Uneven development, innovations and consumption: the case of premodern India

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Uneven development of societies: this vague expression designed to grasp the origins of the present-day imbalance and structural inequality in different parts of the world, perhaps requires some preliminary clarification. When the development of two societies or regions is classified as „uneven“, it may mean that these two societies or regions develop (or move) basically in the same direction but that the tempo of their progress is different. From the point of view of comparative analysis, this is a relatively simple case: the basic criteria for comparison, set by these common developmental tendencies, can be assumed to be in both cases the same.

Uneven development, however, may not be the best term for historical processes that can be interpreted as mutually divergent. Parts of eastern and southern Europe can probably be characterized as lagging behind other, more dynamic and developed regions in the northern and western parts of the continent; on the other hand, it can be argued that northern India in the Middle Ages, for example, presents a rather different case of development: a systematical build-up of state structures (the so called sultanate type of government) that can be hardly labeled as feudal in the European sense of the word; beneath these structures imported from the Islamic Middle East, a stable, hierarchically ordered society based on a great number of clearly defined and internally relatively homogeneous groups whose mutual interaction was regulated by rules and customs inherited from immemorable past. The long-term structural stability of this society contrasts with what could from the Indian perspective look like the inherent long-term instability of European societies. The very concept of development may be seen as a product, a particular interpretation of this perceived instability. To label the parallel and mutually independent developments of these two civilizations in the premodern period as uneven might therefore be misleading. It was only from the nineteenth century onwards, when Indian society came under British domination and gradually accepted
the western concept of development and progress, that the distance between them became measurable and their development classifiable as uneven. Only now, when both types of societies have come to share similar goals and expectations, can the structural features that India has inherited from her „divergent“ age be interpreted as negative relics of the past, retarding the reforms of a now developing country. It should be kept in mind that the comparatistic term „uneven development“ presupposes such a common perspective.

The second point relating to the term „uneven“ concerns the nature of the relationship between the subjects chosen for this type of comparison. In some cases at least, including the Indian one, it can be argued that the change in general perspective in one society was brought about by a violent irruption of the ideas and power structures of the other: before the colonial period India did not seek Europe, nor was she interested in her values and ideas. Of course, Britain did not subdue the subcontinent in order to spread her enlightened ideas there, but to make profit and exploit the country economically. In the Indian context, at least, the term „uneven“ contains the element of structurally grounded inequality: one participant in the relationship developed at the expense of the other, and the changes on one side could not remain without consequences for the other. Dependency thus becomes an important component of this unevenness.

Therefore, as far as India is concerned, the problem of the uneven level and tempo of development has to be seen in a double perspective: first, the greater or lesser degree of flexibility in its premodern heritage and the differing degree of aptitude in its various components to conform to the changed societal paradigm; and second, the process of political and economic subordination that created for the subordinate partner in the relationship an additional handicap on the newly delineated path. To put it simply: India’s problems with development are not due exclusively to its unfortunate colonial past, but are also not caused solely by the stubborn survival of precolonial structures - at least some of them may prove to be surprisingly flexible. In the future, they may even attempt to redefine the imposed paradigm in such a way that some of the so far commonly shared criteria of development and progress will lose their universal validity. Fundamentalist redefinitions of value scales can serve as an example of such a process.

The aim of the present article is to point to several features that, in the opinion of the present author, distinguished the premodern Indian society from its contemporaneous European counterpart. To bring them into sharper focus, an attempt has been made to register and interpret different reactions of European and Indian societies toward various types of
innovations - in technology, organization of production and consumption habits. Differently structured societies reacted differently to identical stimuli and innovations. From their different reactions some conclusions can be drawn about their vital characteristics in the premodern period, when they had not yet been constrained by the vis maior of colonial reality which made them behave in a less „natural“ way. A natural capability to assimilate innovations is important esp. in the context of the development debate. Indeed, a comparative history of innovations, of their different fate in different societies would make a fascinating, if difficult, subject of historical study. The present article can not do more than bring together few points relevant to the Indian case.

