What Went Wrong With "History From Below"
Reinstating Human Agency as Human Creativity
VINAY BAHL
While refuting contemporary fashionable discourse on 'History from Below', which is based on cultural determinism, the author of the present volume urges scholars to use their own innate creativity (as human agency) collectively to build an alternative theoretical framework that can open up the possibility of creating an alternative state of being and alternative kinds of societies. While suggesting one of many possible alternatives, the author has attempted to reinstate in the present volume the notion of 'human agency' as human being's innate capacity for creativity, which is closely related to the concept of 'humaneness'. Author believes that such interpretation will open up the possibility of developing a new theoretical framework that will be devoid of binaries such as, traditional/modern, core/ periphery, progressive/backward, national/global. Based on these ideas, the present volume is an attempt to show one of many possibilities of writing a history of the world from an alternative perspective derived from the experiences of the social formations, cultural formations and class struggles in India. The focus on “India” is important (not merely as a local history, or colonial history) because it represents the historical experiences of one billion plus people with all possible historical, political, economic, and cultural scenarios and its interactions with many other societies over time. Author hopes that suggestions hypothesized in this volume might help in writing histories — everywhere — of women, working people, oppressed people, oppressed societies, as well as of oppressive societies from the vantage point of their own societies and their interactions with other societies without using binary terms. Such history writing will allow oppressed people and oppressed societies to break away from the prevailing notion of ‘inevitable fate’ about their present miserable condition and hopeless future choices, as they are made to believe about the inevitability of ‘globalization’, about the so called ‘development’, and their consequences.

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What Went Wrong With
“History From Below”

Reinstating Human Agency as Human Creativity

Vinay Bahl

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"But to achieve another world that we believe is possible and necessary requires a deeper critique, class analysis, and the self-organization of a class-conscious movement."

"In the absence of . . . a new vision, we find ourselves facing and fighting endless resistance battles with little hope of final victory"
Bill Fletcher, jr. *(Ibid)*.
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Acknowledgement

This volume is based on various published (and now revised) and unpublished essays written over a time span of more than a decade. But the present volume started acquiring its present form in the late 1999. All this time I have been teaching sociology at the Pennsylvania College of Technology. In spite of having twenty hours weekly teaching load, I could consult various recent publications and articles with the help of the inter-library loan system of the college. Therefore, I shall first like to thank the library staff of the Pennsylvania College of Technology, specially Connie Rice of the library loan program, for her efficient support. The final version of this manuscript was prepared during my ten months stay in Paris (2002-2003) as a guest research scholar of the College de France. I would like to thank Professor Gerard Fussman of the College de France for inviting me. I would also like to thank the staff of the library of the College de France, and Asia Centre library in Paris for the help. My thanks are also for the staff of the Centre d'Etudes de L'Inde et de L'Asie du Sud, Paris, for their secretarial as well as personal support and help.

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related issues. In the end, I would like to thank a colleague (who wishes to remain anonymous) for invaluable contributions in the inception and shaping of this volume. But I solely am responsible for any error.

Preface

This volume is not based on conventional in-depth study of ideas of major philosophers and thinkers. The contemporary debates relating to the concepts of 'human agency' and the writing of 'history from below' resonate with my subjective questions and queries, that were forming in the course of my experiences and challenges in various ascribed and achieved social roles while growing up in India and later in the North American society. This connection, between prevailing academic debates and my own deep personal concerns for similar issues, further confirmed the idea that personal questions are not necessarily always separate issues but are very much connected with the larger whole, called society. Such awareness contributed in enhancing my teaching of Sociological courses as I consciously began to find ways to: (a) make sense of these questions and debates for my North American students; (b) explain the relevance of these questions in the context of students' own historical background and prejudices—that is North America—and in their daily lives and their aspirations to become plumbers, carpenters, gardeners, builders, chefs, mechanics, social workers (who are generally mothers on welfare) and nurses and so on. Thus, my efforts were shaped deeply by everyday challenges and experiences: as a teacher, as a student (earlier in India and later in the USA), as a woman (single by choice), as a migrant, as a lower middle class woman from Punjabi speaking family (relocated in a provincial industrial town after partition of India) with Hindi based schooling and with crude colonial linguistic tools coping with the elite (predominantly male) world of English speaking academia, as a so-called 'Third World', and as a so called 'colored' person. All these challenges in India and in the USA—together have shaped the final outcome of this volume. This is not to deny the direct or indirect influences of various historians, philosophers, thinkers, and contemporary discourses either on my writings or thinking, but to highlight a different route to scholarship. This different route to scholarship further validates the theoretical framework suggested in this volume.

Without undermining the prevailing ideas of 'local and particular'
or that 'everything in society is ultimately socially constructed', my effort is to be inclusive of various prevailing ideas, while bringing back the role of human agency in the social construction of reality in a dialectical relationship in a way that evolving human being—her/his creative potential—remains the basic unit of analysis. I think that by making evolving human being as the agent of constructing all societies, all power relationships and all social realities, it will be possible to create strategies for achieving the goal of emancipation and empowerment of people. Because theoretical perspective, as suggested in this volume, allows a possibility for every human being to depend self consciously upon her/his creative capacity to build and change everyday social realities without privileging any one person/group or any one society. This is important to state because we generally lose sight of our basic questions in the daily onslaught of buzzwords and fashionable discourses. We need to keep our goal of peoples’ emancipation and empowerment in place and keep believing in our creative potential if we wish to understand and change our complex social world. Otherwise, we shall only keep reproducing the mainstream dominant ideology in our scholarship and will keep marginalizing alternative forms of scholarly endeavours.

It should also be pointed out that many chapters in this volume have gone through extensive revisions while also eliminating various errors in the previously published essays in different academic journals. I hope the questions and concerns raised in this volume will help in promoting useful discussion to create and shape multiple alternative perspectives to write ‘history from below’.

Vinay Bahl  
Paris, April 14, 2003

Introduction

"Since social life belongs to human conscious life and reflective capacities, one cannot significantly address human being without addressing ‘the intrinsic sociality of mind’ ". Arthur Childe.

“A vision of a future social order is based on a concept of human nature.” Noam Chomsky.

“It is possible for us to choose—to value creativity.... It is by choosing to value certain qualitative elements of the process of becoming, that we can find a pathway towards the open society.” Carl Rogers.

“Actions are creative even though their social values are very different... and there is no distinction regarding the degree of creativity.” Carl Rogers.

We are living in the era of ‘alternatives’ and individual ‘choices’ which are available in terms of the varieties of consumer goods, services, life styles, medical systems, spiritual salvation, and ideas of individual empowerment. But with all the creative choices and alternatives that are available in all walks of life, it is surprising that in resolving the issue of poverty along with other inequalities and ‘underdevelopment’ the same creative minds could only repeat the old formula of modernization through the increased number of sweatshops. The issue of poverty has acquired a new urgency in our time, because at the turn of 21st century when agriculture and food production technology is highly advanced, more than two billion people are living below poverty line in the world mostly in Africa, Asia, South Asia, and Latin American (AFASALA) countries. The UN Commission of Refugees (2002) states that eleven million children are living as refugees in the world. The United Nations Report (2000), informs us that the number of undernourished children in 1995 was estimated at 54 million in Latin America, 121 million in Africa, and 363 million in Asia. At the same time, the income of the richest 10 percent of the US population (around 25 million people) now equals that of the poorest 43 percent of world population or some 2 billion people (UN Human Development Report 2002:17-19).
Another estimate shows that with all the abundance of food in the world 800 million people are starving. South and central Asia have by far the highest malnutrition levels, in percentage terms as well as in absolute numbers. Asia and Africa also have a high birth rate in comparison to the European countries and Japan which have a declining or zero birth rate. This difference in birth rate also means that in the near future larger number of people from the poorer world will depend on migration to fill the gap between countries that cannot feed their people while wealthy countries would be seeking a labor force to perform their services. To a large extent this is already taking place. For example, in the year 1990 about 80 million people were living outside the country of their birth, but in the year 2000, the number of such people increased to 150 million. United Nations has calculated that to keep the proportion of working to nonworking people at 1995 level, the European Union must take in 1.4 million immigrants a year—more than the number who now enter legally and illegally combined (Margoulis, 2002:16). While ignoring these living and working conditions of people around the world, the scholars—both within the west and non-western world—are advocating the idea that we have reached the “End of History,” that there is “no alternative to capitalism,” and “this is the best we can have,” and for this supposedly “best” system, “80 percent of the world population has to pay the price for the 20 percent people in the world to live a better life.”

Western economists continue to promote the idea of more sweatshops for poor countries, while also admitting the failure of the projects of modernization and development. For example, when recently a large number of college and university students in the USA started protesting against worldwide sweatshop conditions and low wages, 250 economists including Nobel prize Laureate Robert Lucan, and lawyers, under the leadership of an Indian economist teaching in Columbia University, Jagdish Bhagwati, issued a joint statement to the Presidents of those colleges and universities that, “urging companies to raise the wages of their workers in developing countries above the prevailing market average to those nations...would limit the number of jobs in those countries and...worsen the collective welfare of the very workers in poor countries who are supposed to be helped.”

At the same time, the political leaders of poor countries—following the model of modernization and so called ‘sustainable development’—are vying with one another to attract foreign capital by marketing their so called, ‘comparative advantage’: poverty, child labor and abundance of women labor which is cheap, non-unionized, docile and controlled. By paralleling the use of women and child labor in poor countries at the end of the twentieth century with the similar use of women and child labor at the beginning of the western industrial revolution in the 18th century, the supporters of the so called ‘comparative advantage’ absolve themselves from any social ‘guilt’ (if they ever consider it) or any social wrong doing. As if the social injustices of the past of one society if repeated in the present time in other societies, automatically sanitize past and present injustices and therefore are guilt free! With this logic, it won’t be surprising if some countries would find it acceptable to adopt a slavery system in the 21st century following the example of Britain and the USA in the 17th and 18th century to build their wealth. This possibility is not far from reality because the living and working conditions of child labor and women labor in the 21st century are not much better than the slaves of the 17th and 18th centuries in the West. It is perplexing that Western economists and politicians as well as the economists and politicians of poor countries, with all their capacity for creative ideas, including the conquering of the moon and the planet Mars, could not find any alternative perspective to resolve the issue of poverty in poor countries and inequalities of all sorts within the world. Scholars—such as Subaltern Studies school (hereafter SS)—who claim to be offering new perspective in the name of challenging the dominant ideas have fared no better.

The question is: with all sophisticated methodologies available, with state-of- the-art technologies available, and with the best intentions of increasing production of food and goods, why economists and other concerned scholars cannot come up with anything better than the sweatshops for poor countries, while at the same time blaming the culture of people for their so called economic ‘backwardness’? Have scholars really lost the capability to think creatively—morally, justly, and humanistically—to find an alternative perspective to eliminate poverty in the world? These two questions along with the knowledge that all humans are born with an innate creative potential—which is the real source of human agency—compelled me to think that if we use (collectively) our creativity it is possible to explore an alternative perspective. Moreover, all perspectives are human constructs and human beings keep changing them as and when they deem fit. It is a different matter whose perspective will prevail. Nevertheless, we must keep making efforts in that direction to save ourselves from fatalism. This volume is one such humble attempt.
The ideas suggested in this volume are not provided as ‘the right’ answer, but they are based on my understanding that it is possible to think about social reality in more than one way if we wish to empower people (expanding civic, economic, social and political rights of citizenship for all sections of society so that people are able to control and direct their own lives. But not the way this concept is hijacked by the IMF as well as by the Multinational pharmaceutical companies who are promoting empowerment through NGOs, and in the case of pharmaceutical companies through reproductive technology without any consideration or information about long term health consequences of such devices mostly affecting poor women) in a very real sense while moving beyond sweatshop solutions. It is with this spirit that various issues based on the experiences in India and its history, are raised in this volume despite their complexity. These issues, as formulated in this volume, are offered as possible future research projects and not as a final blueprint for an alternative perspective.

