The life-work of a genius like Marx is always unfinished, and for the most part unplanned, but no philosopher ever gave his system to the world in so unsystematic a fashion as he did. Much of his writing was governed by accidents of the historical tides swirling round him. Even his work on economics was left incomplete; on history and politics the bulk of his ideas are scattered about in his three or four pamphlets on contemporary events, in numberless letters, and most of all in the great mass of articles he wrote, primarily to earn his daily bread, for the *New York Tribune*. Marx complained of "this wretched paper", though no journal has ever deserved better of posterity, and of the "very great interruption" to his studies caused by his journalistic work; but if he had not been compelled to undertake it both he and we would have been much the poorer. Each main section arose from happenings somewhere abroad, which stimulated him to explore their historical background. It was for him a means of catching at ideas, indulging his insatiable curiosity, and working off nervous pressures in a flow of satire, wit, eloquence: Marx was one of the great Romantic writers, and a stylist to his finger-tips. For us, it is an immense chaotic contribution to a way of looking at the human universe which had begun taking shape before Marx, and is still taking shape. Only a man so phenomenally endowed could have afforded such magnificent prodigality. But everything here is necessarily hasty, improvised, one-sided; at times the words even have an oddly un-Marxist ring. We know from his other writings how Marx looked at very broad ranges of history, and from his journalism we learn in microscopic detail his reactions to passing events. What we lack is a considered, all-round summing up of things of the middle order of magnitude: the English Civil Wars as a whole, the French Revolution, the Crimean War.

In his early years Marx was occupied with philosophy and the idea of socialism. In 1848 he and Engels wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, and felt that they and their friends were ready for the arena. Revolutions were just about to break out over much of Europe; but they ended in defeat, partial or temporary for the bourgeois Liberals, more crushing for their unsolicited ally the working class. Subsequently old autocracies or ruling classes and new bourgeois groups drifted together,
and against this combination, Marx's hopes of a speedy overthrow of all ruling classes by the proletariat gradually dimmed. We can watch these hopes fixing themselves on upheavals, one after another, further and further away from the Lancashire where the world's biggest concentration of working-class strength lay. In 1854 a revolution in backward Spain fired Marx's mind and set him to studying Spanish history. In the same year the Crimean War started, and Marx caught avidly at the prospect of a serious defeat of the tsarist army that had helped to beat Europe down in 1849. His articles between 1853 and 1856 on the "Eastern Question" fill a volume of over six hundred pages, nearly as big as the first volume of Capital.

This war ended in 1856 with tsarism weakened, but not decisively. Before the end of the year, British imperialism embarked on the second Opium War with China, and Marx had some hopes of crisis spreading from the Far East to Western Europe. A year later, Britain faced a more serious crisis, in the form of colonial revolution, or the Indian Mutiny. It was with a note of Isaiah as well as dialectic that Marx contemplated the revolt of the sepoy army. "There is something in human history like retribution: and it is a rule of historical retribution that its instrument be forged not by the offended, but by the offender himself"—just as, he may have reflected, capitalism was fated to be overthrown by its own creation the proletariat. But India was reconquered; in 1863 a new Polish rebellion against the Tsar was quelled; the Civil War in the U.S.A. from 1861 to 1865, presided over by an Abraham Lincoln perpetually afraid of frightening the enemy by showing too much sympathy with Negroes, brought them only a first instalment of freedom.

It was thus Marx's fate to have to put what faith he could, in default of the working-class seizure of power he had dreamed of, in a long series of dubious representatives of progress: a Spanish general, a Light Brigade, an octogenarian Moghul emperor, an American president. While disappointments multiplied, he took refuge in the grand task he had set himself of writing Capital, of tracking capitalism to the inmost recesses of its labyrinth. Strong emotional compulsions must have been required to keep him for so many years at his subterranean toil, like Shelley's trolls quaffing quicksilver at their labour—

"Pledging the demons of the earthquake, who
"Reply to them with lava—".