The most visible and probably easiest to study and compare are the developments in the field of technological innovations. In the sphere of military technology the obvious candidate for comparison is the spread of gunpowder and related developments in the manufacturing of guns and in their subsequent use in wars. Marshall Hodgson in his famous historical synthesis of Islamic societies\footnote{M.G.S. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam. Vol. III: The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times. Chicago 1974. The thesis is echoed in other recent synthetic works dealing with military technology. See, e.g. W.H. McNeill, The Pursuit of Power. Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000. Chicago 1982, pp. 95, 98. His statement that „the extent of the Mughal, Muscovite, and Ottoman empires was defined in practice by the mobility of their respective imperial gun parks“ is based, as far as Mughals are concerned, on a gross overestimation of real capabilities of the imperial artillery.} formulated an often cited theory of gunpowder technologies as causes for the rise of the three early modern, so called „gunpowder empires“ - Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal. According to this thesis the absorption and subsequent effective use of this innovation radically changed the political map of the Near East and the Indian subcontinent. The present author does not feel qualified to pass judgements about the relevance of this theory to the Ottoman and Safavid case; however, as far as Mughal India is concerned, some reservations are not out of place. A closer look at the passages in the official Mughal imperial chronicle, the Akbarnama by Abul Fazl, describing the battles and sieges that ultimately brought the Mughals their great-power status, will show that the use of firearms was seldom of decisive importance. In battles, the superior qualities of Mughal cavalry, and in sieges, the persistence and endurance of Mughal besiegers who could rely on effective system of material and financial suppport, were generally of decisive importance. As far as handguns were concerned, from the start the Mughals had no monopoly on their use. Field guns, on the other hand, were often too big, slow in firing frequency and prone to burst.

Casting and servicing guns in Mughal India brings us very close to some important characteristics of the Indian technological potential. The guns burst so often because they had
been cast from metal melted not in one but parallelly in five or six furnaces; the resulting mixture was not then perfectly homogeneous.\textsuperscript{2} The metal for one big gun (the bigger, the more prestigious, awesome and noisy) could not be melted in one furnace because the smiths were unable to generate a temperature high enough to process the greater quantity of ore at one time. To achieve this, more sophisticated, power-driven bellows would have had to supplant the primitive bellows worked manually by single operators that were commonly in use in Mughal India. This more sophisticated equipment, well known in this age in China and Europe, required, in order to work smoothly, the use of gears - a device known in India only in its most rudimentary form. This deficiency in mechanical equipment had, of course, a retarding effect on the development of a number of other, non-military technologies: the persistence of the most primitive methods in mining is but one example.\textsuperscript{3}

How to account for the conspicuous absence of labour-saving devices that were so widespread and popular in contemporaneous Europe and China? Paradoxically, this feature may be due to the same causes that made the Indian exports so attractive and popular in Europe: the low cost and relative abundance of a skilled work force. The regular agrarian surplus allowed not only the maintenance of a huge administrative and military apparatus, that redistributed a large part of the surplus among its members, but also freed a significant proportion of the agrarian population for at least part-time non-agricultural pursuits. On the other hand, the relative abundance of labour kept wages low and allowed the workers little more than a life at the level of bare subsistence. Introduction of labour saving devices makes economic sense only if the additional investment in mechanization is less than the cost of hiring an additional labour force. This condition was (and in some spheres still is) hard to achieve in India. In areas where the textile industry was dispersed in the villages, the textile-workers were often members of families belonging to the cultivating castes or groups, and were therefore not absolutely dependent on the sale of their manufactured products. Even if such part-time work raised the total income of a family, it was far too small to generate resources for investment into technological innovations.

It is obvious that even a great mass of producers impoverished by ruthless confiscatory taxation would generate, at best, only a very moderate interest for new investments and also a


\textsuperscript{3}I. Habib, \textit{ibid.}, p. 162 on gearing and p. 173 on the limitations imposed by this deficiency on the effectivity of mining.
very limited demand for goods destined for consumption generally. It can be shown that the extremely heavy taxation depriving the peasant of between thirty and sixty per cent of his produce was a consequence of the age-old political wisdom of Indian rulers, Hindu or Muslim, that money and extra resources left in the countryside breed only strife and undesirable ambitions on the part of the local agrarian aristocracy.\(^4\) Scattered all over northern India, these zamindars, „land-holders“ as they are referred to in the literature, maintained at the end of the 16th century, according to Abul Fazl’s statistics, a total of slightly more than four million armed retainers, mostly foot-soldiers.\(^5\) Any sign of weakness on the part of the central authority gave rise to a strong temptation among the zamindars to stop paying taxes (i.e. to expell the official tax-collectors and hope that a half-hearted attempt from the weakened centre to reimpose its authority could be repelled with local forces) or to rise in open rebellion. Akbarnama registers over one hundred cases of such local „insubordinance“ or „contumacy“ merely during the reign of Akbar (1556-1605).

