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*Ram Sharan Sharma:
The People's Historian*

THE PERSONA

Born in Bihar's Barauni village (Begusarai district) on September 01, 1920, Professor Ram Sharan Sharma had his early education in a rural milieu. Later, he went to the Patna University to do his graduate and postgraduate studies. After a short stint of teaching in colleges of Arrah and Bhagalpur (1943-46), he joined the renowned Patna College as a Lecturer in 1946 and rose to become Professor and Head of the Department of History of the Patna University in 1958. He continued to hold that position till 1973, when the University of Delhi offered him professorship and headship of its history department. He retired from active service there in 1985.

Though a widely travelled person, both in India and abroad, he never forgot his *mula* (roots) and actively worked for the upliftment of his village. He was particularly concerned about the need of educational facilities for all, and specially for the education of women. He was instrumental in inspiring the local people to create a library in the village. The peasant leaders of the National Movement such as Pandit Karyanand Sharma and Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and

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progressive and irrepressible Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayana had considerable formative influences on his persona. As a result, he became simplicity personified. Amongst the numerous Awards and Honours bestowed upon him, the Professor H.K. Barpujari National Award [for his seminal work *Urban Decay in India, circa 300 to 1000* (1987)] and the V.K. Rajwade National Award (2002) for his 'lifelong service and outstanding contribution to the study of ancient and early medieval history' by Indian History Congress (IHC) stand out prominently. He was also an active member of the National Commission of the History of Sciences in India and UNESCO Commission on the history of Central Asian Civilizations.

Before accepting the offer of professorship and headship of the history department of the University of Delhi in 1973, Professor Sharma had already created a distinctive identity of the same department in Patna University during his 15-year tenure (1958-1973). He laid special emphases on restructuring of syllabi of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching in History (cf. *Proceedings of Seminar on Undergraduate Teaching in History*, edited by him, 1968). No wonder, immediately after reaching Delhi, he tried to harness the enormous pool of talent lying scattered over scores of constituent colleges of this illustrious university. It is remarkable that he realised very early that the undergraduate teaching of the discipline in these colleges was its distinctive feature and also the greatest asset. Sharmaji strongly believed that every person possesses some or the other positive quality and that opportunities should be created for him/her to concretise it. He was invariably spot on in identifying talent and harnessing it. He was a great institution builder – a quality that is well represented in the way he shaped the academic programme and administrative structure of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) as its founder Chairman (1972-77). Much of that has survived till this day.

About six or seven years ago when Sharmaji was recuperating in a hospital in Delhi after a minor surgery, I visited him to wish speedy recovery. Even in such surroundings, one could not miss his enormous enthusiasm and commitment to the discipline. Showing one of his recently released book, he said that it was his 85th book (including numerous translations in more than a dozen Indian and non-Indian languages of his more than twenty monographs) in his 85th year.

Apparently, that unceasing zest to write was his elixir that had kept him mentally and physically alive till almost end of his life. One of his last books is *Economic History of Early India* (2011).

The last few months of Sharmaji's life had made him realise the futility of living much longer. It is said that from June-July, 2011 he had started saying that why should he live when he is not able to write any more. And then came the 20th August, 2011. It was 10.20 pm. My mobile phone rang. The call that I had been expecting all through the day but always hoping that it would not come, ultimately came. "Sharmaji is no more" said Professor R.S.Sharma's son from Patna. For once, I felt orphaned. My mentor since 1970 will not be available for discussions and guidance any more. My thoughts immediately went back to the sunny afternoon of the 29th December, 1970 when I had received a very complimentary pat on my back from a *dhoti-kurta* clad, tall, fair and robust historian after I had nervously presented my first research paper at the IHC session at Jabalpur. His humble self introduction "*main R.S.Sharma hoon*" was stunningly gratifying but equally embarrassing. The sense of disbelief then was enormous, for, I had by then already been through his masterly works such as *Shudras in Ancient India*, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* and *Indian Feudalism 300-1200* during my graduation and post-graduation days. Such indeed has been the persona of Sharmaji for people like me, who did not have the privilege of being his formal students but like Ekalavya, were trying to learn their first steps in history writings with his monographs in mind and have had the great opportunity of receiving his blessings nonetheless. Yes, he had all through been encouraging *all* young scholars through suggestions and comments on their writings. More remarkably, his humility had no limits – he was always ready to learn even from a novice working in the discipline of history and go to the extent of acknowledging him/her in his works. Such a combination of scholarship and humility is not seen easily today, when even toddlers in the field of history writing prefer to blow their own trumpets in the din of the market.