It was partly the scholar's impulse to sink the mineshaft of knowledge deeper and deeper from a hole in the British Museum reading-room towards the centre of the earth: partly an inveterate search for the only revenge that could be taken on a bourgeoisie equally repulsive in triumph, in England, or in capitulation, in Germany.
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Europe's closest neighbour and oldest acquaintance in Asia was Turkey, about which Marx was writing pretty often during the Crimean War years. He was inclined to generalize from Turkey to Islam as a whole, occasionally from Islam to Asia. India was comparatively well-known by the mid-nineteenth century; China far less so, Japan very little. Marx not seldom offers generalizations about Asia that would be more convincing if restricted to India.

He came to be seriously interested in India about 1853; his first articles on it were concerned with the Parliamentary debates of that year on renewal of the East India Company charter. India was much in his mind when in 1857–58, the Mutiny years, he wrote the remarkable manuscript on Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, where he sought tentatively to arrange world history in a series—logical rather than chronological, as his editor E. J. Hobsbawm points out—of modes of production, or states of society, one of them the "Asiatic". This manuscript may be regarded as a part of the buried foundations of Capital: Asia therefore as well as Europe made its contribution to the magnum opus.

At the outset Marx was disposed to classify Asian society as one knowing no private property in land, on the hypothesis (which appealed for obvious reasons to the British conquerors) that all right to land was vested in the ruler. This conjecture he coupled with that of a special "Asiatic State", whose primary function was to provide for irrigation works on a scale beyond the resources of private or local enterprise. In point of fact, water-control would seem to have played a bigger part in China, where private ownership by peasant and landlord was well-established, than in India; and in India a bigger part in the south than in the north where political power always had its strongest bases. In any case Marx did not speculate much further about the Asiatic State, which was really not his own idea but a suggestion borrowed from Engels. Compared with his solid German friend, Marx was more a citizen of the world, and less interested by temperament in institutions such as states and armies. It was the problem of ownership of land that continued to preoccupy him, though by 1858 he had modified his first impression. Events of the Mutiny revived controversy about land-rights in India, and he leaned now towards the opinion that any traditional ownership of all land by the sovereign was, as in feudal Europe, no more than a legal fiction; and that the true owner had been neither ruler nor landlord, but "village corporation".

From now on he was to use the term "Asiatic" or "oriental" as a synonym for primitive, for some ancient and unchanging social organization," without much regard for what kind of political superstructure this might support. His picture was of a village whose households owned or occupied their plots by virtue of their membership of the
commune; an entity isolated, self-perpetuating, and self-sufficient because based on a close integration of agriculture with handicrafts, especially weaving. It had to pay a land-tax, by handing over or selling a proportion of its harvest, but inside it a "natural economy" prevailed, potter and blacksmith and leather-worker receiving their income in the form of a share of the crop.\textsuperscript{12} So far, Marx’s picture was realistic and valuable. It seems open to the objection that the village was a less homogeneous unit than he sometimes supposed: instead of a simple division of labour it was rather a small collective lordship, a microcosm of feudal India, a "brotherhood" of land-holding peasants collectively employing a group of menials whose lowly caste sometimes marked them as descendants of an inferior race subjugated in past times. Caste itself implied an elaborate ideology. Again, the manor in Europe was in a great measure self-sufficient, and it too held its land in a semi-communal fashion. If it could evolve or disintegrate, why not the Indian village?

Altogether, Marx’s scheme of a Robinson Crusoe village in a changeless countryside, above which dynasties rose and fell unmeaningly and unheeded, appears too stationary. Coherent evolution may have been impeded by too much movement, not too little. Beneath the level of political events can be glimpsed a great deal of restlessness, of tribes or clans moving about, pre-empting untaken territory or ousting occupants, and claiming superiority over weaker neighbours. It seems curious that while Marx repeatedly treats growth of population as the prime mover of, for instance, early Roman history, driving the simple clan community to war in quest of more land and of slaves,\textsuperscript{13} he seems to neglect population as a factor in India. In all ages, war and famine, besides, uprooted many; and in the final pre-British period Marx may have underestimated the disruptive effect of the eighteenth-century anarchy, even if British writers were apt to make too much of it.

