

questioned the wisdom of looking at ancient India from the modern point of view. His earlier writings show his deep interest in the materialist philosophy of some heterodox sects. Later he believed that the past should be read out of curiosity and pleasure. His book *Wonder That Was India* (1951) is a sympathetic survey of the various facets of ancient Indian culture and civilization free from the prejudices that plague the writings of V.A. Smith or other British writers.

Basham's book marks a great shift from political to non-political history. The same shift is evident in D.D. Kosambi's (1907-1966) book *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (1957), later popularised in *The Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (1965). Kosambi blazed a new trail in Indian history. His treatment follows the materialist interpretation of history, which is derived from the writings of Karl Marx. He presents the history of ancient Indian society, economy and culture as an integral part of the development of the forces and relations of production. His was the first survey book to show the stages of social and economic development in terms of tribal and class processes. He was criticised by many scholars including Basham, but his book continues to be widely used.

During the last twenty-five years there has been a sea change in the

methods and orientation of those who work on ancient India. They lay greater stress on social, economic and cultural processes and try to relate them to political developments. They take account of the stratification of the texts and compare their conventional nature with archaeological and anthropological evidence. All this bodes good for the future of historical studies. Unfortunately a few Indian writers magnify the role of religion, and believe that everything good and great, originated in their country. Western writers no longer insist that all such things came to India from outside. But some of them hold that religious ideas, rituals, caste, kinship, and tradition are the main forces in Indian history. They also underscore various divisive features which made for stagnation. They are more concerned about the problem of stability and continuity. They seem to be fascinated by old, exotic elements and want to preserve them for ever. Such an approach implies that Indian society has not changed and cannot be changed. It means that underdevelopment is an integral part of the Indian character.

Thus, the chauvinists and sophisticated colonialists use the study of India's past to prevent its progress. It is, therefore, essential to take a balanced and objective view of ancient India.