cent to 18.2 per cent and that of Japan from 12.5 per cent to 5.1 per cent. As a result, according to the BOK projections quoted by Park, India was to overtake Japan by about 2030 and, by about 2050, was expected to match Europe's GDP share at 12 per cent. See 'China to overtake Japan by 2020', *Asia Times*, 28 September 2005. Since then, it has become clear that the BOK's projection erred on the side of caution. Not only has the Chinese economy overtaken Japan well before 2020 (see, e.g., 'China Passes Japan as Second-largest Economy', *The New York Times*, 15 August 2010), but the time considered necessary for China and India to rise as world economic superpowers has been notably shortened. Moreover, in 2011 a study by two Citibank economists, based on the new concept of Global Growth Generators, selected India, instead of China, as the dominant economic power in a not too distant future. According to this study, whereas China will become the major world economic power in 2020, by 2050 India will overtake China, becoming the world's largest economy. See Willem Buiter and Ebrahim Rahbari, *Global Growth Generators. Moving beyond 'Emerging Markets' and 'Bric'*, *Global Economics View* (New York: Citigroup Global Markets Inc., 2011) (http://www.econ.uzh.ch/faculty/groupzilibotti/Conferences/2011Nov21Demo/E_Rahbari.pdf or <http://www.dis.uniroma1.it/~fsr/GEV2011.pdf>). Whereas these sweeping economic provisions must be treated with caution, there is no doubt that, if they are at least nearing to reality, they are tantamount to the statement that the era of Western dominance is nearing its end.

appearance in Europe or in other parts of the Ecumene. This is what I shall try to prove in the following sections.

The Ancient Era

In the period from the agricultural revolution up to the turning of the fifth century CE the socio-economic features that characterize the history of the subcontinent are much the same as those sketched in the previous part of this article. In fact, from the rise of the Indus Valley Civilization around 2600 BC, Indian history can be seen as characterized by the growth of an ever-expanding urban civilization. Thanks to archaeology, we do know now that urban civilization in India did not disappear with the collapse of the Indus Civilization around 1500 BC. Other urban civilizations were contemporaneous to or followed the Indus Civilization, so that the latter collapse—although important—can be considered as a temporary setback in the development of the urban world in India. By Maurya time (*circa* 317—185 BC), Indian cities—although technically less advanced than the Indus Civilization cities—were bigger and present on a much wider part of the Indian subcontinent.²⁵

Archaeology has also shown that during the period of the Indus Valley Civilization the subcontinent was already tied to the Middle East by trade.²⁶ During the Maurya time the interconnections between India and the outside world did intensify, while in India there was the building of a complex network of new roads.²⁷ The development of the urban world and the construction of an ever-expanding road system did continue after the disappearance of the Maurya Empire. During the first century BC the Silk Road in Central Asia was opened and the Indian subcontinent became related to it. During the first century CE, high sea voyages both between the Red Sea and the West Coast of India and between the East Coast of India and the Malacca straits became common.²⁸

²⁵ D.P. Agrawal, *Copper Bronze Age in India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1971); H.D. Sankalia, *The Prehistory and Protohistory of India and Pakistan* (Poona: Deccan College, Postgraduate and Research Institute, 1974) (2nd ed.); D.P. Agrawal, *The Archeology of India* (London: Curzon, 1982); B.K. Thapar, *Recent Archeological Discoveries in India* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985); F.R. Allchin, *The Archeology of Early Historic South Asia. The Emergence of Cities and States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); D.N. Jha, *Ancient India in Historical Outline* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1998).

²⁶ See Shereen Ratnagar, *Encounters: The Westerly Trade of the Harappan Civilization* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981).

²⁷ Romila Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993) (1st ed. 1963); B.K. Thapar, *Recent Archeological Discoveries in India*.