The On-Going Debate

The formulation of my suggestion is closely related to the ongoing larger debate which began one and half centuries ago. Western scholars have been writing the histories of non-western societies since the middle of 19th century and have been quoted on these subjects ever since. These writings generally ignore Indian economic historians who explained, from the vantage point of the non-western world, the reasons for the poverty of British India. These historians were the first to propound the drain theory of colonial relations in India, western scholars labeled their theory of colonial relations in Latin America as ‘dependency theory’. According to ‘dependency theory’, the economies of poor countries were and are connected with industrially advanced countries in an unequal trade relationship which perpetuates a vicious circle of poverty and dependent relationships. This theory remained under constant scrutiny for a long time, and recently the promoter of this theory, Andre Gunder Frank, (Frank, 1998) himself has revised his opinion in this regard while trying to keep ‘Orient’ at the center and repudiating eurocentrism. Ironically, in his effort to repudiate eurocentrism, Frank has succeeded in reinstating it by denying the historical role of the ‘West’ in the formation of global past.

In the last two decades of the 20th century, some South Asian scholars of Subaltern Studies (SS) school have claimed to be writing people’s histories from the vantage point of non-western societies, an approach ignored since the 1870s. They reject the state-centered national discourse that replicates colonial power/knowledge in a world of globalization. Instead, they declare to be free of modernity’s master narrative and from the linear time framework in their writing of subaltern history. Ranjit Guha, the founder of SS School, announced in 1982 the project’s ambition “to rectify the elitist bias” in history writing “-dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism”. (Guha, 1982:3) In their research SS school revealed India’s cultural roots in subaltern subjectivity and in ‘differences’. More recently the idea of ‘provincializing Europe’ has been incorporated in their agenda and a book with title Provincializing Europe (2000) has been released to that end. This author privileges fragments by using a particular Bengali Hindu Middle class as representing the whole of the contemporary India. By emphasizing culture, identity, and subjectivity, and by promoting ‘communitarian’ mode of history writing, by celebrating indigenous religious ‘fragment’ as the true essence of India in opposition to the ‘cunning’ of post-enlightenment modernity, and the hegemony of the nation state, the SS scholars believe that the basic assumptions for understanding the history of the west can be changed.

But the SS school has completely failed in its objective and it provides no challenge to the analyses of social reality as promoted by the theory of industrial ‘development/underdevelopment’ in the world. Amazingly, the SS school does not much concern itself beyond the period 1890-1940s and it does not explain how SS methodology can be applied to write histories of earlier times. More surprisingly, whenever some intellectuals of critical bent recognize such problems in SS historiography, they tend to brush it aside as ‘ambivalence.’ These scholars (of critical bent) keep ignoring that many times the notion of ‘ambivalence’ is used as a cover for cultural reification, a cover that is also used by the bigots.

The ‘alternative’, as offered by SS historiography, has led us all to a blind alley as it rejects ‘meta-narrative’ (of all types), which makes SS scholars indirectly complicit in promoting the slogans: “end of history,” and “no alternative to capitalism.” Thus by rejecting ‘meta-narrative’, SS scholars are able to deny their own historicity in relation to world
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history. Ironically, SS rejection of ‘meta-narrative’ unwittingly helped in reinforcing the neo-liberal agenda to change the discourse from the binary of ‘capitalism/socialism’ to ‘democracy-totalitarianism’ and applying anti-totalitarian concept to any effort to understand the society as a whole or world at large. Moreover, by denying the existence of larger historical forces, it closes any possibility for people to resist against these forces.

It seems that in order to get out of this dilemma, one needs to examine the process of the making of the world history so that scholars, including the non-westerners, can make a critique of it while 'provincializing' Europe. But in this proposed world history all societies (including vast number of diverse societies within Europe and within world at large) would be treated with the same yardstick equally and not with the monolithic binary of West/East or ‘democracy/totalitarian’. It is only then that we can achieve the aim set forth in reaction to the crisis of epistemology in historiography. The crisis of historiography is explored in greater length in a volume I co-edited with Arif Dirlik and Peter Gran History After the Three Worlds: Post Eurocentric Historiographies, (2000). My idea is not an abstract statement because I have demonstrated in my first book The Making of the Indian Working Class: A Case Study of Tata Iron and Steel Co. 1880-1946 (1995) in a preliminary fashion how it can be applied in history writing. I am further expanding on this idea in my on-going long term project “Rethinking Underdevelopment: A Comparative Study of the Large Scale Steel Industry in Colonial India, Imperial Russia, the United States and Britain at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century.”

If one is not aware of the historical context of all these ideas and phenomenon within India, emerging at a particular moment in the Indian history as well as in the history of the world, which is guided in modern times largely by the world capitalist system, it is very easy to lose the sight of specific differences among individual scholars:

(a) those supporting Subaltern Studies who mainly came from leftist ideology
(b) culturalists scholars who are reacting to the adverse impact of modernization on the Indian people and the ecological imbalances;
(c) the Hindu fundamentalists who have totally different agendas from previous two groups of scholars.

The problem is that all three groups seem to be raising similar issues and similar arguments and ultimately suggesting similar solutions. This similarity does not mean they are all alike with similar agendas, but this means that there is a real historical crisis and that the major social and historical issues cannot be ignored any more. It is puzzling to note that both the right and the left are suggesting to turn back to a ‘pure’ past which can never be found. This puzzle raises the following questions:

i. Why have progressive scholars given up on the futurist agenda and exploration of any other alternative path, and instead echoing ideas that are similar to the rightist agenda?
ii. Why is the Subaltern Studies school promoting differences and which differences? (see chapter one for details)
iii. By emphasizing differences—based on race, gender and ethnicity— rather than the similarities among human beings of all societies, what are they trying to achieve?

It seems to me that by calling something different, we make it in fact abnormal, and the only way we can normalize anything is by looking at the similarities with others. Therefore, it may be appropriate to say that by emphasizing the ‘differences’ we cannot normalize Europe. My suggestion is that if we really wish to normalize every history and treat every society with the same yardstick on equal level then we must focus not on differences (while not denying their existence) but on commonalities which means we learn to look at societies in and of themselves, as well as their interaction with other societies.

For example, all societies are based on some form of production, distribution, and exchange while fulfilling the basic human needs of their members. It is this basic need of survival that leads to group formation, small or large, that makes all human beings equal and not their physical or cultural differences. If we agree with this statement then it means we do not have to start writing history by making Europe, or Africa, or the ‘Orient’, (as Gunder Frank, 1998, has attempted to do in his recent volume) or the East as the center. But we must start by looking at world history as a simultaneous process of many societies interacting as well as developing within their own permeable boundaries— hence modernity is not bound by boundaries—to deal with their survival questions by organizing societies in specific forms of production, distribution, consumption, trade and so on. By this approach it will be possible to provincialize — normalize— ‘Europe‘ while critically studying the ‘West’ (which also consists of vast number of different complex societies) and its role in the making of the global past. Moreover, with
this approach it will be possible to write comparative histories of all societies without any hegemonic status (this approach does not deny that some societies acquired hegemonic power through force and thus able to propagate its supposed superiority) to any one society based on either cultural (and ‘spiritual’) superiority or industrial superiority.

A Possible Alternative Approach

A major question is how to start this comparative approach in history. The possible way seems to be that a historian should start from the basic unit of any society, that is, generic and evolving human beings who, with their innate creative potentialities and capabilities, are able to interact and communicate with other generic humans creating social relationships. Through this process of interaction/communication/language all human beings not only realize their innate creative genius but also become human in the sense as we understand today. Human interaction inevitably leads to group formation and social relationships—household, tribe, locality, trade, guild and so on—for their survival and to fulfill their human needs. Historians should explore how this evolving human went/goes about in everyday life to meet her/his daily needs and how she/he must been adjusting, compromising, challenging and reconfiguring her/his environment to make sense of her/his daily life, as well as how she/he created new circumstances in her/his given environment. It means that human being should be considered as, both an integrated being with a separate body structure having an innate creative capability and potentialities, as well as, a social being who realizes her/his innate potential creatively through social interaction only, while creating social relationships, and simultaneously using ‘inner conversation’ to interpret those social relationships. In this way it will be possible to eliminate the conceptual divide between evolving human beings and their creation of a society.

If we start with this basic unit of analysis then it is possible to understand how people in each society build their environments—social, political, economic, cultural, religious, and relations with outside forces—in which ‘woman/man’ has as much to contribute as the environment they create and vice versa. But people forget these social realities and treat these environments as independent powerful forces. By understanding this process in each society, it will be possible to demonstrate that all societies are equal in their social formation process and people’s struggle to fulfill everyday human needs even when they all vary in their actual material and physical manifestations. It will also help us to find out why and how people of some societies could invade and control other societies. How the colonized people found ways to make life meaningful with their new living conditions? How did people re-define their roles, opportunities and make adjustments in their new circumstances? Invariably, people while making these adjustments and compromises in their new circumstances, also create a new vocabulary (or sometimes using existing terminologies as in the context of ‘caste’) to explain changes in their everyday lives, in their redefined goals, and limitations in everyday life that always merge in the existing local cultures over time.

As Certeau has suggested, this ability of human beings, i.e. to create a new set of everyday practices on the basis of a preexisting harmony, and to maintain a formal relationship between them, in spite of the variation of the elements, should be treated at par with a similar process that takes place in both artistic production and serious thinking. In other words, “It could be considered the ceaseless creativity of a kind of taste in practical experience.” (Certeau, 1988:73) It may not be far fetched to suggest that this approach in writing history can be applied to any one time in history and for any society and consequently to demystify the rhetoric of local and global cultures, so popular these days and therefore, eliminating social hierarchies of knowledge and dichotomies between East/West, North/South, traditional/modern, developed/underdeveloped and so on. So far, available studies on the everydayness of people are not based on such perspective as developed in this volume.

Basic Assumption

One primary assumption of this possible alternative perspective postulates that generic and evolving humans are equal, as they all are endowed with similar biological, genetic make up as well as similar qualities of intelligence, humaneness, creativity, and capability of self-learning including the capacity to make and enjoy music. This idea is based on the understanding that every human being is able to learn and communicate with a language (or many languages: verbal, non-verbal, artistic, or any other mode of communication) which is always made out of abstract symbols. This means every human being who is able to create, learn, and use abstract symbols has an innate creative genius in her/him. Because one has to have a prior capability for creativity only then one can use it to create things or any social structures. For example,
one can see the manifestation of human creativity in every aspect of human life including the creation of society through the process of human interaction. Therefore, continuously evolving human beings should be considered the real players in the formation of history, social institutions, power relations and cultures of any society, and not the other way around. In this perspective, ‘culture’ is continuously emerging from the historical process of interaction between generic human beings to meet their daily human needs in specific places and times (Mukherjee, 1991, Rogers, 1961). It also means that there cannot be one culture in a society but many cultures based on various social relationships that emerge from the dynamic historical process of social formations. In all these processes human beings also use their ‘inner conversation’ (a process of comprehending everyday social reality through human creativity and genius) to give meaning to their existence in every day life.

In that sense every society and its cultures emerged and evolved through similar processes of human social interaction in which individual human being’s ‘inner conversation’ was/is equally important. But in the last 250 years, with the advent of colonialism and imperialism, society-to-society interaction in the world has also increased to an unprecedented degree, and this has injected an added dimension to the ongoing process of social and cultural formation within these interacting societies. This understanding assumes that culture formation in societies consists of a complex, multi-dimensional process. Unlike ancient times, when societies tended to develop more internally with person to person interaction, (with minimal interaction with other societies) societies in modern times are exposed more and more to external forces and to increased society-to-society interaction as well.