Marx at any rate thought of the net result of the old order as stagnation: Asia had exhausted its capacity for progress. Of even the better features of any such vegetative state of existence Marx was, at this time of his life, intolerant. If he sometimes spoke with esteem of the craftsman’s pride in his skilled work,\textsuperscript{14} he also condemned the "contented, slavish relationship" imposed on the craftsman by this very pride: the modern wage-earner, indifferent to his work, is free, though bored.\textsuperscript{15} The rights of man included, for Marx, no right to be stupid. A passage on the barbarous torpor of the Indian countryside unites, like all his most dramatic outbursts, passion with acute reasoning: it links the tiny mindless insulated village with, as its opposite pole, the irresponsible Oriental despotism it supported.\textsuperscript{16} Elsewhere he notes how the dualism of society was reflected in that of the Hindu religion,
luxury and misery in its medley of "sensual exuberance" and "self-torturing asceticism". Born in a Germany only lately beginning to emerge from two centuries of paralysis, and chafing at all Europe's slowness, he must have felt the vast immobility of Asia as a giant cloud-shadow of Europe's own. Marx's imagery has not been studied as it deserves to be; there might be found in it, as in Shakespeare's, a recurrent association between the bad old world he wanted to sweep away and dirt, stench, impurity. Only through revolution could the working class "succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages". At times there is only one step between Marx's revulsion from the moral filth of class society and the obsessive longing of Pietist Germany and Bach's music to be liberated or cleansed from sin, to be washed clean in blood.

In Asia the hated Tsar himself could represent progress. A modern Indian, or Uzbeg, reader may feel that Marx did less than justice to some Asian dynasties of bygone days, and their services to the arts, education, commerce. He may feel that Marx's horizon was too Euro-centric; just as within Europe, after the experiences of 1848-49, he seemed to deny any independent future for small nationalities like the Slavs. But his concern was not with one nation or continent or another, but with the uneven, straggling advance of humanity as a whole. Unlike his shimmeringly idealistic contemporary Mazzini, who had eyes for Europe alone, Marx envisaged a common destiny for West and East. The finest ideals of Greece or Rome, he wrote in an eloquent though unpolished passage in the manuscript of 1857-58, look "child-like" in their narrow, limited perfection, today when mankind stands on the threshold of full self-realization for every individual. Beside this shining vision of the future, every civilization of the past must pale its ineffectual fires. And if Marx felt little respect for Indian history, he had no contempt for Indians, believing them perfectly able to learn to run their own country, and finding in their character subtlety, courage, "a certain calm nobility" or gentleness. It was seldom indeed that he paid any such tribute to any Western people.

Britain's conquest of India had a twofold "mission", destructive and constructive: "the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia". Mission may sound somewhat teleological; and there is an example here of Marx's readiness to jump from India to all Asia. So far there had been chiefly destruction; conquest, brutal and greedy, had made "a heap of ruins". British rule had inflicted more hardship on India than any previous domination. Bankruptcy, chronic war, no public works, perversion of taxation and justice, were "the five points of the East India Charter". Underlying all this was the subversion of the old
village, painful yet necessary for future progress, in two ways: the ru
in of hand-weaving by British machine competition, and the altera
tions in land-tenure. Of these two processes the ruin of handcrafts,
though not the first to start, was the more purely destructive. Be
cause it disrupted the village economy and its close-knit combina
of agriculture with weaving, it represented "the only social revolu
on ever heard of in Asia".26

It was crucial to all Marx’s thinking that the new forces of produc
tion released by science were, in capitalist hands, for the most part
destructive.27 Machine industry carved out its market by eliminat
handicrafts, and having accomplished this in Britain, it was drawing
the trail of devastation across Europe and Asia. It would be inter
testing, if it were possible, to determine whether machinery up to a certain date
did indeed reduce by this cannibalism, instead of expanding, men's
total of consumable wealth. But there is good ground for thinking that
Marx overrated the impact of machine competition on handicrafts in
India, and village weaving in particular. It was habitual to him, with
the impatience of genius, to pull out the thread of history faster than
the Three Sisters were spinning it. Even before the unsuccessful revolu
ions of 1848 he was writing as if the bourgeoisie were already firmly
in the saddle in Europe at large.28 He remembered the blight that had
fallen on the hand-weavers of England, he watched English manu
factures creating a "latent proletariat" in backward Germany.29 and in
his mind's eye, rather than in any statistical mirror, he saw the same
process not merely at work, but completed, in India.

