

Themes in Early Indian History

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Published by: Principal
Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira
Belur Math, Howrah 711202

Copyright: Principal
Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira
Belur Math, Howrah 711202

ISBN: 978-81-966201-6-5

Published on: October 14, 2023 (Mahālayā)

Price: Rs 400/-
(Rupees four hundred only)

Cover Design &
Page Setup: Gautam Mukhopadhyay

Printed by: Soumen Traders Syndicate
9/3, K. P. Coomer Street, Bally
Howrah – 711202
Email: stsbally@gmail.com

Publisher's Note

A national seminar was organized by the Department of History on January 19 and 20, 2023 to focus on various issues in early Indian History. The theme of that two-day seminar was “Themes in Early Indian History”. A number of research scholars and students from various universities and colleges across the country participated and presented (online and offline) their papers. This volume is a collection of twenty five essays and almost all were originally presented in the two-day seminar.

The Department of History later took the initiative to publish these valuable papers and the departmental faculty members really worked hard to accomplish the task. I convey my sincere regards to all of them. Swami Umapadananda, Jt. Coordinator, Swami Vivekananda Research Centre (SVRC), Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira (and also a monastic faculty member of the Department of History) took the responsibility of making all necessary correspondences to publish this volume. My love and best wishes are due to him. Sri Ushmeya Majumder, Sri Sukrit Das and Sri Sanju Sarkar (all of them are the alumni of this department) checked proofs. I thankfully acknowledge their sincere effort. Nurmahammad Sekh, Assistant Professor in the Department of History worked hard to edit the volume. This publication was impossible without his sincere initiative. I convey my heartiest love to him. Sri Gautam Mukhopadhyay, senior faculty member of the same department took the

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responsibility of making all designs and page setting of this volume. I convey my sincere thanks to him.

Finally, I seek the blessings of the Holy Trio for all the contributors of this volume.

Om Peace! Peace! Peace!

October 2, 2023
Belur Math, Howrah

Swami Mahaprajnananda
Principal

Introduction

This edited volume is a collection of scholarly essays originally presented in the Two-day International Seminar entitled “Themes in Early Indian History” organized by the Department of History, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belurmath Howrah, in January this year. The paper presenters comprised of undergraduate and post graduate students, research scholars and early career teachers of History, Anthropology and Philosophy affiliated to institutions located in various regions of West Bengal and other states.

The essay by Subrata Chattopadhyay Banerjee details the emergence of Max Müller’s ‘Aryan Invasion Theory’ and argues that most of Müller’s conclusions surrounding the same were erroneous and that scholarly pursuit can be inaccurate if presumed notions and social constructions of theory play a role. The next essay by Souradeep Mukhopadhyay studies performers and performance in the Vedic milieu to discover politico-religious tension between various traditions and point out that the formation of historical narratives or Itihāsa was not necessarily written but rather performed in the cultural setting. Which is why, he suggests, that performance became a lucrative tool for legitimizing the politico-religious authorities. The stereotypical understanding of the Varna-system is also questioned by the positions of the Sūta, Māgadha and Kuśīlava.

Gopal Chandra Das on the other hand shows how Buddha placed great importance on health and how the sangha was concerned about health and healing in early Indian society. Sapan Ghosh looks at the inscriptions of Asoka to emphasize how an emperor felt the practical necessity of protecting lives of animals and hints that it may have served his political agenda also. The focus of the jointly

authored essay by Abhijnan Basu Majumdar & Upamanyu Majumder is the archaeological site of Hulaskhera where the archaeological profile reveal diverse tendencies under different dynastic rulers, particularly the Kushanas; but degrees of change, they infer are relatively more in favour of a continuum rather than drastic mutations.

The foundation of Tibetan Tāntricism through the silk-route is the subject of Sulagna Bhattacharya's essay while Sagnika Bhattacharya looks at the influence of Śāktism in Buddhist Deity-Worship with Special Reference to Goddess Tārā. The worship of Yakshas and Yakshinis in early India is the theme of Pronil Das's essay while Manisha Sharma look at how women were seen through secular forms of literature on one hand and through normative and prescriptive literature on the other to compare the representation of women in two genres of Sanskrit erotic literature. Ratul Bhar chooses to focus on the Mattamayura Sect in Konkan coast to analyze their political as well as religious influence at the court of Śilāhāra dynasty.

Sarala Dasa's Mahābhārata is the focus of Upamanyu Majumder's essay as he underlies its importance as the most revealing narrative on the origin of the Jagannātha cult shaped by both the Brahminical worldview and local traditions. Aditya Bhattacharya's essay on the other hand looks at the early-childhood life-cycle rituals prescribed in the Dharmasāstra corpus in order to investigate the ideal development in the child's life from the perspective of Brahmanical patriarchy in Early India. Reshma Ara discusses the religious contribution of the Kalachuris of Tripuri as imbued by tolerance. Sagnik Saha examines water management under the aegis of the early Ganga rulers in the southern maidan region of Karnataka and endorses an understanding of the distributive agency of a specific assemblage, where water remains an important element.

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The varied usage and importance of Malabathrum, an item in the Indo Roman trade is highlighted in Archisman Patra's essay while Debopom Ghosh decodes democratic practices in early India. Yangden Lepcha on the other hand studies the role of Indian Buddhist philosophers from c. eighth to thirteenth Centuries CE as part of Buddhism's link between India and Tibet. The Bengali section of this volume begins with an essay by Rahul Nag as he talks about the importance of Binjor as an important site which reflected the technical knowhow of the Harappan people. The second essay, that by Samima Nasreen focuses on the animal world as discussed metaphorically in the Upanishads. In Kaushik Ghosh's essay we find aspects of Jaina religion as practiced in Bankura in the early period.

Sangeeta Koley discusses the position of early Indian women as reflected in Yagnabalka smriti while Subhashree Chatterjee, talks about the way sugarcane, its usage and importance is reflected in the writings of foreigners on early India. Nurmahammad Sekh looks at early medieval Bengal as a region where Islam made its initial foray. In Prasenjit Ghosh's essay, we find a discussion of the importance of sea trade in and around the Chittagong from the seventh till tenth century. Mofazur Rahman Mollah on the other hand discusses the Brahmanical classes of Samatat Harikel region in ancient Bengal. Sayan Debnath talks of the Karam festival as part of the early tradition of the Junglemahal region.

The ranges of the essays are wide-ranging and varied. As reiterated in a previous edited volume, though I am not an expert on early India, I enjoyed reading the essays and found quite a few of them original and thought provoking. I hope readers to absorb the flavor of the papers by reading them thoroughly.

Readers may find some papers in this volume a bit amateurish, devoid of any argument or factual and bland, but the editors used their discretion to keep them nonetheless to

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encourage the young authors, especially students with the hope that they would hone up their argumentative skills and produce better papers in future. Here I should mention that the arguments in the essays published here are the authors' themselves and the editors and no way responsible for them. I urge all readers to go through each and every paper and judge for themselves. We would also hope to hear from you and your feedback would be most welcome in any way that can improve future publications from our end.

(Readers will find a note on diacritical marks used in the last page of this volume)

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