Even that part of the surplus which was left in the countryside to this hereditary zamindari class (between 10 and 20 per cent of the collected tax) was consequently invested in the strengthening of their local power bases rather than in agricultural improvements. The reasons for this are not hard to find. The zamindars were usually not owners of the land in the proper sense of the word, but only the hereditary recipients of a certain part of its produce. They were also not masters over the peasants capable of imposing any feudal obligations upon them. Their right as well as that of the state was, by and large, limited to collecting revenue, and it did not interfere with the actual process of production.\(^6\) The peasant class in a locality was usually not a composite of individual and mutually independent families, but a block or several blocks of caste or kin groups capable of concerted action, and often of violent

\(^4\) For classical formulation of this wisdom, see Barani’s chronicle Tarikh-i Firuz Shahi. Zia-ud-din Barani, later Kings of Delhi or Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi. In: *The History of India As Told by Its Own Historians. The Posthumous Papers of the Late Sir H. M. Elliot*. Ed. by J. Dowson. 2. ed., Calcutta 1953, p. 64. H. Kulke traces its history to pre-Islamic India and locates similar statement in Kalhana’s historical account of Kashmir Rajatarangini. H. Kulke, D. Rothermund, *A History of India*. London, Sydney 1986, pp. 174-175. This disruptive role of money and wealth in general was one of the consequences of the divisive character of Indian social organization. Further reflections of the present author can be found in his article Some Remarks on the Relation of Money and Political Power in Medieval Islamic India. *Archiv Orientální*, vol. 62 (1994), pp. 265-277.


resistance. The local zamindar was sometimes a member of a branch of such a dominant caste or kin group in the locality or wider area; sometimes he and his extended family belonged to a different, higher-status but minority group. In any case, his power and influence could be tested at any time by the tilling classes or members of another branch of his own group. In order to remain in power he had to maintain his own band or even a small army of armed retainers - and use them not only to buttress his authority vis-à-vis the cultivating peasants, but also to resist the central authority if he felt it worth the risk.

In Europe also, a large part of the taxed wealth went into the military sphere; compared to India, however, greater part of this income was spent on procuring more sophisticated technical equipment (continually improved guns and muskets that at one point brought a revolution in the battle tactics, ships, etc.); this unsatiable demand alone kept busy a significant part of the industrial sector. On the other hand, the impulses the Indian type of warfare generated in this respect, were relatively weak. One military article that was in constant demand in the Mughal army were the superior Arabian, Persian and Central Asian horses whose import, according to recent estimates, reached the number of 25 000 a year. The Mughal cavalry, esp. the elite units of mounted bowmen who within the Indian environment kept alive the military skills of Central Asian warriors, along with the vast material and financial resources extracted from the countryside, gave the Mughals decisive edge over their local or regional opponents. Local roots and the parochial outlook of the zamindari class did not create favourable conditions for any sort of technological arms race that would enhance the importance of more advanced industrial technologies.

The situation in the Deccan where the independent sultanates of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golkonda fought for regional supremacy and, from the beginning of the 17th century, increasingly for their very existence in the face of the ever growing Mughal power, was hardly different. These states tried to strengthen their defence capabilities by marshalling into their service new elements - Marathi light cavalry (whose hit-and-run tactics finally proved fatal to the Mughals) and foreign mercenaries servicing the guns and skilled in the use of muskets. The Mughals did the same: the gun founders were initially Turks coming from the Ottoman empire, and the gunners, as the 17th century proceeded, increasingly were European adventurers seeking new employers after the end of the Thirty-years' war in Europe. Until the

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late 17th century the transfer of new military skills and technologies was restricted to immigrating outsiders, with little attempt on the part of Indian military structures to assimilate them fully, let alone to exploit their full potential through innovations in the field of battle tactics. Significantly, new features were incorporated into the traditional pattern of warfare and, esp. the guns, seem to have acquired a distinct function as a symbol of prestige and authority; no „military revolution“ took place in precolonial India.