WORKS : METHOD, CONCERNS AND ORIENTATION

In his long academic career spanning over nearly six decades,

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Sharmaji, as he was known to his friends, colleagues and students, produced several seminal works (over twenty monographs, more than a hundred seminal essays and book reviews, and several edited volumes) on social, economic, political and cultural histories of ancient and early medieval India. Cumulatively put, all his writings tend to bring out the dynamics of ever changing social formations through the several millennia of India's historical developmental processes.

Whichever area of human activity that Professor Sharma chose to write about – political, social or economic processes, forms of property, women and *varna*, – their inter-links and links with productive processes interested him the most. In his keenness to understand the unfolding of historical processes, he evaluated many theories and models available to a historian. In his 1975 he recalled:

“The obsession of some social anthropologists with kinship, caste, rituals, language, social customs, etc. – problems of superstructure – has given rise to several theories... Many of these models may be useful for static societies but lose their validity for dynamic societies. The *jajmani* system, for example, may explain the social and economic relations of the feudal phase but not of the pre-feudal phases... [Theories of] Sanskritisation and of Great and Little Tradition touch only the outer cultural veneer and make little difference to the study of socio-economic formation. Much is being made of the elite theory... but the simple historical truth that by and large the literati and the intelligentsia are the subordinate ally of the ruling class in class societies cannot be overlooked...” [SHARMA: 1975: 2]

Having discarded such fashionable paradigms, Sharmaji made a strong case for the application of historical materialism to the study of early Indian history. His steadfast conviction in the dialectics of modes of production and the society's ability to produce surplus enabled him to undertake a multi-pronged analyses of the state of the shudras and women, different stages of economy, landmarks in the evolutionary processes of state formation, rise and fall or urban centres, emergence and dissemination of feudalism and other phenomena. Thus, he wrote in 1983:

“Mode of production involving the theory of surplus leading to class formation continues to be the best working hypothesis, notwithstanding

countless assertions to the contrary. The effort to eliminate class and surplus has introduced 'elite', 'status', 'hierarchy', 'decision-making', etc. in their place. The theory of surplus is rejected on the ground that people do not produce more on their own but are compelled to put in more work or more people are mobilized for work. Whatever motives be assigned for producing more – and this will differ from society to society – almost all types of serious investigators admit that only extra produce can support whole time administrators, professional soldiers, full-time priests, craftsmen, and other similar specialists who do not produce their food themselves. The argument that people were compelled to produce more would imply the existence of an organized coercive authority such as the state or at least a protostate represented by a strong chief, but it would not negate the idea of surplus." [SHARMA: 1983: *Introduction*:xv]

Though a Marxist in his methodology and orientation, Professor Sharma was neither a strict doctrinaire nor a propagandist nor even an apologist for any political ideology. He had the conviction to take on the orthodox Marxists. Marxism for him was not a substitute for thinking but a tool of analysis that required considerable skill to unfold historical processes. No wonder, he could comment on S.A.Dange's understanding of historical development in terms of a uni-linear progression in his *India From Primitive Communism to Slavery* (1949) thus: "The book shows more schematicism than scholarship". [SHARMA: 1966: 17, n.99]

With such a focus, 'people' acquired a totally different connotation in Sharmaji's writings and 'people's histories' coming out of his pen were qualitatively different from several volumes of Indian history that came out with such evocative titles as *New History of the Indian People* in the 1940s (under the auspices of the Bharatiya Itihas Parishad) and *The History and Culture of the Indian People* in the 1950s and the 1960s (the famous Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Series). These series failed to bring 'people' into the focus. No wonder, developments in Indian society, polity, economy, arts, religions and literature, etc through the millennia affecting millions of toiling masses remained compartmentalised and also somewhat mere adjuncts of the dynastic history framework in these ventures. Writing in 1966, Sharma lamented that very little attention was being paid to the mode of production in ancient India, which, in the materialist

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view, determines the relations of production – economic, social and political. Although some works of B.N.Dutt, G.F.Ilyin, D.D.Kosambi and Walter Ruben following the materialist view had appeared in the 1940s and the 1950s, it was significant, he pointed out, that none of those writings were mentioned in the bibliographies appended to the volumes of *The History and Culture of the Indian People* Series mentioned above.[SHARMA: 1966: 17-18]

In contrast, 'people' for Professor Sharma meant the real producers of wealth, and, therefore, the real makers of history. 'People' were seen as indispensable components of productive forces and not passive subjects in an 'empire'. He must have learnt this lesson very early in his career, for, he had been a witness to the many peasants' and workers' movements during the struggle for India's freedom. In his own inimitable method, Sharmaji retrieved the voices of the most marginalised people and communities.