²⁸ P.C. Bagchi, *India and China: A Thousand Years of Cultural Relations* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2008) (1st ed. Calcutta 1944); Luce Boulnois, *The Silk Road* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966); Moti Chandra, *Trade and Trade Routes in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1977); Vimala Begley and Richard Daniel De Puma, eds., *Rome and India: The Ancient Sea Trade* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Himanshu Prabha Ray, *The Winds of Change:*

It was only beginning with the third century CE that—as shown once again by archaeology—this trend did reverse itself in India and the urban world started to decline. The early sixth century witnessed not only the collapse of the Gupta Empire, but also the disappearance of most cities in the Indo-Gangetic Valley.

The Medieval Era

With the sixth century the downward trend that had already become apparent during the Gupta ‘Golden Age’ reached its lowest point. At the time the localization in the countryside of both the economy and the political power became the dominant feature of the age. By that time, most of the cities had disappeared in much of the subcontinent and those still surviving were either religious centres or military headquarters. As in the case of the abbeys in Europe, temples become the main centre of political and economic power. Monetary circulation almost disappeared and, symptomatically, most of the surviving coins, unearthed by archaeology, are high-value gold coins. Clearly, they were minted less for economic than for political reasons, namely to be given by the monarchs to the magnates of the age. Most trade was localized trade and barter had a main role in making it possible.²⁹

This general picture is exactly like the one characterizing other parts of the Ecumene, including Europe. However, it shows some notable exceptions in the South, where the Pallavas of Kanchipuram (end of the sixth—beginning of the eighth centuries) and the Cholas of Tanjore (tenth—twelfth centuries) ruled on kingdoms where cities and long-distance trade, particularly maritime trade, were important. In spite of cities and long-distance maritime trade, the dominant socio-economic structures in most of the geographical areas politically controlled by both Pallavas and Cholas appear to have been characterized by feudal or quasi-feudal features.³⁰ But even if we consider the Pallava and Chola kingdoms

Buddhism and the Maritime Links of Early South Asia (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); Rosa Maria Cimino, ed., *Ancient Rome and India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1994); F. De Romanis and A. Tchernia, eds, *Crossings. Early Mediterranean Contacts with India* (Delhi: Manohar, 1997).

²⁹ Ram Sharan Sharma, ‘Problems of Transition from Ancient to Medieval in Indian History’, *Indian Historical Review* I, no. 1 (March 1974); Ram Sharan Sharma, ‘Feudalism Retouched’, *Indian Historical Review* I, no. 2 (1974); Ram Sharan Sharma, *Urban Decay in India c. 300–c. 1000* (Delhi, 1987). See also D.N. Jha, ed., *The Feudal Order. State, Society and Ideology in Early Medieval India* (Delhi: Manohar, 2002) (1st ed. 2000).

³⁰ As should be clear from what has been said so far, by defining a state as ‘feudal’, I simply mean that it was characterized by a weak central power, as both political power and the economy were located in the countryside and controlled by the local lords or élites. Accordingly, this definition applies to both the ‘feudal states’ as intended, for example, by D.N. Jha (see, e.g., his *Editor’s Introduction* in Jha, *The Feudal Order*, 1–58), and ‘segmentary states’ as intended by Burton Stein (see D.N. Jha, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980). For the debate on ‘feudal states’ vs. ‘segmentary states’ see, e.g., Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Whispers and

as characterized by socio-economic features at variance with those characterizing the Middle Age, the fact remains that the Pallavas and the Cholas cannot be considered anything different from two exceptions to the general rule. Again this is not a peculiarity of India, as shown by a comparison within Europe. In the Cholas' time, namely the sixth–eighth centuries, the surviving Byzantine cities in Europe and the Near East—particularly, but not only Constantinople—, the permanence of a still flourishing monetary economy and the still existing currents of long-distance trade that characterized the Eastern Roman empire cannot be construed as changing the general situation in Europe. This went on being characterized by the collapse of the urban sector, by the radical contraction of the monetary economy and by the virtual disappearance of long-distance trade. Analogously, in the same period in which the Pallavas flourished in India, the rise of the Italian cities in the northern part of the peninsula, which became the hubs of long-distance trade in Europe and the Mediterranean, did not change the overall reality of a feudal socio-economic system then prevailing in Europe as well as in large swathes of Italy itself.