In the Deccan, however, where the states were locked into a prolonged life-and-death struggle among themselves (and until 1565 against the Vijayanagara) and later against the Mughals, one might expect to find a greater readiness for experimentation and for radical innovation in technology than in the north. The permanently high level of power struggle and organized warfare among well organized state structures created an environment resembling in certain respects that of contemporary Europe. These circumstances might seem to have been more conducive to an arms race with all its technological consequences than was the situation in the north. However, until the late 18th century no such developments were noticeable - despite the existence of regular units of Portuguese musqueteers and gunners in the local armies and the occasional successes of siege artilleries against city walls. The reasons for this stubborn conservatism should probably be sought in the social and cultural characteristics of the Indian military elites. The Turco-Mongol horsemen and their descendants that made up the core of the fighting forces of the Mughals, their Rajput opponents as well as the Telugu military elites in the south, were hereditary social groups with sharply defined codes of military behaviour and very definite ideas about honour and proper conduct in battle. A very characteristic example in this respect is the decision of Vijayaraghava, the Nayaka of Tanjavur, who after the loss of his city to Madurai siege forces in 1673, entered the battlefield and, in what was to be a honourable military suicide, forbade his men to use firearms and ordered them to fight only with swords and spears - „because if one dies from some lousy bullet shot from a distance, he fails to enter heaven - that is nothing like a warrior’s death.„\(^8\) Such an attitude, also widespread among north Indian Rajput elites and to some extent among the Mughal warriors, seems to resemble the behaviour of Mamluk military elite as described in the classic study by D. Ayalon\(^9\); it would be difficult to find examples of it in 16th or 17th century Europe.


Different moral codes, different sets of values, different rationalities stand behind these different notions of personal honour, military (and, in the broader sense, worldly) success and ultimately life and death. Reduced to this level, deeply personal but at the same time moulded by prevalent socio-cultural (perhaps civilizational) patterns, the problem can hardly be formulated as one of uneven development in the military (or other) sphere: to this author, such an approach seems to be largely irrelevant and its conclusions trivial. A comparative study must go to a deeper level of analysis of the basic social structures, societal patterns, and the causes of their long-term stability or, as the case may be, flexibility.

The relation between practical (in the modern sense of the word) and symbolical or ritual aspects of behaviour may also be studied in less dramatic contexts than that of the military; significant differences, in comparison with Europe, can be shown to exist also in the thus far little studied sphere of consumption habits, and the flexibility or stability of their patterns in the face of various innovations. A study of this theme is important not only in order to grasp an essential component of the social and cultural characteristics of a given society but - since the dynamics of consumption mould the structure and quantity of demand - also in order to better understand the basic mechanisms governing production, commerce and the economy in general.

To begin with, any simple juxtaposition of an alleged European flexibility, readiness for innovations and thirst for novelties on the one hand, and an Indian rigidity on the other would be an oversimplification. As late as the 19th century, there were agrarian regions in Europe whose consumption habits were quite traditional, wealth was invested into land and cattle or spent on magnificent weddings, funerals and other feasts. French peasant demonstrating these preferences has been characterized as „an uninviting market for mass manufactures“.¹⁰ This description could be applied with minimal modifications to the Indian peasant of the premodern and, in many regions, of the modern age as well. A generally low level of consumption of goods which had their origin outside of the agrarian sphere or were not directly relevant to its basic economic functioning was a feature common to many agrarian societies, European or Asian. So was the habit to demonstrate social status by spending huge (sometimes prohibitive) amounts of money in an ostentatious display of wealth.

during the appropriate social events, rather than by making everyday use of goods considered to be luxurious (which would often be an impracticable course in rural conditions).

In the Indian case, a relatively strong village autarky was coupled with the ever-present normative activity of the institution of castes or other corporate bodies. Particular castes were powerful guardians of very specific habits in the sphere of social intercourse, processes of production, food and dressing that gave their members their distinct identity and definite place in the larger society.\(^{11}\) It was almost impossible and often risky to break the established rules. As an expression of higher personal aspirations, it would not only be ineffective but counterproductive. Social mobility was not unknown in the premodern Indian society; however, it could manifest itself only in the framework of the established caste system. This mobility, for want of better term often called „sanskritization“\(^{12}\) by social and cultural anthropologists, concerns not individuals but whole castes: a long-term improvement of the economic standing of a caste leads to collective and concerted attempts on the part of its members to raise their ritual status by changing several important habits and rules of conduct and to redefine the position of their caste in the caste hierarchy. The change often takes the form of adopting the more orthodox behavioural patterns of a higher caste (hence „sanskritization“; depending on concrete context this process could be also called a „rajputization“, „kshatriyazation“ or by similar more or less ugly sounding term). The consequences of the normative and regulative functions of these corporate bodies for the formation and flexibility not only of production processes and technologies but also of demand and consumption are obvious. Caste prescriptions could only reinforce the natural conservatism in the habits of various status groups.