The alleged neglect of caste by Marxists has often been commented upon. It is well known that D.D. Kosambi, striking a discordant note from the general tenor of Marxist perspective on caste, gave it a very conspicuous place in his overall framework of history writing when he treated caste as an ideology. Professor Sharma, too, in his overall orientation of identifying different stages of social formations through the several millennia of early Indian history, always kept his eyes on the mutations in the caste system. The whole gamut of his works focussed on social process. Very early in his career, fathoming and explaining strategies of social exclusions worked out by dominant classes became his passion, which he nurtured and sustained all through. Long before the Subaltern Studies volumes purporting to be 'history from below' became fashionable in the 1980s and thereafter, he had already got his *Shudras in Ancient India: A Social History of the Lower Order Down to c.AD 600* published in 1958, which soon acquired such an iconic status that Sharmaji acquired a nickname 'Shudra Sharma'! It was indeed one of the early manifestations of his commitment to people of India to which he remained hooked till his last breath.

Gandhiji had euphemistically called the shudras as *harijans* (people of the God) and the present day terminology of *dalits* lumps them all in a single basket. In contrast, Professor Sharma's pioneering study of the shudras unhesitatingly described them as the 'labouring

class' and simultaneously focussed on their different layers. Further, it not only investigated the vicissitudes of their material conditions (changes therein studied in time sequence indicated on the basis of archaeology and inscriptions) but also attempted to reflect on complexities of their economic and social relations with members of the higher and highly privileged *varnas*. The *raison d'état* of the unconventional nature of this study lies in the host of challenging and uncomfortable (at least to the established power centres of the time) questions raised by Sharmaji. Some of these included: What led to the formation of the shudra community? If the shudras were meant for serving the three higher orders, can they be categorised as slaves? Was ancient Indian society a slave society? How far does the ritual status of the shudras correspond to their economic status? Did the reforming religious sects bring about any fundamental change in the position of the lower orders? Did the role of these labouring class in the economic system undergo any change over the centuries? How did the shudras react to their servility and disabilities? Why are social revolts comparatively absent in ancient India?

Answers provided by him to these questions have occupied the centre-stage in the debates on early India's social history in the last more than six decades. Apart from convincingly demonstrating the absence of signs of a 'slave society' (as understood by orthodox and straight-jacketed doctrinaire Marxists), this monumental monograph on India's toiling masses underlined the dynamics of Indian society and demolished the myth of its alleged static and vegetative character. Here we were told about how a tribal society disintegrated and, in the process, a differentiated class society (expressed in terms of *varnas*) came into being (its parallel in the realm of political structure would be the transformation of tribal polity into a territorial state as shown in the complementary monograph *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (1st ed. 1959) ; and we also read that with the transformation of agrarian order (coming into existence of landed intermediaries) more and more disabilities were being imposed on the members of this 'labouring class' (the shudra *varna*). The present day 'cultural nationalists/purists' who are rooted in the 'brahmanical' world view of early Indian history and seek their sustenance from the 'Glories of India's ancient path' mode, always hounded out Sharmaji for such reconstructions. For them, the Rigvedic society being

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considered as 'tribal' and denting of the image of the 'Golden Age of the Guptas' were acts of sacrilege.

Sharma's *magnum opus Indian Feudalism 300-1200* (1st ed., 1965) has been another landmark monograph that challenged the age-old notions about stages in the development of structures and processes of power centres in the early Indian society. It's not that the generation of historians preceding him or even his contemporaries were not familiar with the vocabulary of 'feudalism', 'feudal lords', 'vassals' and 'feudatories', etc. *Indian Feudalism* presented feudalism not as a jargon for defining parameters of mere political authorities but as a definite marker in the evolution of Indian society. Focussing on the changing order of land rights – hierarchy of landed intermediaries/beneficiaries emerging between the real tillers of the soil and the state and such new stake holders in land being endowed with numerous fiscal, administrative, judicial and policing powers – Sharma could mark the beginning of the 'medieval' period in Indian history with the emergence of this feudal social formation. This new formation was particularly noticeable for the subjection, exploitation and immobility of all forms of labour – both agrestic and artisanal.