How could this have happened "over the whole surface of Hindu
stan", as he wrote in 1853—much of it only occupied within the past
few years? Marx’s own figures seem to contradict him. If Indians were
so poor that they could afford to spend no more than ninpence a year
each on all British goods,30 they could be wearing very little of even
the cheapest Lancashire cloth. Had they then, profiting by the absence
as yet of the British missionary and his wife, all taken to going naked?
The 64 million yards of muslin imported into India in 183731 would not
have given the population of British India one yard each. If 150,000
people at Dacca in east Bengal were supported in 1824 by weaving,32
their disappearance since then had no bearing on the fate of the village
 artisans with whom Marx’s argument is concerned: the towns of old
India he regarded—too sweepingly, it may be—as only marginal to its
economy. Lancashire cloth could only have made its way in coastal
areas close to the ports, or where rivers gave admission to bulk
commodities. India's extreme dearth of means of transport throughout
the first half of the century was itself a dyke against the inundation of
Lancashire cloth that Marx imagined. In the whole of the south, there
was scarcely a road worth the name, even for military purposes, and
many districts found it impossible to fetch even salt from the coast. In later years it was reported, very likely with truth, that many weavers and other rural craftsmen—menials, not partners, of the farming fraternity—shook the village dust off their feet, not because they were forced out of work but because railway and other construction jobs offered them a better life. Handicrafts rural or urban have often died out only very recently, or are still struggling. At this day in all kinds of places in India and Pakistan the traveller hears of artisans just being overtaken by their slow and relentless pursuer, the machine.

The other force that Marx saw operating on the old village was in his view not less cruel, but less blankly negative, for it was setting up private ownership of land, and this appeared to him in 1853 "the great desideratum of Asiatic society". It was emerging in two forms, each so far as the masses were concerned "abominable": the zemindari system of big landed estates, and the ryotwari system of collecting land-tax from cultivators each treated as individual proprietors—or if not that, then at least, on the theory of the government being universal landlord, as individual tenants. On this theory the government was free to demand rent as well as tax, and shear them doubly close to the skin. When the issue came up again for debate as a result of the Mutiny, Marx (agreeing for once, reluctantly, with Bright, though finding fault with his reasoning) wrote of the ryots as suffering from grinding over-taxation. On the big estates, especially in Bengal, the peasantry suffered from rack-renting and sheer robbery. Marx could fittingly describe the zemindar as a caricature of an English landlord, the ryot as a caricature of a French peasant.

What sort of private landowning he thought desirable and feasible is never made clear; presumably, capitalist farming. And if the only way forward for India was indeed, as he assumed, through capitalism, countryside as well as town would have to come under its control; and all the exploitation that was going on under British auspices could be reckoned another part of the necessary price of progress, since it would accumulate capital and drive the peasantry into wage-labour on the land or in industry. The Marx of the 1850s judged any price worth paying to get rid of Asia's senseless torpor, even the brutal surgery of imperialism. In later years he showed signs of drawing back from this ruthless logic. When he returned to general history after the years of struggle with Capital, the great work he lacked energy or confidence in the end to complete, primitive communism engaged his thoughts a good deal. He may have experienced a need of reassurance that man really was socialist by nature, by heredity. His sympathy with the Narodnik dream of a direct transition from mir or village community in Russia to socialism can be interpreted, as Hobsbawm suggests, as a shrinking from the price in human suffering implied in
any overwhelming of an old rural society by capitalism. The spectacle of India, as well as of Russia, may have been in his mind.