In India as in the remainder of the Ecumene, in due time a counter-tendency to the situation of localization in the countryside of both the political power and the economy asserted itself. Indeed, the new phase became apparent with the rise and consolidation of the Delhi sultanate in the thirteenth century. The mainstays of the sultanate were a number of new cities, which were the residence of the new Islamic ruling class, their servants and the service categories that catered to their needs.³¹ A massive trade with the Middle East became an important feature of the economy of the Sultanate. In a region like the Indian subcontinent, where for climatic reasons it was not easy to breed vigorous horses, this trade was started and carried out in order to get the warhorses necessary to cope with the Mongol invasions.³² An economy characterized by the expansion and importance of the urban sector and the existence of significant currents of long-distance trade made possible the shifting back of political power from the countryside to the main cities. From Balban (1246–1287) to Ala-ud-din Khalji (1296–1316) to

Shouts: Some Recent Writings on Medieval South India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 38(Pt. 4), (2001): 453–65.

³¹ M. Habib, 'Urban Revolution in Northern India', in *Politics and Society During the Early Medieval Period: Collected Works of Professor Mohammad Habib*, Vol I, ed. K.A. Nizami (New Delhi: People Publishing House, 1974), 59–80, reprinted in Jos J.L. Gommans and Dirk H.A. Kolff (eds), *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia 1000–1800* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 45–65; Irfan Habib, 'Economic History of the Delhi Sultanate—An Essay in Interpretation', *Indian Historical Review* 4, no. 2 (1978); Irfan Habib, 'Barani's Theory of the History of the Delhi Sultanate', *Indian Historical Review* 7, nos 1–2 (1980–1981). Of course, the periodization followed in these works is the traditional one; accordingly the Indian Middle Age is supposed to begin with the rise of the Delhi Sultanate.

³² Simon Digby, *War-Horse and Elephant in the Delhi [sic] Sultanate. A Study of Military Supplies* (Oxford: Orient Monographs, 1971); *ibid.*, 'The Maritime Trade of India', in *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, eds Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (Hyderabad: Orient Longman in association with Cambridge University Press, 1982), 125–59.

Muhammad bin Tughlak (1325–1351), the story of the Delhi Sultanate can be seen as a continuous attempt at political centralization.

Indeed, this effort at political centralization, which reached its apex under Ala-ud-din Khalji, started to experience increasing difficulties during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlak. No doubt the peculiar character of the Sultan, a ruler who was both gifted and deeply flawed, played a role not only in head-starting the decline of the Sultanate as a political entity, but in the unravelling of the socio-economic system that had come into being in India during the central phase of the Middle Age. Muhammad bin Tughlak's personal quirks and follies, however, were not the only forces at play and, certainly, not even the most important ones. This is shown by the fact that the turning point in this Sultan's reign was his failed attempt to suppress the rebellion in Ma'bar, which was a direct result of the plague that hit both Muhammad bin Tughlak's army and the Sultan himself.³³ This was part of the pandemic that had started in China in the 1320s and that, for the whole century, moving westward, devastated the whole of Asia, Europe and North Africa.³⁴ Moreover, although further research is necessary to give a clear-cut answer to the problem, it is reasonable to assume that the troubles in the Gangetic doab, which were worsened by Muhammad bin Tughlak's wrong policies and massive use of violence, were related to the setting-in of a long-term agrarian crisis that, because of ecological reasons, in the Gangetic Doab as elsewhere in the Ecumene, was hitting the traditional and most developed centres of high agrarian production.³⁵