Ever since these formulations were first presented in the early 1960s, there have been numerous debates, critiques and alternative paradigms. Barring some sophisticated semantic duels, no substantive argument has emerged in the last nearly five decades that questions the essence of the material bases of the feudal social formation rooted in changes in the landed agrarian order. In a scathing critique, it was once argued that Sharma was "obstinate", insensitive to criticism, "repeating his views innumerable times – almost verbatim often and hardly developing them" and that under the impact of the feudalism thesis the "historiography of the period is still in utter disarray" [Andre Wink:1990:219-225].¹ Only someone who is thoroughly unfamiliar with the numerous writings of the last several decades seeking to refine the feudal construct – writings of not just R.S. Sharma but many others exploring the phenomenon at regional level as well – could be audacious enough to make such accusations against Sharma. It is surprising that Wink completely ignores Sharma's writings of 1974 and 1987 which were published well before his monograph. The former ('Indian Feudalism Retouched') had categorically stated:

“What has been stated... is not the final word on Indian Feudalism. For the period AD 600-1000 we need detailed studies of agrarian economy, trade and handicrafts, currency system, and the role of towns, on regional basis. For the later period it may be necessary to explain the long continuity of the closed economy under the feudal set-up and the stages through which this economy began to erode” [SHARMA: 1974: 330].

The 1987 publication, too, was clearly an exercise in filling one such desideratum. It is no less startling that Wink makes such baseless accusations despite being familiar with Sharma's participation (through his contribution 'How Feudal was Indian Feudalism?') in the famous 'Feudalism Debate' [SHARMA: 1985].

It is often argued that the materialist reductionism of Marxism underplays religion and culture. It is not just that this is one of the elements of 'vulgar Marxism' [Hobsbawm: 1968 (1997): 141-156] but the problem lies precisely in taking religion outside the domain of culture. Why do we often see the formulation 'religion *and* culture'? Numerous contributions of Professor Sharma, like those of D.D. Kosambi, try to take the bull by its horns, demolish the myths surrounding the nature of materialist reductionism and define contours of religious histories afresh. Significantly, both of them did not study religions as part of the so-called superstructure (again, against the basic grain of orthodox Marxist frame) or accord it any particular hallowed and autonomous status. Instead, for them, it was an integral part of the larger and dynamic cultural process involving an interaction between historical contexts and the development and influence of ideas and institutions of social, political and economic orders of the day. Apart from R.S. Sharma's analyses of some Vedic rituals, as will be seen below, other examples of his writings on religions and people's religiosities along these lines may be seen in his analyses of the birth of Tantrism and Buddhism, and suggestions for handling such popular beliefs as *tirtha yatras* (pilgrimage tours), *vratas* and *utsavas* (fasts, feasts and festivals) [SHARMA: 1974(a): 175-189; 1983: 117-134; and 1983(a): 236-239].²

Exponents and newly initiated enthusiasts of the so-called 'feminist' writings on early India have sometimes contended that Professor Sharma paid scant attention to the concerns of women in ancient Indian society. It needs some recalling that the earliest attempt to bring the gender issue into focus by these 'feminist' enthusiasts was

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made only in 1988 when the 'Altekarian paradigm' (reference to A.S. Altekar's *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation: From Prehistoric Times to the Present Day*, first published in 1938) that had dominated writings on women for about half a century, was thoroughly dissected [CHAKRAVARTI: 1988]. But more than two decades before that, in 1966, Sharmaji had published several perceptive essays on promiscuity in ancient India, proprietary rights of women, linkages between women and shudras in *Light on Early Indian Society and Economy*. Subsequently, delivering the General President's Address at the Indian History Congress [SHARMA: 1975], he lamented over the fact that the role of women in the process of production had not received the attention of scholars. That he was constantly mulling over the issues concerning and confronting women is evident in the essay on 'Historical Aspects of Sati' which did not form part of the first edition of his *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India* published in 1983 but was included in its second revised edition of 1995. Still later, in 2003, he shared his views on the village society on the basis of his observations and personal experiences in his native village of Barauni and its neighbourhood. The essay entitled 'Rural Relics of Communal Sharing and Social Inequality' is particularly noticeable for providing insights about discrimination against women – they could even be subjected to forced labour — on account of *varna* ordering in those geographical spaces [SHARMA: 2003].