I elaborate above idea further as follows:

(a) Human (means generic evolving human—both physically and socially—and not a fixed entity) specie is born with an innate capability of being creative (a few months old human child is able to process various sounds with their social meaning—language—and making connections is nothing short of an act of genius. It is a different matter what that child will do with her/his innate creativity when she/he grows up in a particular society and in a particular time). It is the unique combination of the intuitive appreciation of relationship among objects and ideas and also symbolic representation that makes science, art, or technology possible. It means that symbolic cultural form could take place only because of the preexisting human potential to create or imagine music, or any other art form (Newberg, 2001, Tattersall 2001). Therefore, it is not surprising that music companies and marketers believe that music is part of human DNA and through music it is easy to win loyal consumers for their products specifically children as they have yet to build their values. Some neurobiologists also admit that human physical capabilities and their social and cultural expressions became possible only in socio-cultural contexts. Similarly, archeologists have also pointed out that “thinking and communicating through abstract symbols is the foundation of all creativity, art and music, language, mathematics, science and written word” (Wilford 2002). Therefore, it is not too far fetched to say that the process of learning and creating things is always the same everywhere. It is through the innate capacity of human creativity, which can be realized only in the process of social interaction with other human beings, that human being expresses herself/himself in many ways including the formations of social institutions and various fine arts and artefacts, as well as fulfilling her/his needs while interacting with other human beings (and also through inner conversation) for everyday survival.

It is important to point out that all human beings are capable of symbolic thinking—thousands of languages were created in the world at the same time probably—which also means that human beings everywhere were and are capable of developing consciousness that extends beyond their time and place and also developing perception of the world within and beyond one individual (Wilford 2002). The capability of creating abstract symbols helped people face various threats and competitions from other people in their day to day survival by tapping their inner resources. Same creative capabilities also helped human beings to develop cultural attributes, maintaining a common identity, communicating ideas that helped in organizing societies into stable, enduring regional groups. But the need to develop new symbolism and new identities could arise only when diverse cultures interact on a continuous basis. Such cross-cultural interaction became possible when people of a society try to fulfill their various needs—food, need for labor force, trade, raw material, marriage etc—by venturing outside of their living territories. But many times this cross cultural interaction can be on an unequal terms due to the colonial context. Nevertheless the contact itself creates the possibilities of influencing one another’s culture (Rahman 1999).

(b) Human being’s innate creativity includes the capacity for reification (through inner conversation) as well, i.e. treating an abstract concept as if it were a person and as if it had a reality of its own kind.
Reification takes place at two levels: first, imagining a possible concrete form; second, after converting the imagined form into a concrete form through words, sounds, or any other modality, providing meaning to these forms and then treating them as if they are real person and 'true'. This is what probably is called in India as Maya. 'Maya' according to 'Hindu' belief system means, everything in the world is an illusion, including one's wealth — which is also called 'Maya' and therefore, slippery—and human body, which is made of five elements, after death returns to those same five elements. Thus, according to this belief, we are all trapped in earthly illusionary world 'Maya Jal' (network created by illusion) while believing it to be the real one. When a person dies she/he leaves behind all accumulated wealth as well as the body that disintegrates into the five basic elements it was originally made of). Later, this concrete 'reality' (or 'truth'), which emerged through the process of reification gives people the impression that they have no control over those social, political, economic, and cultural realities, forgetting that it is people, not god or nature, who created these social realities (including society and its social structures) in the first place. This explanation does not deny the role of natural forces, geography etc in the social formation processes within a given society.

(c) These reified social realities also change through the process of constant social interaction between people to fulfill their daily human needs, and through their 'inner conversation' (based on innate creative capacity) to make sense of these realities. This whole process of fulfilling daily human needs, which I shall refer to as humaneness, requires human communication and interaction through symbols (created through the innate capacity of creativity in human beings). This humaneness includes all physical, material, intellectual, emotional, spiritual needs of human beings, the sense of self-identity, human creativity and personal fulfillment, cooperation, and compassion for people. A human being becomes a human in the process of realizing her/his humaneness. But humaneness can be realized only in a social context where human beings interact with one another while using their creativity in every day life. Such an idea does not exclude conflict among people — based on gender, class, race, caste and so on—which also plays an important role in creating the process of constant social change. But emphasis here is on cooperation and compassion (the original concept of humane probably developed from the recognition of these human qualities) because that is the guiding force for the sustenance of any living society as human beings cannot live without other human beings. Probably that is why the worst punishment in criminal justice system is solitary confinement.

How do socio-economic, political and historical processes form particular social relationships and power structures? How are they sustained through different means, different social institutions and in different times and places? These questions are important in themselves, however, our emphasis here is that all these historical forces and social institutions are human creations to begin with, a by-product of social interaction of human beings in the process of fulfilling their daily human needs. It may be possible to explain the above questions from a different position as suggested in this volume in which evolving human being is made the basic unit of analysis. Such an analysis would not treat social relationship and power structures as a given entity, because these relationships and power structures are themselves created and recreated (reproduced) everyday by people of a given society in the process of social interaction among people to meet their daily human needs.

The Process of Becoming Human

An evolving generic human being learns to be human while interacting with other human beings, either 'real' or, now-a-days, also 'virtual' ones. Human interaction is necessary for the reproduction of human beings both biologically (sometimes indirectly in the age of test tube babies and sperm banks) and also everyday socially. It is undisputable that every human baby needs other human beings for physical, emotional, and mental nourishment for a long time, and that these needs require some form of compassion on the part of adult human beings. Moreover, in this process of biological and social reproduction human beings have to be constantly inventive to find new ways to meet their daily human needs in different social, historical and natural geographical environmental contexts. In the process of finding new ways, using their creative capabilities, to adjust to and live in different natural and social conditions, human beings also create new social and historical conditions in their societies.

But this is not to say that human social interaction is a non-conflictual linear process, because one can find in various societies throughout history numerous examples of power relationships and power conflicts based on gender, race, class, age and many other factors. Notwithstanding these conflicts and differences, our focus is on the examples of cooperation between people against extremely adversarial circumstances,
as in the case of working people’s struggle for their rights, women’s struggle for equality and justice, and people’s struggle in general for universal human rights and human dignity including during the natural disasters. (It does not mean that these cooperating processes are devoid of power struggle or hierarchical relationships within these social movements. But these hierarchical relationships are part of the larger social problem against which social movements emerge.) The reason for this focus on cooperation is to address a major question for this volume: What makes it possible for people to cooperate and transcend their selfishness (selfishness is the instinct to survive, but its different forms are created in a socio-cultural context which in turn are created through social interaction of people)? It seems to me that by focusing on the question of cooperation, and not dwelling on differences and conflicts—while not denying their existence in our daily lives— it becomes possible to explore an alternative theoretical framework which can help in finding new ways to understand the issue of poverty vis-a-vis the development/underdevelopment paradigm.

This idea is not too far fetched; in recent years the US government has advocated the idea of ‘people caring for people’—that is volunteer work—to ameliorate the social tension created by the mass unemployment and underemployment of people due to the advent of information age. The U. S. government under the new Bush administration is also approaching religious institutions to use their compassion and calling to help government achieve its goal of reducing social tension. The churches are asked to take care of ex-welfare recipients in exchange for government subsidies. Britain is also moving in that direction by trying to abolish social welfare system. This appropriation of volunteer work as a political and economic strategy of the state (as also of World Bank and IMF which are promoting the idea of NGOisation of societies in the name of local ‘empowerment’) minimizes the spirit of volunteerism and ‘humaneness.’ Moreover, it promotes the neo-liberal agenda of reducing the role of the state, partly so as to make possible large cuts in public expenditure and also promoting the idea of “people pulling themselves together [as self-help and non-dependence, taking responsibility of their lives] from below without much help from government or their privileged fellow citizens” (Harriss, 2001). One should carefully notice how neo-liberal forces appropriate progressive vocabulary and the concept of self-help, transcending selfishness, appealing to the subliminal instincts using ‘religious’ vocabulary to serve their own agenda without seemingly doing so. Thus, on the one hand creating the illusion of people’s ‘empowerment’ but on the other hand, cutting all resources for people’s welfare while providing more resources to the already rich.

**Defining ‘Humaneness’**

My use of the term *humaneness* also implies both innate human creativity to find ways to survive and fulfilling their daily human needs, and people’s capacity to care for others while transcending their selfishness (but not the way new liberals these days are using it to justify their goals). All human beings are born with both capacities but by relegating them to the domain of institutionalized religion we are unable to use it for finding an alternative historical perspective (but neo-liberal are able to use both religious institutions, their vocabulary, and humanitarianism to promote their agenda.). My understanding is that human creativity and its manifestation in *humaneness* is more easily discernible and displayed (though human beings use it every day in their lives) when human beings find themselves under extremely oppressive social and political conditions, but do not abandon their ingenuity while adapting or struggling to change their conditions. To illustrate we have examples from American and Indian history. For instance, slaves in the United States were able to keep their creativity alive under the most adverse conditions by creating new music, thousands of quilt patterns, and various artifacts while also trying to keep their human bonds intact. Then there was the extreme oppression of female slaves, who had to face the additional threat of being raped and forced to bear children. They sometimes killed their own children to save them from life of slavery.

The form of oppression differed under a free labor market. In a free labor market working masses were put under new oppressive working and living conditions alienating them from the work process, from the finished product, from other coworkers, and from each other. In spite of these hurdles working masses were able to find ways to cooperate with one another to change their living and working conditions, while also expressing their creative ideas in poems, songs, poster art, and many other forms. They were also able to transcend many ethnic differences (but not gender differences especially in the North) as well, and come together in their struggle against capitalist forces, winning major victories. A most recent example is from South Africa where poor people are once again standing up together, in spite of ethnic differences, and in some cases linking up even with former enemies of apartheid time, against the ANC government to improve their living conditions.
(Desai, 2002, Desai, 2003) Similarly in Mexico, people are not passively waiting to be pulled out of the increasing immiseration (40 percent people living in extreme poverty). Instead, they are searching for ways to exercise a modicum of self-governance to strengthen their organization and their ability to survive at the margins of globalised society. They have been able to continuing to produce their basic needs locally and are involved in projects and initiatives that attempt to identify ways of inserting innovations into existing community structures to produce new commodities and services. (Barkin, 2003). We can add similar examples from Brazil and Argentina as well. But according to the IMF perspective the *piqueteros* (unemployed people who are trying to survive by creating neighborhood unions) in Argentina are seen as “the ‘collateral damage’ of neoliberalism—a fluke explosion that happened when rapid-fire privatization was mixed with ‘shock’ austerity in the mid 1990s.” These people refused to disappear quietly into the scavenged shanty towns and die. Instead they organised to block highways and bridges until the government provided unemployment benefits (Klein, 2003). But the government and capitalist forces treat the desperate quest of millions of Argentinians to stay alive as a threat to the economy’s recovery, and they believe that people’s efforts to stay alive must be halted—with brute force—in order to get more IMF loans (ibid).

Another illustration of human ingenuity can be seen from the ability of Indian tribal workers to acquire totally new skills in record time as they adjusted and adapted to new modern factory life environments modeled on western values that were completely alien to them until the 1920s. This example also refutes the prevailing myths—among both western and eastern scholars—about the ‘cultural backwardness’ of the working masses in India, a characteristic that is supposed to be responsible for India’s poverty. The Tata Steel workers’ struggle in colonial India demonstrates that between 1920 and 1940 tribal people who joined the modern Indian steel industry were able to run a whole new rail mill on their own within a few years. Lack of advanced knowledge of machines, or the discipline of factory life, did not seem to stop them from becoming wholly skilled workers whose abilities matched those of imported European workers. These workers also found ways to improve their living and working conditions when pushed to the extreme by company policies. Moreover, they used their existing cultural ideas of justice and fair play to resolve problems that arose from different set of social relationships created by modern steel industrial set up (Bahl, 1995). In all of these adaptations and maneuverings in new social conditions, it was their ‘humaneness’ that guided the tribal workers’ actions. Therefore, while examining any historical process of social change, a scholar should also take into account the role of people’s daily life strategies that are guided by their very ‘humaneness’.