This more or less general characteristic feature of demand (the behaviour of aristocratic classes may may be to certain extent different) had in turn important consequences for the organization of the supply side of the equation. The structure of the premodern Indian textile industry may serve as an example. The three great textile producing areas were located in Bengal, Coromandel and Gujarat. Each of these regions excelled in the manufacture of a different kind of textile goods and the specialization was carried still further.


in particular localities, each of which brought its products, marked by distinctive colour, pattern, fabric etc., to a great degree of perfection. This highly specialized output was linked to a correspondingly specific and generally stable demand in consumer regions; contact between both was mediated by local merchants possessing the necessary information the areas of production and production costs on the one hand, and the tastes and quantities of particular types of goods required in the respective areas of consumption on the other. It seems that the Indian home market was, at least as far as textiles were concerned, too fragmented to be suited for industrial mass production. Fragmentation and little flexibility or rigidity of tastes were not features limited solely to India: as the Dutch Oost Indische Compagnie soon found out, the situation in the Southeast Asian and Persian textile markets was similar.\textsuperscript{13} Well informed native merchants who operated on the local Asian textile markets with smaller overhead costs and who could therefore content themselves with smaller profits, had thus a distinct advantage over the big European companies geared to trading in great quantities and requiring a higher rate of profit.

Although it is impossible to put in quantitative terms, the Indian textile production supplying domestic and other Asian markets was, through the 17th and 18th centuries, proportionately larger than the share destined for the growing European market. Increase in the European demand could be met by the expansion of the existing production structures (e.g. by shifting from part-time to full-time work) without the introduction of technological innovations. In this period, European companies did not succeed in imposing their control on Indian artisans through the putting-out system introduced in textile producing regions in Europe.\textsuperscript{14} The traditional system, born out of and adapted to the local conditions of demand, production and distribution patterns, worked well, and until the beginning of the colonial epoch was under no serious pressure to change.

What was changing rapidly at this time were the consumption habits and fashions in Europe - a process most prominent initially in Dutch and English cities in the last third of the 17th century and gradually spreading to other countries. The complex causes of this

\textsuperscript{13} O. Prakash, \textit{The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630-1720}. Princeton 1985, pp. 143-144 (Southeast Asia) and 176-177 (Persia).

phenomenon form a subject of lively scholarly debate and can not be analysed here.\textsuperscript{15} Some examples of the new behaviour will perhaps suffice to highlight the contrast with the contemporary Indian scene. Asian imports generated a favourable response among a growing number of people thirsting for novelties and seeking to enhance their personal image i.a. by following the newest fashions. In England, at least, these new trends were not restricted to the upper classes. In 1681 a conservative English gentleman complained that „as ill weeds grow apace, so these manufactured goods from India met with such a kind reception that from the greatest gallants to the meanest Cook Maid, nothing was thought so fit to adorn their persons as the Fabrick from India.\textsuperscript{16}“ In the same year, the Court of Directors of the English East India Company, reflecting on the same phenomenon from a different angle, sent the following instruction to their factors in Bengal: „Now this for a constant and generall Rule, that in all flowered silks you change ye fashion and flower as much as you can every yeare, for English Ladies and they say ye French and other Europeans will give twice as much for a new thing not seen in Europe before, though worse, than they will give for a better silk of the same fashion wore ye former yeare.\textsuperscript{17}“ Whatever was seen as new or unusual, would fetch a good price.\textsuperscript{17} The East India Companies were, of course, interested in encouraging or even whipping up this spendthrift extravagance and curiosity for everything new. While the English were delineating their import strategy in textiles, the Dutch doctor Cornelis Decker alias Dr Bontekoe, backed allegedly by the directors of the Oost Indische Compagnie, praised in his treatises the excellent medicinal properties of tea and recommended his patients to take from 50 to 200 cups of this new beverage daily. Similar praise was heaped by this good doctor on coffee, another commodity imported by the Company.\textsuperscript{18} Both beverages spread quickly among all classes of the population, which was also due largely to their falling prices in the first quarter of the 18th century. Behind this gradual formation of mass markets for novelties (soon turned into ordinary things to be supplemented again by other innovations) one can discern the first stirrings of a truly consumer mentality, so typical of modern capitalism. In this respect too, Asian countries were different, the spread of innovations was


\textsuperscript{16} From a speech of English politician Pollexden before the Board of Trade, cit. by O. Prakash, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 201.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 216.

slower and limited to more or less strictly defined environments.\textsuperscript{19} A comparative analysis of the spread of particular consumer goods (tea, coffee, tobacco, chocolate) in different societies might throw new light on their characteristic social and cultural patterns.