As a result of the failure of Muhammad bin Tughlak's policies, after his death a reaction set in and expressed itself in the decision by his successor, Firuz Shah (1351–1388) to give up the centralizing policy pursued by his predecessors. Accordingly, in what remained the most extensive Indian state of the age, the same socio-economic characteristics that had prevailed at the beginning of the Middle Age started to reassert themselves. Moreover, it can be argued that the change of policy implemented by Firuz Shah played a crucial role in weakening the Sultanate both politically and militarily. After Firuz's death, it resulted in the Sultanate's inability to cope with Timur's invasion, which brought about the sack of Delhi and the virtual destruction of the city (1398), as well as the

³³ Nilankata Sastri, *A History of South India* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1992) (4th ed.), 237–38.

³⁴ McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 143–51; Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 170–75; Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*, 36–38. The spread of the plague in India goes unnoticed in these works (see, e.g., the map in Abu-Lughod, 172–73). But the plague was there, as shown not only by the events involving the failed reconquest of Ma'bar by Muhammad bin Tughlak in 1333 (see note 34) but by the assertion of the historian Badauni who, referring to the situation in Delhi in the aftermath of Timur's sacking (1399), writes that 'such a famine and pestilence fell upon Delhi that the city was utterly ruined, and those of the inhabitants who were left died'. Quoted in R.C. Majumdar, H.C. Raychaudhuri and Kalinkar Datta, *An Advanced History of India* (London: MacMillan, 1967), 329 (emphasis added).

³⁵ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2, 1974, 387–91.

de facto collapse of the Sultanate. Whatever power was still in the hands of the Delhi Sultans on the eve of Timur's invasion disappeared, leaving a situation in which the political and economic power had largely gone back to the localities. This situation did not change as the century progressed. Indeed, while during the fifteenth century the reborn Delhi Sultanate gradually rebrought under its overlordship most of the Indo-Gangetic Valley, it was unable to exert any kind of close-knit central control on the great nobles who continued to act as little kings in their own fiefdoms, which, in turn, included most of the geographical area encompassed by the Sultanate. Accordingly, the new Delhi Sultanate, although extensive, remained a decentralized feudal structure. Moreover, Ibrahim Lodi (r. 1517–26), the last Delhi Sultan, was forced to give up the extraction of the land revenue in cash and go back to the payments in kind.³⁶

For a long time, historians have depicted what was the other main Indian state in the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries, namely the Vijayanagara Empire, as a centralized military monarchy. In the late 1980s, however, Burton Stein—generally considered the foremost authority on the subject—conclusively showed that even Vijayanagara was a largely decentralized political structure, whose *maharadirajas* were nothing more than feudal kings presiding over a set of powerful feudal lords.³⁷

The Early Modern Era

During Akbar's reign (1556–1605) the land tax came to be paid in silver once again. Likewise, long-distance trade became very important once again, as shown among other things by the fact that silver itself was transported to India through trade.³⁸ A number of great cities became the mainstay of the Empire. Akbar centralized the power of the state, even if this centralization was not carried to its final consequences.³⁹ It was only under Akbar's third successor, Aurangzeb (1658–1707), that territorial over-extension—which began with the invasion of the Deccan in 1681—plus the fact that the process of centralization of state power had been left unfinished by Akbar and his successors were among the main causes

³⁶ Irfan Habib, 'Agrarian Economy', in *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, 67.

³⁷ Burton Stein, *Vijayanagara* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

³⁸ Aziza Hasan, 'The Silver Currency Output of the Mughal Empire and Prices in India During the 16th and 17th Centuries', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 6, no. 1 (March 1969), 85–116; Om Prakash and J. Krishnamurty, 'Mughal Silver Currency—A Critique' and Aziza Hasan, 'Mughal Silver Currency—A Reply', both in *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 7, no. 1 (March 1970), respectively, 139–50 and 151–60. Apart from the different interpretations of the authors on the origins of the coined silver circulating in the Mughal Empire, what is important from my standpoint is the agreement by all the above authors that the silver necessary for coining in the Mughal Empire was imported and not produced in India.