From the contemporary world, the East Asian countries referred to as the ‘Four Tigers’ provide illustrative cases in this regard. Until recently, these countries were considered culturally ‘backward’ and were historically guided by Confucianism. But in spite of this so-called ‘backwardness’ these countries in a very short time were able to compete with the western world in the areas of productivity, living standard, and export promotion. The speed with which these East Asian societies could adapt, change and produce things comparable to the most industrially developed societies can be explained by looking at the common element in every society. The innate ‘humaneness’ of people, and not their culture, is at the center of this commonality. People create culture in the process of interacting with other people in their societies in order to fulfill their daily needs, including achieving their ‘humaneness’. That is why the so-called ‘cultural backwardness’ did not hinder Asian countries seeking equality with the west. Similarly, tribal workers in India had no problem acquiring high technical skills in such a short time, in spite of never having been exposed to any modern industry, as Tata Steel was the first large-scale modern industry in that region of India.

**Human Social Reproduction in Everyday Life**

In these processes of class formations in a society, the actions and the social reproduction of the working masses should not be considered simply as ‘resistance’ to modernization, or as passive reactions to their circumstances, as some scholars maintain. The creation of human bonds and human relations, and subsequent actions of people to preserve these new bonds, are a part of their being human (humaneness). It may not be far-fetched to suggest that there exists a whole system in this social process of reproduction similar to the systems propounded in such other fields as physics and economics. In most instances we witness only the attempts of powerful elements within a society who are able to destroy or subvert those systems of social reproduction through processes of control. For example, in the last two hundred years in the Anglo-American world managerial ideologies to control workers have changed from

(a) the ‘theory of dependence (treating worker as a child and dependent on the employer)’ to

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(b) the theory of ‘laissez faire (responsibility of employer for his worker was rejected)’ to
(c) the theory of ‘social Darwinism (riches and poverty merely reflect differences of ability and efforts)’ to
(d) the theory of ‘human relation (worker seen as an ‘individual’ and his/her skills needed to be improved by appropriate attention to her/his psychological make up)’ approach.

We need to explore the very systems of social reproduction that these powerful elements control and subvert. By exploring the system of human social reproduction in everyday life it will be possible to eliminate existing binaries in the world. We can then focus on how every society is created, along with other things, by the system of human social reproduction in everyday life, including the creation of different political and economic systems, rather than focusing on ‘superior’ cultures, or ‘superior’ industries of a society while creating artificial binaries.

In the contemporary era, the use of technological devices to watch, compute efficiently, and control working people’s actions and thoughts is increasing every day. The recent introduction in the 1990s of an ingenious concept of ‘team work’ — an advancement on the theory of scientific management and controlling of the labor process — has further created a system in the work place that increases productivity and creates a false sense of participation by having workers monitoring one another. Furthermore, it is based on a temporary relationship with one set of workers completing a short project at one time, and then moving on to a new project and a different set of co-workers. In this new system, workers eliminate the ‘slackers’ automatically and help in reducing direct conflict with management. The whole set up thus minimizes the chances of workers ever developing the bond needed for a united struggle. Further separation of workers in one factory is achieved by encouraging each department to treat other departments as clients for their products.

Along with “teamwork” that actually prevents bonding, management promotes the idea of excellence by introducing such concepts as ‘everyday heroes’, and ‘champions’ in the work place. As Gay has pointed out, “Cultural Excellence is a struggle for identities, an attempt to enable all sorts of people, from highest executive to lowest shop-floor employee, to see themselves reflected in the emerging conception of the enterprising organization and thus to come increasingly to identify with it.” (Gay, 1991: 53-54) This is a clear case of manipulating people’s ‘humaneness’ in order to increase productivity and gain their loyalty with minimal conflict. Willmont has explained the implications of this new corporate culture. He writes, “Corporate culturalism expects and requires employees to internalize the new values of ‘quality’, ‘flexibility’ and ‘value added,’ to adopt and cherish them as their own, so that in principle, their uniquely human powers of judgment and discretion are directed unequivocally toward working methods that will deliver capital accumulation.” (Willmont, 1993) From this we can see that the idea of ‘humaneness’ is not an abstract idea because it can be observed in a concrete and representative social situation. As suggested above, one form of ‘humaneness’ is the bonding among workers which empowers (individual power in using their civil, political and economic rights) them against the capitalist exploitation. Conversely, another form of bonding—called team work—encourages corporate culture which weakens the earlier forms of bonding among workers who could gain power to subvert the capitalist agenda.

Corporate Agenda of Continuous Tapping and Controlling of ‘Humaneness’

The importance and the value of ‘humaneness’ are well understood by the powerful corporate world, but not by the scholars trying to explain social reality. In the beginning of the twentieth century, for the mass and cheap production of the goods, as well as to control the labor process, the concept of ‘scientific management’ was utilized that completely crushed workers’ creativity (ingenuity) while reducing them into simple cogs in a vast production machine. Later, in the middle of twentieth century corporate management learned that they could increase productivity by adopting the theory of ‘human relations’ which focuses on workers’ psychological makeup. At the end of the twentieth century, with the increase of the consumer economy, the corporate world is not only finding new ways to control its workers and increase productivity, but also to find ways to control consumer’s (who are also workers) mind as well.

Corporations are investing more in those research projects which can capture and control individual ‘humaneness’ (including the innate creative potential and capacity of human beings), so that the corporate world can commodify it for its own profits. Already corporate research on psychological manipulation of customers to buy more products is promoted through the use of certain types of music at different times of the day, certain types of smells, and other subliminal messages in the...
This psychological project seems to be intended to capture the sociologists, and it would be also incorporated in the social, behavioral (the good life, optimism, flow—i.e. people sometimes feel completely optimal individuals and communities to

and biomedical research work; all in the name of efficiency and common creativity of human beings, no technology could have emerged, or any
to use for profit making. For an example in this regard, these days a

knowledge worker has to sign away all rights to her/his ideas

(written and unwritten) for the duration of his/her employment with the company.

It is not surprising, that while corporate research is focusing on capturing individual ‘humaneness’, the academic world, as has been the case in the past, is facilitating it with the reintroduction of the idea of ‘positive psychology’. Martin Seligman, past president of American Psychological Association, who developed the idea of ‘positive psychology,’ explains that it is “the scientific study of optimal human functioning. It aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive.” (Howery, 1999:8) ‘This approach while focusing on all individuals “attempts to identify what permits optimal functioning.”’ Their questions are: who has achieved these things (the good life, optimism, flow—i.e. people sometimes feel completely left out in certain type of action or relationship while losing a sense of time), how did they achieve them, and how do they sustain them? The ultimate concerns of people are “why am I here and what is my legacy” would also be part of this approach.

This project is pursued with a clear goal to apply it in communities, and workplace organizations with the help of social psychologists and sociologists, and it would be also incorporated in the social, behavioral and biomedical research work; all in the name of efficiency and common good. This psychological project seems to be intended to capture the

ultimate ‘humaneness’ of human beings and subsequently use it to control and direct people at the workplaces and people in communities. For example, instead of providing tangible benefits to the workers, companies are sending them more often to one day morale boosting seminars on becoming a better worker and finding meaning of their lives at the workplace by strongly identifying with their companies.15 In many ways this project is the extension of the old idea of ‘positive thinking’ that was introduced in the United States during the 1950s. At that time the US corporate world needed this idea to convince people to support investment in advanced technology by suggesting that more technological advance would mean, in the long run, more free time and more leisure for everybody. It is well documented by now that after 50 years of the introduction of ‘positive thinking’ people in the United States do not enjoy more free time and that more people are working two part time jobs for less money. So much for the positive psychology and positive thinking to better our lives!

Today, a more dangerous form of tapping and controlling ‘humaneness’ is gaining strength as one futurist of technology has indicated. This futurist informs us that there is a possible shift in the chip technology that would control human ideas and behavior supposedly for making a ‘better’ (secure) society with increased predictability. These predictions are based on IBM’s new technology that allows a computer cursor system to follow a user’s gaze which is now officially used by bank teller machine in Texas.16 Some schools in the USA are already using finger prints instead of credit cards in their cafeteria. The student just has to move her/his index finger in front of the scan and it will be matched with her/his identity and the computer will record all the details of the food bought by that student. This early exposure and acceptance of biometric system will make these children more prone to accepting invasive technology in future life. 17 In other words, these children in their adult life would see invasive technology as a normal way of life and they would never be able to relate to the issues of civil liberties or privacy rights. A recent study (Quart, 2002) points out that a good number of child psychologists are systematically writing projects focusing on “emotional branding of kids” and selling them to higher paying clients as corporations can be more successful in both short term (children spend 28 billion of their own money in 1999 and directly influencing spending of 600 billion of their parents money) and long term to win loyal consumer when children are targeted early in life. There is at least one psychologist (also many times a cultural anthropologist) on almost every...
advertising team that promotes to children and advertising to kids hit 12 billion in 1999. The study demonstrates how the relentless marketing to kids has insidiously permeated what used to be, not fifteen years ago, youth’s sacred places: the teen movie and magazine, youth literature, school social events, video games, extreme sports, the dressing rooms and worst of all, their inner lives. The idea is to connect consumers emotionally with the brand product. It is with this goal in mind that most of the commercial media companies are joining marketers. One can see this happening specifically in the area of recorded music. As one Pepsi executive stated, “Music is part of our DNA. Working with Sony lets us bring it to life in the marketplace. The Umbrella idea is that Pepsi is bringing you music first. It reinforces Pepsi’s connection and leadership in music as a marketer at the same time it allows Sony to get airplay for artists early and often.” (McChesney and John Bellamy Foster, 2003:9)

We are now closer to getting a chip in our brains that can read and unload our fantasies, visions and thoughts for the benefit of the corporations and for marketing those ‘fantasized’ consumer goods. That means the core of creative abilities of human beings, which I refer as part of “humaneness” would also be commodified and human beings would use their innate creative capabilities only at the service of the capitalist forces and not for their own emancipation. The idea of ‘cashless economy’ is already well on its way that is beyond plastic cards and it would be based on chips ingrained in the wrists of humans. Chips already can be embedded in family dogs and are routinely used to track and save rare wild animals.18 Referring to the Sunday Times of London in 1998, this article informs that 45 people including two Americans had already been willingly implanted with chips that could allow them to be tracked at all times. Most of them were film stars and millionaires with fears of being kidnapped. Similarly, companies are very much interested in tracking the tastes of consumers so that they can offer a product, which would naturally be attractive to consumers without feeling the pressure of advertisements. Zippo’s manufacturers Ad agency uses Hypnosis (as do General Mills, Dewar’s scotch, Shell Oil Co. and many others) to enhance market research for example to find out in a focus group how people feel about a product. Self hypnosis used to uncover people’s fondest memories associated with using the famous windproof lighters. The technique was developed in 1972 and once again companies are digging deeper into people’s minds to compete in globalized market (Lin, 2002). Already it is suggested that chips which can be implanted painlessly and within seconds, could be useful for no more baby mix-ups in the hospital, a powerful new tool to track down kidnapped children runaway teen-agers, or even deadbeat dads (Verhovek, 1999, BBC world service, March, 13, 2003). In many corporations, including health services, and transportation, employees (also prison inmate), have to wear on their body similar devices that can trace their itinerary every second and locate them including their time in the rest rooms.