Sharmaji's commitment to the cause of dissemination of scientific history was boundless. He was not just a class room preacher. He took his craft into the public domain and like a true activist, ceaselessly fought the communal, obscurantist, casteist, and fascist forces throughout his life. He literally led from the front. When such forces withdrew his *Ancient India* (textbook for XI-XII classes) in 1977 (the book was subsequently restored), he came out with *In Defence of "Ancient India"* (1978) attacking those forces. His *Communal History and Rama's Ayodhya* (1990) and *Ramjanmabhumi-Baburi Masjid: A Historians' Report to the Nation* (in cooperation with Professors M.Athar Ali, D.N.Jha and Suraj Bhan, 1991) made a strong case against the exponents of the "Rama Temple" (under the now demolished Baburi Masjid) at Ayodhya. No wonder, the Government of India sought his views on the more recent controversy about the Rama Setu project as well. Earlier, he had been instrumental in getting

a resolution passed at the IHC against the Emergency. I can't remember any other professional academic body mustering such a courage in those tumultuously tyrannical days – days, when people being asked to bend, preferred to crawl.

During six decades of his active academic career, Sharmaji had written so prolifically not for adding many letters against his name, but to spread scientific historical consciousness amongst his readers. The fact that his first book (*Vishwa Itihas ki Bhumika*, in two volumes, 1951-1953; its revision and translation into English is in process) was published in Hindi when he was merely in his early thirties; and that he deliberately got almost all his works translated into Hindi and other Indian languages are indicators of his concern for making his writings available to the maximum possible readers in their own languages.

SHARMA'S USE OF VARIED TEXTS

The works of Professor Sharma show his mastery over all genres of texts — epigraphic, literary, numismatic and archaeological. This competence is not very common. It enabled him to demolish many myths created by imperialist-colonialist historiography as well as by the cultural chauvinists of more recent times, and made scientific study of ever changing Indian society in all its dimensions possible. Even the most familiar texts acquired a very radical purpose and tenor in his writings. Epigraphs, for example, did not interest him for reconstructing minutiae of succession struggles or mere genealogies of political powers. Instead, they were made to yield vital details about socio-political and economic structures, changing land rights, etc. Same holds true of material antiquities unearthed during archaeological explorations and excavations. His use of such finds from more than a hundred sites spread across the whole length and breadth of the sub-continent for working out different phases of urban centres in early and early medieval India was equally innovative. *Urban Decay in India, circa 300-1200* is an exquisite example thereof, which also shows the way to read section drawings making the navigation easy even for a novice.

The tiniest of all texts, *viz.*, metallic coins were also not seen by Sharmaji as mere items of curiosity. He saw in them the stamps of

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society. Unlike most of the professional numismatists or historians using these texts, Professor Sharma was not interested in their taxonomies based on mere cataloguing of their 'types' and 'varieties'. At a seminar on 'Coins as a Source of Economic History of Ancient India' held at the Patna University in 1969, he said: "Coins will not carry much meaning for historical reconstructions unless we identify the ancient sources of gold, silver and other metals; explain the abundance and paucity of coins, determine the area and period of circulation, and above all calculate the volume of coins in the context of time and space. At the moment all our ideas about the quantities of coins are impressionistic and subjective. It is time that by developing and applying objective tests and methods and by asking new questions we find the volume of coins and the part they played in the economic life of the people." [SHARMA: 1969/1976: 7] As an illustration of avoiding simplistic constructions and need for understanding complexities of the functioning of metal money, Sharmaji drew attention to wider networks of commercial relations that involved trading in such items as silk, cotton fabrics, workings in precious stones and their imitations (as in the case of beryl) and sugar. His essays on rates of interests and usury, though largely based on literary texts, also had a bearing on the functioning of monetary economy [SHARMA:1963, 1964 and 1965-66]. He argued that factoring in such dynamics helps us in understanding the use of particular metal (specially if it is precious one such as gold or silver) for minting of coins in a specific region and at a specific time.³

The manner in which various texts were invoked by Sharmaji shows that he did not suffer from any tunnelled vision. He wasn't dismissive of any genres of texts. He was a veritable exponent of an holistic analyses of diverse texts, without being too credulous about any of them and all the time being sensitive to place them in specific temporal and spatial contexts. Commenting on the literary texts used for writing his monograph on the shudras, he wrote:

"Although the texts belong to different periods, they repeat *ad nauseam* the same formulae and terminologies, which make it difficult to detect changes in society; hence special attention has been paid to the study of variants. Many of these texts cannot be understood without the aid of the commentators, who not unoften project the ideas of their own times into earlier periods." [SHARMA: 1990: 7]