³⁹ Douglas E. Streusand, *The Formation of the Mughal Empire* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

that, in the following century, triggered the process that was to end up in the break up of the Mughal Empire. By the 1720s the Empire had become a kind of loose federation of de facto independent provinces, over which the imperial paramountcy was purely nominal.⁴⁰ Moreover, large swathes of the subcontinent had passed under the sway of the Marathas. Like the contemporary Mughal Empire, the Maratha dominions were not a unified imperial structure, but a loose confederation of de facto independent monarchies.

Up to a few decades ago, this and the fact that the various Indian states were continuously at war with one another resulted in the historians characterizing the eighteenth century as an age of 'decadence and depravity' or, to put it in less emotional terms, a dark period of political and military anarchy (provisionally interrupted by the rise of the colonial power), plus economic collapse.⁴¹ However, recent scholarship has conclusively shown that the two main features of the century were: (a) that many of the Indian states emerging in the eighteenth century did have a degree of centralization well superior to the one that had characterized the Mughal Empire; (b) that, in spite of the fact that some parts of India, including the symbolically and politically important area of Delhi, were devastated by war, on the whole the economy of India showed itself to be extremely resilient. Even areas, for example in the Deccan, which had been devastated by war showed the capability to bounce back. Still on the eve of colonial conquest, most of India was characterized by a flourishing economy. Monetary circulation was increasing, rather than decreasing, and long-distance trade remained important. In the eighteenth century, India consolidated its position as the most important exporter worldwide of finished and semi-finished cotton and cotton-mixed-with-silk textiles. In turn this presupposed a complex economic and financial organization.⁴²

⁴⁰ See Zair Uddin Malik, *The Reign of Muhammad Shah 1719–1748* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1977).

⁴¹ The quotation—an ironic one—is taken from Hermann Goetz, *The Crisis of Indian Civilisation in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, type-script without the date of a lecture by the author, 1. From internal evidence (see 1), this lecture appears to have been delivered after Indian independence, being a shorter version (25 typed pages against 51 printed pages) of Goetz's previous lecture, *The Crisis of Indian Civilisation in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries. The Genesis of Indo-Muslim Civilisation* (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1938). In both lectures, Goetz argued pithily that India during the eighteenth century, far from going through a period of cultural decadence, was characterized by an extraordinary cultural efflorescence. However, Goetz tended to accept the eighteenth century as an age of political and economic decay.

⁴² See Frank Perlin, 'Proto-industrialization and Pre-colonial South Asia', *Past and Present* no. 98, February 1983; *ibid.*, 'Growth of Money Economy and Some Questions of Transition in Late Pre-colonial India', *The Journal of Peasant History* 11, no. 3 (April 1984); C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars. North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); *ibid.*, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas 1600–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

The Late Modern Era

The beginning of the late Modern Era coincides with the establishing of the colonial hegemony, namely with the destruction first of Tipu Sultan (Anglo-Mysorean war of 1799) and, soon afterwards, of Maratha power (Anglo-Maratha war of 1803–1805).⁴³ We now know that colonial hegemony, far from being a blessing for India—as claimed by colonial historians—put an end to the political and economic developments of the eighteenth century and brought about a series of adverse economic developments: monetary circulation declined; economic depression set in; long-distance trade changed in nature and was politically manipulated in such a way to cause a net export of wealth from India to Great Britain. Summing up, differently from what was the case in the West, in India—as in China—the beginning of the Late Modern Era was characterized by a process of de-development.⁴⁴ In turn, this process of de-development was the natural result of the kind of world system that had emerged at the turn from the early to the late modern era. This new system, as already recalled, was characterized by the fact that, for the first time in history, a well-defined geographical and geopolitical area was militarily and, therefore, politically and economically dominant on the remainder of the globe. This situation contributes to explain why, while the West grew, the Rest declined. Of course, as in history nothing is permanent, in India counter-tendencies had already started setting in at the end of the nineteenth century and became increasingly visible and relevant beginning with the First World War. But, in India (as in China), the turning point came only after the collapse of European power in Asia, following the Second World War, and the rise of the bipolar world. That was the time when India was finally able to get out of the situation of economic stagnation that had characterized the first half of the twentieth century, embarking on a period of growth that, beginning with the early 1980s, became increasingly fast.⁴⁵ In turn, it is this growth that—together with that of China—is prefiguring the coming into being of a new international order, where, as in the precolonial era, the most advanced countries in the world will be in Asia and, maybe more importantly, no single area of the globe will be in