An interesting example of the limited response of a local environment to an innovation introduced from outside is the history of local joint-stock companies in the Coromandel coast, which were organized by the Dutch and English East India Companies in the last quarter of the 17th century with the intention to better mobilize the capital resources of local merchants trading with them and to improve their bargaining position \textit{vis-à-vis} their suppliers, the local weaver communities. Despite some success, esp. in the case of corporations organized by the Dutch, the concept of joint-stock company did not take root and did not change, in a significant way, the basic character of the local trading enterprise. One of the more important reasons for this was the strength of local caste ties and caste rivalries (reflecting the basic division of the local society into the so called left-hand and right-hand castes) that made the smooth operation of a larger body of merchants cutting across these divisions and united only by common investment strategy, impossible in the long term.\textsuperscript{20}

Comparisons would serve little purpose if made without an attempt to set their results into some more general explanatory framework. If the observed differences run not through one but several basic spheres of human activity - the social organization of production, the level and development of technology, the patterns and dynamism of consumption, mental attitudes\textsuperscript{21} - then the causes have to be sought in different basic structural features in societies that produce them, rather than in just different tempo of analogous historical processes groping essentially in the same direction. If we accept Marc Bloch’s thesis that proper feudal ties could develop only when the preceding ties of kinship proved inadequate, that feudal relations in Europe were the outcome of a fundamental reconstruction of social structures

\textsuperscript{19} Recent study on the consumption of coffee in Safavid Iran offers interesting points for comparison: according to its author, coffee, although popular among city dwellers and consumed in public places (the coffeehouses), did penetrate neither the private sphere nor the rural areas: restricted to certain milieus and occasions, until the end of Safavid era it did not become the drink of the masses. R. Matthee, Coffee in Safavid Iran: Commerce and Consumption. \textit{JESHO}, Vol. XXXVII (1994), pp. 1-32.


\textsuperscript{21} See the criteria for classifying different types of societies put forward, in the context of the Indian feudalism debate, by H. Mukhia, \textit{ibid.}, pp. 229-251. His convincing arguments against the Indian feudalism thesis lead him to an inevitable conclusion that „medieval Indian society, far from being static or stagnant, was yet unlikely to have undergone a transformation whether or not colonialism had intervened.“ \textit{Ibid.}, p. 247.
after the old social order was irreparably disrupted, then India with her firmly established hierarchical structures of clearly defined, hereditary status groups, structures at the same time durable and flexible, and supported not only by custom and tradition but also by highly sophisticated ideological constructions, could have hardly undergone such a radical reconstruction of social ties that would make it feudal. Bloch’s important insight may be contrasted with an observation by the Indian historian D.D. Kosambi, who characterized India as a high civilization grafted onto a basically tribal society. To apply the concept of feudalism, as derived from a particular course of European history, to medieval India, would mean either to misinterpret her basic structural features or alternatively to stretch and dilute the meaning of the term to such extent as to deprive it of much of its specific content and analytical value (that is important i.a. for cross-civilizational comparisons and relevant also for the debate about the possibilities for development of indigenous capitalism).

To sum up: the criteria for a comparison of two societies or civilizations are not necessarily the same as those devised for measuring uneven development. Only when the two subjects of comparison are found to possess the same fundamental structural features as far as social organization of production, role of technology and the character of basic social units are concerned, can their differences be understood as differences in the uneven degree of development of a certain common feature. As far as comparisons with non-European societies are concerned, the results of such a basic comparison, stated in as unambiguous terms as possible, should preceed any possible discussion of uneven development - both types of comparison should develop their own appropriate sets of criteria attuned to their respective contexts. Finally, when the common ground for the second type of comparison (the one based on the concept of unevenness) has been found to exist, the method selected should be capable of identifying those cases in which the uneven tempo of development and assimilation of innovations can be attributed to persisting remnants of the divergent societal model of the past. For India, and probably a number of other non-European societies, the stage when this second type of comparison becomes relevant was reached only in the 19th and 20th centuries. In this period, the element of structural dependency (in the wallersteinian sense), reinforced in many cases by direct political subjection, becomes an inseparable aspect of the unevennes.


23 Fine example of this approach is an article by S. Bhattacharya, Cultural and Social Constraints on Technological Innovation and Economic Development: Some Case Studies. *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. III (1966), pp. 240-267.