One wonders what is the difference between, putting chips on humans in the name of security, therefore, controlling them politically and legally as a property of a family or a state, and branding slaves and animals as property of their masters in the earlier times? Interestingly Pentagon is also using the most important media Hollywood to control people’s mind. It uses Hollywood to create positive image of Pentagon by providing real military set up and soldiers, as well as relying on the Institute of Creative Technology,19 where talented novelist and artists are asked to imagine all possible scenarios of war and terrorism, so that Pentagon can prepare American soldiers for such possibilities.20 The history of North America clearly shows that various inventions and methods developed to meet military goals during conflicts were always handed over to the private businesses for profit making during the peace time. A recent report shows that already personal video recorders, such as made by TiVo and SONICBlue, can collect information on individual households’ viewing habits, allowing advertisers to more precisely target their messages (Gentile, 2002). It is also pointed out in this report that in 1999 Spielberg convened a three day think tank to pick the brains of 23 futurist about the likely changes technology would bring during the next 50 years. All agree that there will be a major change in advertising industry to start spot sell to people directly. It means increasingly sophisticated knowledge of customer habits and desires. As Spielberg’s science fiction film shows that in future reading the retina of eyes is going to be the clue to get to the wallet of the person. In another technological development at MIT which uses artificial intelligence and videography to make words and song- even in foreign languages—emerge from the lips of people (even the dead ones) who could never possibly have uttered them (Emery, 2002).

It is not surprising that these capitalist forces are also trying to appropriate the most important source of inner knowledge of humans, called Yoga, in order to understand the working of inner self and then use it to their advantage, i.e. marketing products. Therefore, it may not be a simple coincidence that by the year 2002 around 15 million Americans had been following some form of Yoga. Yoga has now
become not only a big industry in the US but it is being reinvented in the form of ‘power yoga’, ‘Baptist Yoga’, ‘Christian yoga’ ‘Aqua yoga’, and ‘Yin yoga’ providing it a legitimacy in the larger western social script while at the same time erasing its connection with Indic tradition. Some are combining Yoga with American dance forms like hip hop and disco, while others are now imparting specialized instructions to niche segments—Yoga for would be moms, Yoga for have been moms, and even yoga for breast cancer survivors. It seems Americans have made ‘yoga stand on its head with innovations and marketing muscle’ (TOI, May 30, 2003). More recently, in 2002 some topmost neurobiologists and psychologists from America started a project with the help of exiled Tibetan Buddhist religious leader, Dalai Lama, to learn how to manipulate human inner creative mind to remain perpetually happy despite all social, economic, and physical problems (Goleman, 2003). In San Francisco an experimental project with school teachers and medical patients is already being conducted in this regard. It will not be surprising if this technique will be put to use at the workplace management as were the earlier projects on ‘poverty management’, ‘conflict management’, ‘pain management’ and ‘stress management’ for which yoga, Zen, transcendental meditation and other such methods are used. All these projects focus on changing individual behavior through manipulation of human’s inner capacities of creativity so that they learn to accept their social situation with contentment while blaming their own self for their failure. This method also eliminates the possibility of people connecting with others who are in similar situation and using collective action to demand broader structural changes.

These methods of using inner self to achieve ‘perpetual happiness’ reminds of an old idea of ‘contentment in one’s destiny or status’ that was earlier promoted for keeping the stability of the Indian social stratification system, and later, this ideology was considered a hindrance in the ‘development’ (modernization) of India with people’s mentality of ‘contentment’—ironically creating a myth that Indian people are supposedly more ‘spiritual’ in their attitude towards life. In turn, such myths had promoted a false binary of ‘spiritual east’ and ‘modern technologically advanced west’. It is not clear how by promoting same very ideologies, that were once condemned as ‘anti development’, would help in the promotion of ‘modernization’ (or so called, development).

While explaining these new developments it is not to suggest that people should not use yoga or any other method to alleviate their pain. What is being highlighted here is that the corporate world is using these methods to their own advantage in the name of people’s ‘empowerment’ and ‘self help’ while giving an illusion of it to unsuspecting people. In such a climate academic scholars are unable to create theories and related strategies for the alleviation of poverty and misery in the world. Instead, they are reduced to repeating the slogans of the corporate world with probably a new sophisticated twist to them while legitimizing corporate role in exploiting and manipulating consumers, who are mostly also workers.

Need for Alternative Perspective

The speed with which this contemporary historical process is moving, it has increased the urgency for discussing the suggested alternative perspective in this volume. This sense of urgency is also behind the suggestion that the scholars such as, postmodernists, postcolonialists and Subaltern Studies should not keep repeating and reinforcing oppressive social theories that unwittingly help only to promote the corporate agenda. Instead, scholars should use their own ‘humaneness’ (and creativity) to save this very ‘humaneness’ from corporate agenda.

In order to do so, it is necessary that we use all possible tools to understand western capitalism and its relationship with various societies. It means to understand the historical process of social formation within western societies as well as all those societies that came in contact with western societies during that time period. In this society-to-society interaction, the adaptation and exchange of cultures and cultural artifacts is inevitable. The exchange and adaptation of ideas and artifacts between societies can take place under different social relationships, though historically the predominant one has been the use of force. It cannot be claimed, as economist William Baumol,21 recently stated while rewriting the story of capitalism that “Medieval China, for example, invented gunpowder, paper, the printing press and probably the compass and the waterwheel. But these inventions failed to raise living standards until adapted into consumer products by societies that were less hostile to commerce.” According to Baumol, “the genius of Western capitalism was to translate invention into the goods and services that enrich everyday life.” While making these statements, Baumol is only recognizing the genius of western capitalism but not the genius of those who invented the new technology. The real irony is that today when China is able to adopt nuclear technology from the United States of America it is not considered a work of genius, but of espionage. How do we reconcile
this double standard? Why are the marketing of products (advertising, promotional campaigns) and mass production processes seen as the work of genius while invention and the process of invention are not? One can see this happening in every field including music, art, fashion, education, technology, medicine, food and so on.

Most of all, the process of mass production did not occur with a stroke of genius, but in the process of bitterly fought class struggle to control the hours of work, wages and labor processes. In the heart of all these developments is the human labor and human capability for creativity. Ignoring these historical processes of social production and reproduction is like saying that capitalism’s exploitation of labor and the management of labor are work of genius, but worker’s initial knowledge of production process, their knowledge of creating products in innovative ways, and perfecting these processes with a long time experience, which were later appropriated by the capitalists through scientific management system, are not. Baumol’s claim is based upon the assumption that the East is inferior to the West, even when people in the East created these technologies that helped western societies to achieve high standards of living. Thus, by ignoring the historical process of social formations within both societies and their interactions (by force or by mutual interests) in modern times, scholars such as Baumol can perpetuate the myth of the ‘genius’ of western capitalism and a ‘backward, inferior’ east, while keeping alive the binaries of tradition/progress and underdevelopment/development. Such explanations remind the way John Stuart Mill, while serving as an officer in the British East India company for 35 years, was on the one hand responsible for studying dharmashastras to instruct the British on ‘managing’ Indians socio-politically, and simultaneously, was pioneering liberalism at home. It was rationalized that Indians were not ready for liberalism, even though one could explain how Mill’s study of dharmashastras influenced ‘European liberalism’. (Mehta, 1999)

This process of both appropriation and demonization of the source is now being expanded to other cultures as well. For example, North America is now appropriating the Indic traditions such as yoga, and its medical system and so on, while at the same time India is also depicted as incoherent, pre-rational deficient in ethics, ‘other worldly’ and culturally ‘backward’. Not very long ago, Native American, and African cultures also met with a similar fate in the hands of the western world. These artificial binaries of East (inferior) and West (superior) must be eliminated so that we can avoid the possibility of expanding these binaries based on extreme nationalism or localism. With the alternative approach, as suggested in this volume, it will also be possible to explain capitalism as a product of a historical process of interaction between equal societies (not of artificial binaries). In this interaction between societies, certain social elements of certain societies sometimes forcibly occupy other societies. The occupiers thus meet their perceived needs at the expense of other societies and appropriate their resources: physical, material and human. In the forcible occupation of other societies, the institutions of knowledge production and the producers of knowledge are used for the purpose of justifying exploitation of the colony. At the same time, the occupying society appropriates the existing knowledge of the occupied society without recognizing or compensating the occupied society. Thus in this colonial context of knowledge production (and appropriation), knowledge itself is turned into a culture of colonialism for solving the colonizer’s social problems within its own societies. In this way the colonizing society, while retaining the same social structure and inequalities within its own society, tries to solve the problems of its lower classes by stealing from others. In this process of stealing from others it also imposes its own ideas and cultural habits on the subordinated societies in order to guarantee a flow of human (with colonial cultural ideas and habits) and natural resources. For example, foreign policies of different societies are mostly based on finding solutions to their domestic economic and social problems, but only those societies with strong military force are able to rob others successfully (Chossudovsky, 1997; Chomsky, 1994; Eichengreen, 1997).

At the same time, it is not to be assumed that the people of subordinated societies suddenly abandon all their rituals of daily life. In fact, they make sense (through inner conversation) of their newly imposed social reality by creating and configuring a new culture. This new culture always accommodates parts of the imposed culture, while continuing the previous ones. In all of these processes, it is the innate ‘humaneness’ of human being that creates a new agenda for life from an arbitrary life which looks like a seamless process to scholars—those who dwell only on colonial culture, western science, or colonial imagination. It is ignored that human agency—as human creativity—is not passive or simply receptive to an imposed agenda. Human beings are constantly creating and recreating their lives (including culture) in the process of interacting with historical forces, as well as meeting their daily human needs, including their ‘humaneness’. ‘Humaneness,’ according to this perspective, is the natural human need to create for the sake of creating,
while also fulfilling their human needs for survival and cooperating with others to achieve these goals. No society can survive or progress without its individual member’s capacity for ‘humaneness’. In other words, each human being’s ‘humaneness’ is what creates and sustains society in the first place. At the same time, ‘humaneness’ cannot be realized in the vacuum. It is realized when human being interacts with nature, with other human beings, and with one’s inner-self (inner conversation) making sense of all these interactions using some prevailing contemporary world view or creating a new one, if none is available.

‘Humaneness’ in Everyday life

As mentioned earlier, ‘humaneness’ also means that human beings in every society are able to set their own life agenda by creating and recreating a society at the bottom, even when the upper (and outer) structures of the society (government, rulers, constitution) are repeatedly destroyed. One can provide numerous examples in this regard from every living society.23 For example, when Soviet Russia ceased to exist and its economy was in shambles, its people were able to maintain their way of life by falling back on a barter system. Similarly, poor people in the USA keep on bartering their expertise and sharing their resources to cope with their situations in every day life as it is happening in contemporary time in the war-torn Palestine and Afghanistan. Historically India was invaded from its western borders many times, but people in these areas went on doing their daily chores within their existing social relationships while submitting to the new forces temporarily when forced to pay more for rent, or other services. The case of Andaman island is a good example where people from diverse cultures (including from India (all regions), Burma, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Malaya, China and so on) are able to live together for a long time while sharing their creativity and humaneness.24 In Mid Eastern countries during medieval times Islam, Christianity and Judaism lived side by side without much conflict (Menocal, 2002). A most recent publication (Rosenfield and Tardieu, 2002; Bystydzienski and Sachacht, 2002) based on some European experiences, shows how poor people are succeeding in creating alliances and overcoming social exclusion and radically changing their inhume living conditions. These people are, in fact, using their ‘humaneness’ to make a difference in their lives by finding new ways to solve everyday existence problems with dignity and pride. This experience is opposite to the concept of private charity for elevating the conditions of poor people. In

recent years people’s struggle in Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, and Argentina for their basic human rights is revealing in this regard and confirms to the point made here. Maxwell Cele, one of the community activists in South Africa who fought the installation of water meters in Mpumalanga, said

“No one is in charge of the protests, except the anger and hunger in every person. ...What connects the militant community mobilizations springing up across South Africa is not ideology but need: for water, medicine, electricity, and land. It is the gut instinct that human needs should take precedence over the demands of the market and, more to the point, that any direct action taken by ordinary people to meet those needs is not only justified but heroic.” (Desai, 2002 quoted in Klein, 2002)

Need for Erasing Dichotomies

Based on these assumptions, the major debate of the present time over the question of which history is more important—written or oral—loses its validity. It also means that the emphasis on either human agency or on meta-narrative in explaining any social reality is a false dichotomy, because both of them are intertwined in the same process of social formation that is created by the genius (creativity) of human beings in the first place. This volume proposes writing histories of different societies without using a binary of tradition/modernity, east/west, south/north and so on. Instead, without denying the existence and effects of domination of one society over other, it suggests that the comparison between societies should be based on premises of equality, because it is human creativity that structures any society—dominated one as well as the dominating society. There is only one basis of the creation of society: that is generic and evolving human beings who possess the innate creative capacity. This notion of human creativity provides a basis for treating all societies as equals, as all societies are able to create—through the genius and creativities of human beings—in a number of ways, a complex structure of social, political, and economic relations, and technology, art, music, language, dress, and any number of institutions and artefacts. Therefore, applying the idea of human creativity on the issue of the ‘development or underdevelopment’ (as understood so far) it should be possible to demonstrate (I shall take it up in a future project) that: people of a given society choose how they use their creativity for the purpose of resisting historical forces of capitalism and related development, or for forging new methods of ‘development’ (increasing productivity) to enhance people’s empowerment in the face of threatening living and
working conditions. The role of other historical forces are always there but each one of them are only one of the many collective forces.