Thus, even myths and rituals with which ancient Indian texts are replete, were duly considered to be an important source for the reconstruction of social history. If pure Sanskritists were keen to see them in symbolic manner, Sharmaji would draw historical inferences in such symbolisms. For him, the fertility rites, for example, underscored the importance of the production of plants, animals and human beings. He contended that the operation of rituals in day-to-day life shows that they originate in reality, and change with changes in real life. Wading through the five different versions of the *ratnahavimshi* ceremony delineated in the later Vedic texts, he could show that this ritual was 'the product of a developed political, social, and economic organisation in which tribal and matriarchal elements were being submerged by class, territorial and patriarchal elements, leading to the emergence of differentiated organs of government...'. Similar exercise was undertaken in respect of the *devasuhavimshi* ceremony as well which enabled him to identify some persisting tribal and primitive aspects of the later Vedic polity [SHARMA: 2005: 143-169]. The interdependence of emerging institutions and ideas and the compatibility of the one with another was duly underlined through such an approach. The remarkable blend of archaeological and literary texts in his *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* is true example of the holistic approach mentioned above.

Constant dialogue with himself and other professional colleagues, and his ability to listen to others were hallmarks of his method. That explains the constant polishing and updating of his works, most of which ran into several editions. A comparison of the themes, arrangement thereof and contents of various essays in his 1966 publication entitled *Light on Early Indian Society and Economy* with two editions of his *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India* (first published in 1983 and revised 2nd ed., 1995) would clearly show Professor Sharma's unceasing eagerness to rethink and refine his writings. Equally arresting is his ability to say the most sophisticated and complex things in simple words, without using jargons. In simplifying the complex concept of 'historical materialism' as 'no production no history' [SHARMA:1975:4] and epitomising the 'vigour' and 'persistence' of equally complex caste system in India in terms of '*beti-roti*' relationships (governing restrictions regarding marriage, food-sharing and social intercourse) [SHARMA: 1983(b): 23n.1; regrettably, this expression has been deleted in the 2nd ed., 1995]

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he displays his phenomenal skill of saying things simply and clearly without caring to be seen as indulging in fashionable ‘discourses’. His *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* is a classic example of this trait. But long before that, and referring to the current craze for peddling of ‘models’, he wrote thus in 1975:

“For comprehending and explaining the past in India we naturally look for models and typologies, but the intellectual market in social sciences, like any other market, is flooded with ‘western’ commodities... what is needed is not only an awareness of the various models that are being peddled in the field but also their careful examination, otherwise we would just become middlemen and paraphrasers. I would rather prefer to be damned as old-fashioned than go in for the latest fad without assessing its analytical validity and social relevance. New terms are needed to express new ideas, but phrase-mongering should not be confused with advance in historical knowledge.” [SHARMA: 1975: 2-3. His abhorrence for uncritical use of ‘models’ is emphasised again in 2001: 1-13].

Professor Sharma has been a colossus. It would be difficult to fill the void created by him. He remained the *historian of the people and for the people* in the real sense of the term. Living without him in the world of Indian history writing would not be an easy task in the foreseeable future. We, the Indians, would miss him for a very long time indeed. For me, at a personal level, he was a Dronacharya of a different ilk (*eḷ alag se Dronacharya*) – not asking for *dakṣhina* to kill all potentials of a promising *shishya*, but one who would go all out to hone the skills and polish the craft of not only the Arjunas but those of the Ekalavyas as well. The only *dakṣhina* that he would have loved to receive would surely be the commitment to extend the frontiers of scientific and secular history of the people. The country needs from the historians of the day a renewal of such a commitment. I would like to pay my tributes to this great scholar and historian and a greater human being.

NOTES

¹ It needs pointing out that this work was published at a time when (a) India was reeling under communal passions on the question of the alleged Rama/ ‘Hindu’ temple lying under the Babari masjid at Ayodhya, and (b) Sharmaji was in the vanguard of contesting such claims of the Hindu chauvinists. Wink, through this work, only helped the cause of the communalists, for, like the older colonialist framework of periodisation of Indian history

in terms of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim', argued for 'Muslim economy', *Ibid*, p.225.

² For an analysis of Kosambi's writings along these lines, see Krishna Mohan Shrimali, 'Kosambi and the Religious Histories of India' in D.N. Jha edited *The Many Careers of D.D.Kosambi: Critical Essays*, LeftWord Books, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 86-129.

³ For a relatively more recent warning against simplistic reconstructions based on numismatic data and a plea for a more nuanced handling of those texts, see Olivier Guillaume, 'An Analysis of the Modes of Reconstruction of the Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek History', *Studies in History* (NS), Vol. II, No.1, January-June 1986, pp.1-16.

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