⁴³ British territorial expansion of India began with the conquest of Bengal in 1757. By 1765, not only Bengal, but large swathes of Northern India, including Awadh, had been brought under the direct or indirect control of the English East India Company. But this was far from meaning that the British were the hegemonic power in India, as shown by the long and inconclusive wars of 1773–1784. Only the military annihilation and physical elimination of Tipu Sultan of Mysore (1799) and the crushing defeat of the major Maratha prince of the age, Daulat Rao Scindia, in the battle of Assaye (1803), won by the future Duke of Wellington, paved the way for the British hegemony south of the Himalaya. This was ratified in 1806 by the British peace treaty with Jaswant Rao Holkar, the only Indian prince who, thanks to his prowess as a guerrilla leader, had been able to survive the British onslaught.

⁴⁴ The term and concept are borrowed from Sara Roy, 'The Gaza Strip. A Case of Economic De-development', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 17, no. 1 (Autumn, 1987): 56–88.

⁴⁵ See Deepak Nayyar, 'India's Unfinished Journey: Transforming Growth into Development', *Modern Asian Studies* 40, Pt. 3 (2006): 797–832.

a position of hegemony vis-à-vis the rest.⁴⁶ At that point, what we call the Modern Era will come to its end and historians and intellectuals will have to create a new terminology. Although that moment is not so far away, it is far away enough to allow us to close at this point our discussion on periodization in both world history and Indian history.

Conclusion

The above-proposed periodization has, of course, its strength and its weakness. What, in my opinion, makes it much more satisfactory than the traditional periodization is the fact that it takes into account both the economic structure and the general political evolution, rather than focussing narrowly on the religious composition of the upper crust of the ruling class. In doing so, the proposed analytical model focuses both on the fundamental unity of Indian history and on the basic unity tying the Indian to the world experience. On the other hand, this model de-emphasizes the divisive elements of the Indian experience, represented by the separate religious strands historically present within the Indian society.

Clearly, the not-so-hidden agenda behind this model is one that, on the one hand, emphasizes the basic unity of humankind and the equal worth and dignity of the several peoples in which it is structured, and, on the other hand, de-emphasizes the importance of religion *as a divisive factor*.

Once this is said, the obvious objection that can be made to this model is that it has been built without any serious effort at integrating cultural and religious factors in it. Here the relevant questions become: Is there a cultural unity characterizing the various eras as they have been defined in the above model? And, if a cultural unity does not exist, is the proposed periodization acceptable? Shouldn't we strive to build a new periodization based not only on socio-economic and political factors but cultural and religious factors as well?

All these are very important questions, which deserve proper answers. Personally, I am convinced that the above-proposed periodization can be refined and shown to be relevant at the religious and cultural levels as well. But, no doubt, additional research on this topic is needed, which will have to be carried out by scholars both in possession of the relevant analytical tools for an in-depth examination of the cultural history of India and with a wide enough vision to be able to compare and relate the cultural to the socio-economic and political history both of India and the world at large. And this is a task that the author of these lines willingly leaves to others.

⁴⁶ See note 24.