For example, Indian politicians and scholars debated for a long time before consciously choosing to introduce the modernization and subsequent industrialization of India as well as the model of ‘scientific housewife’ (Berry, 2003). It is a different matter why the choice of modernization became acceptable over other alternatives available at that time. But one thing is clear that modernization did not happen because it was inevitable. Similarly in 1950s Government of India deliberately chose to adopt the US model of ‘scientific housewife’ for nation building and created conditions and infrastructure to make Indian women’s role in that image (Ibid; GOI report 1959). In the 1990s once again it was a conscious decision of the Indian middle class and politicians, to introduce liberalization and open India to world markets, which has already changed the class structure, space management of big cities, gender relations, and poor women’s choices in the job market (Jhabwala and Sinha, 2002). Once again, there was nothing inevitable about all these changes as they clearly resulted from a consciously chosen path, of course with the blessings of IMF and World Bank. Similarly it is possible to refer to the conscious choices made historically in other societies of North America, Soviet Russia, in post Soviet Russia, China and in present day Venezuela, and Brazil as well. The most recent example is the unilateral US invasion of Iraq, that is once again creating a new world disorder and mass sufferings, which was not an inevitable fate but was made by a conscious choice of the US and British vested interests. The governments of other countries, even though opposing this unilateralism, were also quick in demanding their share of the contracts in the so called rebuilding of Iraq, thus promoting the historical capitalist imperial agenda. In the cultural sphere also it is possible to show that cultural changes mostly are made very consciously in everyday life. Many interested political parties use such avenues to promote their ideas and sometimes to change the political discourse, and new aesthetics. The role of media in changing culture has been well documented as well as its role in manufacturing consent for the ruling classes.

Organization of Chapters

In the present volume, I am attempting to locate the problem of writing ‘history from below’ and suggesting to write history in a way that would open up the possibility within which the idea of emancipation and role of agency would thrive. I am hoping that other scholars would also contribute in developing such strategies and not accept the present historical conditions as inevitable or as ‘fate’. Based on this understanding I have organized chapters under three separate sections:

(i) What Went Wrong with ‘History from Below’, (ii) Erasing Dichotomies, and (iii) Creativity, (Human Agency), Meta-narrative and History.

In section one, I situate the debate on recent historiography that has influenced a whole generation in the last two decades. The essays in this section pose specific social questions accompanied by their debates, analyzing why and how scholars deviated from the real issues by rejecting the concepts of class, class consciousness and emancipatory politics. What were the ramifications of deviating from the project of emancipation? What went wrong? The first chapter focuses on the Subaltern Studies project showing how “history from below” emerged in a broader historical, social, political context and how its ideology has deviated from the project of emancipation, and the writing of working class history. What is the social utility of such scholarship? Taking the above critique further Chapter two focuses on the specific issues relating to the so called ‘empowerment’ of Indian women by the revival of the tradition of sati and the empowerment of local communities by the proliferation of the NGOs and their role within local communities. On the one hand, this chapter examines the ideas of South Asian scholars such as Ashis Nandy and Subaltern scholars that support the revival of traditions that possibly including sati. At the same time, this chapter investigates the recent ideas of Gail Omvedt and Krishendu Ray, who support liberalization and neo-imperialism. The scrutiny of their recent ideas shows that all these scholars are advocating apparently opposite historical forces, but in effect, they are not very different in promoting the existing status quo, and consequently against emancipation.

The questions are: why are these scholars promoting such ideologies in the name of emancipation? How is “History from Below” is now converted into the history of identities and subjectivities of specific social groups or individuals and not the historical and social processes that gave rise to those identities in the first place?
In order to understand the issue of social identities in our time it is important to first understand the process of class formation, class consciousness and ‘caste’ consciousness in India. In chapter three the emphasis is on the general issue of the formation of class and class consciousness. But the specific in-depth aspects of the issue of class consciousness—the struggles and problems of emancipation for both women and men in the ex-colonies of the world in specific historical, social, cultural and political contexts—are taken up in section two; ‘Erasing Dichotomies’.

In section two, I explore the possibilities of writing ‘History from Below’ of different societies without the use of usual binaries and try to discover different ways so that the possibility of emancipation remains open. It seems that by focusing on the idea of ‘Erasing dichotomies’ it becomes possible to measure all societies with the same yardstick and not subscribe to such prevailing political divisions as identity/nationality or local/global. I am not suggesting that people do not experience these dichotomies because they do. My question is what made these dichotomies possible that they become so real? My other questions are: How do men and women in the AFASALA (Africa, Asia, South Asia and Latin America) region become proletarianized and develop their class consciousness? How do they organize themselves to resolve their conflicts with dominant forces in the past and in the present time? Was/ is this process similar to what happened in western industrialized countries or not? While chapter four locates women’s class consciousness in AFASALA countries in their historical, economic, cultural and political context, chapter five elaborates on women’s movements in AFASALA societies in the context of cultural imperialism in the globalized world. It is suggested in this chapter that today it is necessary to create bridges between societies and between women (and men) of different socio-economic, cultural, ethnic and national backgrounds within the colonizing world as well as between the colonizing world and AFASALA societies.

In section three, by focusing on two micro level cultural issues and one macro level socio-economic issue, I have tried to show that it is possible to eliminate binaries in history writing. But while eliminating binaries we need not sacrifice either the role of structural forces or the role of human agency as human creativity. Some questions dealt in this section are: How do people in different societies express their creativity, spirituality and subjectivity in every day life as well as in specialized areas? How do societies adapt from one another various cultural expressions, including various artefacts, clothes and musical sounds?

First, focusing on the subject of Indian women’s clothes (material culture), chapter six elaborates how human creativity and subjectivity in our time has to be understood by focusing both on the internal social, cultural, political, and economic processes within a society and also within a larger context people of these societies interact while eliminating any binaries. It means we need to understand the interplay of human creativity at the level of subjectivity, while also situating that human being within a broader social and historical context as well as material and non-material conditions (of course created by people themselves) that contribute in the formation of a culture and people’s subjectivities. In another example of micro and macro relationship the inquiry is extended to the issue of subjectivity and creativity in the sphere of music and musical experiences with an added dimension of ‘spirituality’. The purpose of focusing on music is to understand how the most intimate inner subjective experiences such as, human creativity, ‘spirituality’ and pleasure are also closely connected to the macro context of a given society. At the same time, these subjective experiences keep changing along with various social, economic and political ups and downs of a given society. In addition, the musical forms and interpretations are subject to various changes with society to society interactions as well. Through a case study of an Indian classical music form called Dhruvapad, which is claimed to have emerged from the 3000 year old Indian scripture Sam Veda, I attempt to locate this musical form in its historical context. In the process of locating this musical form, I tried to show how the status of Dhruvapad shifted in various historical times from ‘people’s culture (low brow) to ‘elite’ culture (high brow) and how Dhruvapad adapted from different musical forms in various historical times that were emerging in the process of society to society interactions. It is also suggested that it is possible to find a similar process of shifting status in the emergence and development of western classical music.

Last essay deals with a macro level issue of India’s industrialization. In this essay I suggest that it was neither the ‘benevolence’ of imperialist Britain, nor the culture of Indian elite, or simply the vision of an entrepreneur that created a large scale Indian steel industry possible. I explained that in the emergence of the large scale Indian steel industry the role of human creativity at every level was equally important as the role of other historical forces—the vision of an entrepreneur, the creativity of the colonial officers to use the global economic situation to the advantage of colonial power, creativity of technicians, of scientists, of
educationists, of skilled/unskilled workers, creativity of uprooted tribal people who used their ingenuity to adjust in new circumstances and learned quickly becoming skilled workers, creativity of people’s movements in India, creativity of nationalist leaders and nationalist movements. All these various people residing in their respective societies, while using their creativities to deal with their everyday socio-economic and political issues, produced global/local conditions and a specific historical conjunction that provided a favourable opening for the emergence of the large scale Indian steel industry.

Thus by focusing on the human innate capacity of creativity it has been possible to move away from stage theory of Rostow on modernization, and the stage theory of Marx’s idea of shifting—progressively—different modes of production. At the same time, it has been also possible to treat all societies on equal basis in the sense that each society, including both colonizing and colonized, were/are products of human creativity and human interaction within their own permeable social boundaries as well as their interaction with other societies. The unequal relationships between societies emerged in the process of their interaction when one society was able to control resources and political administration of other society through force (for example, recent invasion of Iraq in 2003) or other such means. Therefore, unequal relationship between societies do not (and did not) occur due to any innate unequal human capacities for creativity.

Another Possible Alternative Organization of Chapters

The above sequence of essays in this volume can also be viewed based on implicit themes and arguments contained in them. For example, the issue of the proletarianization of women in the AFASALA region and their class consciousness cannot be separated from the issue of industrialization, cultural and economic imperialism, class/caste formation, domestic arrangement of production and reproduction, social reproduction, dynamics of caste, women’s dress and local traditions and social movements. Therefore, it might be appropriate to infer that it is not possible to understand a woman’s specific gender experience—in every society—, her subjective identity and her choices in her society without examining her class, caste, and race, prevailing patriarchal/matriarchal relations in particular areas along with her own creativity. Furthermore, we also need to understand the level of industrial development of her society, political status of the society and social, economic and political choices available to her at that point in time and place. It also means that either woman, man, as separate categories cannot be a useful tool to explain social reality. Because both women and men live in the same society that is formed by them in the process of their interaction with one another using their human potential of creativity. Each society is constructed during the process of meeting people’s basic human needs, including their ‘humaneness’, that in turn constructs all values, culture and gender relations and so on. With this understanding of the social formation, it is fair to say that scholars can sometimes focus on women and men to explain certain experiences, and situations while filling the gaps in the methodological approaches. But this gender specific focusing on their personal experiences cannot be a substitute for the understanding of the process of social formation. In order to understand the process of social formation we need to include in our analysis, human capacity for creativity, human labour as a creative act, and how it became a commodity, the specific experiences of women and men as well as the social, historical, political and cultural contexts in which those experiences became possible in the first place.

For example, the issues of gender experiences is related to the process of the reinforcement of traditions—including types of clothes—, to the process of proletarianization, to the politics of emancipation and to the level of industrialization in a society which includes the process of globalization as well. Along the same lines, the issue of class cannot be separated from the discussion of caste, class formation, class-consciousness that includes both genders, from the continuation of traditions or the creation of new ones under the pressure of industrialization. All these subjects, women/men, caste, class and politics of emancipation, particular types of clothes and tastes, are intertwined because each human being experiences life as a whole person (including gender, class, race, nationality, age, and any other category) and simultaneously.

Similarly, the issue of clothes is not simply an issue of changing fashion, but they are the visible signs of human creativity in the form of prevailing customs, tastes, aesthetics, class relations, gender relations, and caste relations of a society. Since clothes embody the custom of a society it cannot be separated from the history of that society. But generally customs are seen as autonomous of society, hence not as a social issue. Similarly, clothes are considered to be an individual choice, creativity and subjective experiences and autonomous of larger society. By focusing on clothes as everydayness of people it is possible to
understand the conditions under which the most visible embodiment of local customs were produced, changed and sustained in a particular class, caste and gender structure of a society in a particular time. Clothes provide clues to discovering links between human creativity, social structure and culture. Such clues are useful specially to understand multicultural societies of the 20th century on the one hand, and to understand proliferating individual responses to the hegemonic culture, on the other. Such understanding will help in erasing the binaries of traditional and modern, and allow us to see the process of interaction among people within a society and their interaction with larger outside forces as well.

It is possible to apply the above mentioned approach to understand another intense subjective (and it is considered in some quarters as ‘autonomous’ of society) experience and a universal phenomenon of music—a natural human instinct. For example, by the end of the twentieth century, clothing (material culture) has also become a very important medium in the promotion of popular music (non-material culture) industry, which raises the following question: how have clothes and music, apparently two separate subjective experiences and choices, become complementary in the open markets? In other words, how are cultural choices and experiences of clothes and music related to the structural processes of change within the relevant larger society? In exploring such questions it is necessary to challenge another binary concept: high culture and low culture. Instead of focusing on the complementary role of clothing and music, I have focused on the debate of ‘high and low’ culture to locate the concept of ethnomusicology in relation with the Indian ‘classical’ music—Dhruvapad. By locating Indian ‘classical’ music Dhruvapad in its historical context it became possible to explode the myth of the binary of ‘high and low’ culture. It also helped in pointing out that any form of music acquires ‘high or low’ status in a particular historical context with the help of hegemonic forces of the time within a society.

The alternative approach suggested in this volume allows us to view every society in its totality while unravelling the dynamic relationship between the parts of the totality, instead of freezing these relationships as external to the parts. Moreover, the advantage of this perspective is that it is more inclusive in that it includes the role of human agency as human creativity, the role of the world historical, economic, political and cultural forces, the specific social context in the social formation of any society, the role of class struggle, a dynamic approach to class question, role of gender formation and gender experiences and race experiences as well. It is suggested that with this approach it will be possible to restore the writing of ‘history from below’ as it was originally meant to be. Such an approach would start with world history as a unit of analysis in which all societies would be treated as equal in their process of social formation while recognizing the historical specificities of each society. The ‘history from below’ as suggested here, will include oppressed people in all societies as well as all oppressed and colonized societies in the world on equal footing, thus, breaking the binaries of traditional societies verses modern societies, orient/occident, and core/periphery. This treatment of equality of all societies would put all the areas of the world at par with one another, without ignoring the history of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism of certain societies or, without ignoring the historical, political, cultural specificity of each society or, the specific context of each person’s life and experiences, as well as, each evolving human being’s role in creating and also reinforcing the existing social norms in her or his everyday life. Thus it would be possible to have a perspective which can be inclusive and also open enough to accommodate any new variable, which might emerge in the future, without losing the role of the class conflict, labour processes, larger historical forces, individual creativity and individual identities. This effort became necessary once again because Subaltern Studies, which claims to be ‘doing history from below’, abandoned this project in favour of joining the postmodernist debate. But the need for writing the ‘history from below’ has further increased in our time with the brutal onslaught of global capitalism once again on every walk of life and in every society mostly affecting negatively vast masses of already marginalized people.

Conclusion

This volume is about problematizing complexities while showing the possibility of writing a history of the world from an alternative perspective not based on European history, but derived from the experiences of social formations, cultural formations and class struggles in India. The focus on India is important because it represents the history of one billion plus people with all possible historical scenarios, since the time of Indus valley civilization, and all possible mixes of people, religions, political forms, economic structures, social structures, arts, music, dance, clothes and languages. Moreover, Indian history includes all possible scenarios
of British colonial rule and labour relations, expansion of the earlier empires of South Asian rulers, an extremely diverse and complex culture, interaction with all major world religions, a connection with neo-colonialism, the emergence of a bourgeoisie, and communism, the success of high technology, production of nuclear weapons, continuous brain drain, experiments in both socialist economy and capitalist economy, existence of nationalism and communalism, India’s status as a regional power, and its interaction with other cultures in all historical phases of the world, including Europe, China, Middle East, Africa, Russia, Earlier Soviet Russia, East Asia, Australia, Latin America and the United States.

The suggestion of an alternative perspective is posed against previous frameworks that invariably attempted to show that India is not a ‘normal’ society in the sense that western societies are. These frameworks postulate that in India, working class people have a culture in which they do not act but just react to their circumstances, and they have no role in making or shaping it. By avoiding the concepts of class formation and class-consciousness and focusing only on culture, on Indian women, or on caste and the caste system, historians are examining these factors out of context, which inevitably lead them to reject the possibility of the forming of working class consciousness. This volume also points out, besides the issue of social formation, that by making ‘class’ (with all complexities) rather than gender, ethnic, or caste identity, a primary agency solidarity among working people becomes a possibility. Otherwise, women and men would have no grounds for developing solidarity across history, across society, and across nations. It is not a woman’s/ man’s identification of herself/himself as a biological woman/man that unites her/him with other women/men, but her/his evolving ‘class’ position. This does not mean that it is easy to comprehend the concept of ‘class’, as it is an invisible category of analysis. Moreover, ‘class’ is also a dynamic social relationship; one woman’s/ man’s ‘class’ position can keep changing throughout in her/his whole life span as she/he interacts dialectically with constantly changing historical, economic, social and political forces. ‘Class’ is also related to the technical division of labor, to comparative income, to other culturally created hierarchies and to an experientially constructed status. All these complexities in the concept of ‘class’ can be comprehended if we focus on the dynamics of the process of social formation in a society during specific spaces and times. Discussing on similar lines Tom Brass has also pointed out,

“It is one thing to describe class as ‘foundational,’ it is quite another to demonstrate that class is inapplicable. Since the later is something ‘new’ popularism cannot do, because the analysis of class is so obviously central to any understanding of the development process, ‘new’ populist are reduced to reciting meaningless mantras in the hope that they will be mistaken by the more gullible for theoretical analysis.” (Brass, 2000)

The alternative perspective suggested in this volume has developed in the process of understanding various contemporary social issues that are fiercely debated by scholars in both western countries and non-western countries. These scholars use either economic or cultural arguments to explain social issues. In earlier days, grand theories of modernization, dependency and the world system, which reduced social analysis to economic determinism were more popular. In recent years, the emphasis on culture, subjectivity and identity in the name of human agency has gained ground to the extent that it has closed all possibilities of creating new approaches, leading to a blind alley while promoting cultural determinism—which hides various complexities including class/economic conditions of people. In the alternative hypothesized perspective offered in this volume, the focus is on both processes; the role of human agency—defined more broadly here as ‘humaneness’ (includes subjective reaction to the living and working condition) and human creativity—and world history based on the equality of all societies. With this approach it should be possible to explain the issue of industrial ‘development/underdevelopment’ not merely as a technological or cultural process, but as a larger process resulting from people interacting with people in a society while resolving their daily human needs through their ‘humaneness’ and creativity. Technological development, along with other processes, should be considered as only one manifestation of this interactive process.

A recent example from India (Mahurkar and Parihar, 1999, Corporate Monitor, April, 1999) shows that the so-called development projects are compelling people to leave their villages in massive numbers in search of a livelihood. But the fate of one Rajasthan village changed when Dhanoya, a poor man in that village, heard of an old idea of saving rainwater naturally and made up his mind to implement it and save the village from drought and extinction. He mobilized the village people to set up a dam, and in response people from all castes and religions in the village came together. They were successful in saving their village from present and future extinction, and they soon became prosperous with their projects of watershed development. This approach is now replicated in other regions as a weapon against poverty in India, and is preferred to the
failed projects of ‘development’ (industrial projects) imposed and suggested by IMF and western scholars. This has given the people of the village a sense of empowerment and ownership. As villager Kanhya Lal said, “We used to feel we could not change our fate, but now we have the confidence to look after ourselves.”

From the perspective of this volume it is important to note that people from all castes and religions were able to come together to save this village, rather than reinforce their so called rigid ‘caste’ identities, thus refuting the widely propagated notion of rigid ‘caste’ consciousness of Indian villagers and its hindrance of people’s solidarity (At the same time, I do not deny that in many villages prevailing ‘caste’ identities do matter in everyday life. But my emphasis is on the possibilities of people coming together in spite of ‘caste’ identities). Similarly, in another instance, when imported parts were not available for repairing existing tractors, some villagers used their ingenuity to create new ways of improving those tractors that did not depend on imported parts. Similarly in Bangladesh, the poorest country in the world, people have created many new schemes such as the famous Gramin Bank to take control of their lives. It is a different matter that such schemes are hijacked many times by the patriarchal power structure to its own advantage while marginalizing women. Nevertheless, the role of people’s creativity cannot be denied in developing new ways to change society. Recent example of Workers Party’s success in Brazil is noteworthy in this regard as are the actions of poor people in South Africa who are once again standing up against the ANC administration and their draconian rules. Similarly, in India people are successful in fighting against the projects of modernization (Narmada Valley Dam) which are supported by the World Bank and other multinational companies in alliance with the government of India.

It is important that scholars give back the credit where it is due and recognize the genius—creativity—of all woman/man who are able to survive and manage their daily life with ingenuity. It is the capitalist forces that learn from people’s ingenuity and innovations and appropriate these innovations and survival strategies for its commercial ends through the scientific management system. Thus a so called primitive culture is suddenly transformed—by the magic wand of time and motion study—into a modernity and therefore, seemingly ‘progressive’ western—of course, ‘brand new’—culture. For example, women in Africa for ages have been carrying from a long distance, big pots filled with water on their heads and loads of fire wood, as well as, carrying their children without straining their necks. The Pentagon authorities in the United States after making a time and motion study of African women’s ability to function with so much load, found that this method could be adopted by the U.S. army to train its soldiers to carry more weight while on the battle field and remain efficient and agile. Similarly, the creative styles of inner city street Afro-American youths are profitably used by the high fashion industry to set the new trends in teenage clothing, while these inner city young people are treated as deviant of society. One can go on adding any number of similar cases from the world of music, art, scientific inventions, weapons, innovation in food, cooking, herbal plants, indigenous knowledge, and other intellectual fields that are appropriated by the corporations for their own profit. We applaud corporations for making profit, but we do not appreciate the genius and creativity of average person who is the real creator of those ideas that are utilized by the corporations for profit making. Similarly, we tend to recognize the braveries of soldiers—who kill people on behalf of their countries—and rich people who go for adventure tours, while ignoring the bravery of those people who are able to survive their impossible everyday struggle against the onslaught of the capitalist forces and are also able to keep intact their creativity. Probably it is not surprising, because a soldier’s bravery, and the glamorous life of rich people seem more interesting than the struggle for survival of poor people. But interestingly in the year 2000 the TV network giants found a way to market and profit from common people’s capacity to survive creatively in extreme circumstances as the record breaking rating for artificially created ‘real survivor’s’ TV programs demonstrate.

It cannot be denied that it is the creativity, genius, and average woman/man’s capacity to provide labour power, as well as the reproduction of social and biological labour that has created profits for the capitalists class, in the form of inventions, innovations, and manual labour. Since capitalists are using all their resources to control the genius of average woman/man to maintain their profits and power therefore, the concerned scholars should also make efforts to understand this precious potential source of capitalist profits and expose the hypocrisy of the theories of development and theories of identity and subjectivity.

In the end, it may be pointed out that the suggestions hypothesized here might help in writing histories—everywhere—of women, working classes, oppressed people and oppressed societies from the vantage point of their own societies without the binaries of traditional or modern, core/periphery, progressive or backward, not as national or local history, but
as a dynamic process of social interaction between people through their
capacity for creativity. A question automatically arise: Why have we
not used our creative ideas to write and promote such histories? Why
have we expended our creativity—humaneness—in finding ways and
vocabularies to promote and reinforce oppressive ideas such as industrial
development, culture, caste, gender, and identity difference, that lead to
a blind ally. Surely if we wish we can direct our innate creativity—our
humaneness—and human agency—to changing the discourse to the
advantage of oppressed people, in the process emancipating ourselves
and our history writings and not give in to fatalism. This volume is one
humble step in that direction.

NOTES

My preliminary ideas, as suggested in this introduction, were first presented in
December 1998 in the Annual Conference of Anthropological Association at
Philadelphia. Another revised version of this introduction was presented in a
workshop “Autour Des 'Subaltern Studies’” organized by Journee du Centre d’
Institute—Friday Seminar, Bogazici University, Istanbul, 20 December 2002.

1. It is important to note that the industrial giants have also started to
express’ (since 2000) a concern about the issue of global poverty. Most of all
even the USA has now admitted its imperialist (but only military form) designs.
Ironically, postmodernist and post colonialists including the subaltern scholars,
who claim to be writing for the oppressed, are against dealing with the larger
historical forces in their analysis in the name of erasing Eurocentrism.

The Nation for the text of the complete letter released to administrators
which was initially drafted by Jagdish Bhagwati of Columbia University and
burnished to perfection by a collective (250 economists and lawyers) of free
trade zealots calling themselves the Academic Consortium on International Trade
(ACIT), (Liza Featherstone and Doug Henwood, 2001).

Ironically, the Economic Strategy Institute, a think tank financed by steel,
aviation, semi conductors, autos and other manufacturers, has published a report
Labor Standards in the Global Trading System by Peter Morici, a neoclassical
economist from the University of Maryland and former economics director at
the US International Trade Commission, which is opposed to ACIT’s draft letter.
Based on standard economic theory as well as the accumulated evidence Greider
concludes that the ability of some countries to gain advantage against foreign
competitors by exploiting their workforces ultimately distorts the allocation of
investment capital for everyone in the system and thus is inefficient, he explained.
(Greider, 2001:12).

3. R. K. Pachuri, the director of Tata Energy and Resources Institute, spoke
at the US Chamber of Commerce.

“I would like to talk about poverty because it represents a huge business
opportunity and moral responsibility .... to invest in India.” This meeting was
attended by World Bank, Coca Cola, The Department of Labor, Treasury,
Commerce and State, and the embassies of India and Saudi Arabia. Earlier
Pachauri was also chosen to welcome Bill Clinton during his trip to Agra where
he made a speech on energy and environment. India Today January 8, 2001.

4. ‘Backwardness’ is a concept which means, according to the modernization
theory, those areas of the world which are not industrialized.

5. This idea was suggested earlier in my published article in April 1997
“Thinking Globally: Cultural Imperialism and Women’s Movements” Gender
and History.

6. We must remember that in the human history it was, and it is the innate
human creativity that has produced an unlimited varieties of languages, dresses,
music, artefacts, rituals, religions, cults, healing systems, housing and living
conditions, technology, furniture, state formations and social formations in the
whole world. There is no one perfect way of doing things and this variety cannot
be reduced to the label of low or high, progress or backwardness, as each way of
doing things and creating things are pertinent to that particular social and historical
context. We should be celebrating human capacity of creating unlimited varieties
of things and expressions rather than promote one standard way, that will make
the world a poorer place by limiting human creativity.

The problem is that the history of the world is defined based on only European
experience. For example, one scholar suggested that, ‘culture’ has become the
all-explanatory term for the contemporary times, as earlier it was ‘Fate’ in the
Elizabethians time, and ‘History’ in the Victorians Era. These suggestions of
‘eras’ and their contemporary all explanatory terms are based on the history of
the west and of the USA only. These suggestions do not use or include the
histories of rest of the societies in the world to create a periodization of world
history. Usually when the western scholars use the term ‘culture’ as an
explanation for ‘Third World’ poverty, the ancient notion of freedom, virtue,
notion of will, that associate with this term, are normally forgotten. It is surprising
that when scholars write the history of North America, they generally use a
periodization based on economic eras that they think were created by the
 technological, social and political development in the country. But the same
approach is avoided to explain the history of India or many other non-western
countries. Instead, one all explanatory term ‘culture’ (a static one) is used for
their historical discussion. Moreover, the idea of culture, as it emerged in America,
is seen as democratic against the static one applied to non-western world.
(Rothstein, 1999: A-19)

7. These ideas are used here to develop an approach to explain the issue in
hand and not to concern ourselves with the origin of these ideas. How and why
have I come to raise such questions, and why am I choosing to deal with these

questions in the way I am doing? To answer these questions I have to trace not only the history of my intellectual development in various contexts within India and in the USA, but also my personal life history, as both processes are intertwined. Since I have no intention of writing that history, it may not be possible to answer these questions. Nonetheless, it can be stated that nobody thinks or writes in a vacuum and everyone is borrowing from previous thinkers and writers either through ‘collective consciousness’ or consciously by quoting them. In our analysis we generally forget that at any given time in history people are exposed to various ideas from various sources and experiences. To ignore all the influences and experiences and admit only one or two major influences (or major author, philosopher) can lead to suppressing many voices and also denying the process of interaction among people as well as people of other societies. My major concern in this volume is: how can we use available ideas creatively to break the impasse we have reached in our thinking of the question of “development and underdevelopment.”

8. Steven Pinker (2000) has made some very interesting observation about the brain while demolishing the slur of ‘biological determinism’. He also says that brain is made of mental modules that give us innate skills and predisposition for language acquisition, for face recognition, for building basic taxonomies of life forms and much else. Human specie has shared characteristics that unites us all irrespective of race and culture. We all have the same physical and mental organs. This is obvious in the case of language, where every neurologically intact child is equipped to acquire any human language. Similar is the case for other parts of our mind as well. He gives a long list of basic social patterns such as cooking, cooperation, cooperative labor, copulat, coyness display, crying, cultural viability, customs, daily routine, dances, death rituals etc. (Quoted in Johnson, 2002:15).

9. In another context the following was noted by one renown scholar of Indian culture. “The basic three structures of the world, viz (a) physico-chemical (b) bio-psychological and (c) logico-mathematical are all simultaneously open to upward and downward causation. In other words, the physico-chemical structure can causally influence the bio-psychological one and the latter can causally influence the most abstract logico-mathematical, the reverse process of causation is also operative in the world. In spite of its relative abstractedness and durability, the logico-mathematical world has its downward causal impact on our bio-psychological and epistemological processes and products. And latter can also bring about change in the structures of physical world and its chemical composition. Applied physics and bio-technology make the last point abundantly clear” Furthermore, he writes “the human quest for knowledge involves the use of both head and hand...even for our appreciation of what is beautiful and the creation of what is valuable we are required to exercise both our intellectual competence and physical capacity—our psychosomatic structure is a functional connector between what we are and what we could be, between the physical and beyond. To suppose that there is a clear cut division between the physical world and the psychosomatic one, amounts to denial of the possible emergence of higher logico-mathematical, musical and other capacities. The very availability of aesthetic experience and creation proves that the supposed distinction is somehow overcome by what may be called the bodily-self or embodied mind” (Chattopadhya 1999: xix and xvii).

10. The US daily newspapers reported about Philadelphia rally led by Clinton and three earlier Presidents of the US to promote volunteerism in the US in the wake of mass layoffs. See details on this issue in national daily newspapers of December 1996, and also in March, May 1997. Some newspapers also reported church reaction to this program and their scepticism. See an article on this issue by James Petras “United States: Volunteerism: The Great Deception” in Economic and Political Weekly July 5, 1997. See Jeremy Rifkin’s suggestion on social economy in The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era. Putnam Book 1995. Bush junior’s administration is taking it further by inviting churches to take over the job of caring for the poor who are eased out of the economic system by the restructuring of the global economy in which the US has played an important role. Jennifer Loven “Bush to Enact ‘Faith Based’ Measure” Associated Press Dec 12, 2002. Britain has also now adopted this example to eliminate social welfare system.


12. It is possible to point out that machines simplified the work, and therefore, Indian workers could easily adapt to it. But my concern is based on the most prevailing explanation that the Indian workers were not skilled in modern technology and that they did not have the discipline or commitment of factory life which supposedly led to India’s industrial backwardness.

13. For example, Taylorism, and Fordism were introduced in work places to increase productivity, and to reduce workers to a mere cog in the machine. These methods of workplace management were based on the principle of separating worker’s mental and physical labor while taking away their ingenuity (humaneness) so that management could control the production process and worker is reduced to a human robot.

14. Scientist are able to find a gene which controls the sleep pattern in humans so that a pill can be manufactured for the use of the factory workers who work on shifts and cannot get enough sleep. Thus worker’s productivity can be increased by stretching the human physical limit or altering the gene to use human machine as a non-human machine which can work twenty four hours. Most of the genetic engineering seems to be geared at finding the human limits and altering it to the benefit of productivity and profit only. Unless we use it for the purposes of uplifting human living conditions we shall all be reduced to being robots in the hands of corporations. The New York Times 6/10/99 E-8.

15. CBS weekly program 60 minutes, June 2002, CBS.

16. Futurist: Humans Will Have Computers Embedded in Skin” Williamsport
creativity in India Today 9 Ocrober 2000. Creativity can also be seen in various forms of struggles when people find new methods to fight against oppression and changing their living conditions as in the case of Brazil landless people called The Sem Terra Movement. See for details Joao Pedro Stedile “Landless Battalions: The Sem Terra Movement of Brazil” in New Left Review No. 15, May-June 2002. Also see Frederic F. Clairmont’s analysis of Brazil’s election and winning of Workers Party headed by Lula ‘Elections in Germany and Brazil: Critical Outcomes’ Economic and Political Weekly, November 16, 2002.

In south India a large number of unorganised workers covered 850 km in 50 days to celebrate May Day in Chinnai. Half of them were women workers. Others consisted of carpenters, brick workers, domestic workers, street vendors, tailors, rickshaw pullers, bidi workers, agricultural labourers. It is an important event because 90 percent of workers in India are working in the unorganised sector. A. K. Roy “Voice of the Unorganised Sector” Economic and Political Weekly, October 5, 2002.

It is no surprise that western business community has started promoting the idea that ‘Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they’ll surprise you with their ingenuity’. Richard Donkin “Employee ingenuity can spring surprises”, Financial Times March 28, 2003. The article highlights the mutual benefits of both military and business world and concludes that military leaders can once again be useful in advising the corporate world by sharing the leadership skills in managing the workforce because the adaptive armies of today could become equally adaptive workforce of tomorrow.

28. Naomi Klein, 2000. A recent ABC evening news (5/16/2002) informed about a herb found in Kalahari desert in Africa which is known only to Jutwasi tribe. This tribe, which is close to extinction due to lack of food, can now provide (ironically) a cure for obese—over eating—people in the USA. The US corporations are sending their social workers to learn more about these herbs from local tribes and later would patent them for their profit. Soon the name and creativity of Kalahari desert people who found this herb and kept the knowledge alive all these years would be ignored and eliminated from the memory of the world history. The sole credit would go to the name of the corporation which would be able to appropriate the knowledge and actual herb for its profits.