From another and less clouded point of view, the constructive mission ascribed to British power by Marx began with the country's political unification. That the old India was incapable of uniting and defending itself was to him self-evident. Its equilibrium had rested on mutual repulsion of all its parts (one may fancy the Holy Roman Empire floating in his mind), so that it became "the predestined prey of conquest", and its history if it had any was a history of being overrun. Some foreign rule being at present inescapable, British was better than Persian or Russian, for it rested on a higher level of material achievement than India's, and hence could not be simply engulfed. At the same time Marx equally took it for granted that India was a single country, and potentially a single nation; the more readily—or even uncritically—because for him nations and nationalism were merely parts of history's scaffolding, used and then dismantled. His own native land was awaiting unification; so was Italy, with which he once compared India. Britain was transforming India from a geographical expression into a reality, capable in 1857 of waging its first national struggle.

Thus Marx was prepared to welcome the annexation of Sinde (1843) and conquest of the Panjab (1849), as completing the expansion of British power in India and closing the old gateway of invasion, the north-west frontier. This time it was being bolted and barred against Russia, and even though Marx could deride the Russian menace to India as a bogey, it is hard to believe that his hatred of tsarism did nothing to reconcile him to the presence in India of Russia's grand enemy. The Afghan war of 1841-42 on the contrary he considered "infamous"; the Burmese war of 1852 "senseless". Burma (but not Afghanistan) lay outside the ancient limits of India, and there was no Russian threat on that side. Nor was there in Oudh, annexed in 1856; and Marx, who ought logically to have welcomed annexation of all surviving principalities inside India, and usually did so, was at some not very useful pains to prove that its seizure was illegal. He blamed it and the Afghan affair on the machinations of his bête noire Lord Palmerston, whom he persisted in viewing as a Muscovite secret agent and author of practically all evil. Oudh apart, Marx found another reason for welcoming the completion of conquest: hitherto the British had been able to divide and rule, to play off one Indian state against another, but now that game had come to an end. He often underestimated the tenacity of religion—one of the great powers of history, its Hapsburg empire so to speak; he did not foresee that the old form of divide and rule would be replaced by a more insidious one, the playing off of Hindu against Muslim.
Having arrived at this point, the constructive mission was about to unfold its next chapter, the economic and social regeneration of India. This would be set in motion by John Bull's own requirements. India had become indispensable as a market, notably for the cotton industry. But a colony ruined by plundering and neglect made a poor customer. Its ninepence a head spent on British goods was a sorry figure compared with the fourteen shillings a head of the West Indies. Hence the "industrial interest" in England felt "the necessity of creating fresh productive powers" in India; of making canals to facilitate the growing of cotton and other commercial crops, and railways to lower the cost of transporting them. In short, the time had come to commence "the transformation of India into a reproductive country".51

Far from looking upon capitalism as beneficial at first, baneful later, Marx thought of it as doing nothing but harm in the first place, at home and abroad, and now at a later stage as preparing to do some good at least abroad. Be that as it may, he certainly explained the whole wrangle over renewal of the East India Company charter in 1853 as a tug-of-war between the "millocracy" or industrial bourgeoisie and the obstructive "moneycracy and oligarchy", or the City and landed gentry.52 There was doubtless a great deal in this view. It may have left out some factors of a less immediately economic sort. Marx thought of all Britons in the East as so many Clives or freebooters, still greedily cramming their swag into capacious knapsacks. But a gradual change had been stealing over the Company's servants, moulded for a generation now by Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism and the rest of the ideology that capitalism had acquired since its caveman days, and some of them were carrying out intentionally, not as mere tools of history, a sort of bourgeois-revolutionary, anti-feudal policy. Like any such large establishment, the administrative corps could not but develop a certain momentum of its own.53 While there were provinces still to be snapped up, the old predatory habit of advancing the frontier in a vain effort to get rid of financial deficits kept the ascendant; now, newer ideas and men could begin coming to the front. They had on their side the growing interest in technology, stimulated by the opening of the Railway age which opened horizons as fascinating as the Atomic age a century later. A separate Public Works Department was being organized, to take development out of the palsied hands of the Military Board which had hitherto made nonsense of it. Work started on the Ganges Canal, of which the Roorkee engineering college in 1847 was an outgrowth. Lord Dufferin as governor-general wrote rhapsodically of what railways could mean for India. Here, as much as in the narrow minds and counting-houses of Lancashire, may be recognized the springs of a new programme.
Part of what aroused Marx's interest in India was the outburst of
discussion, about the mid-century, of economic development there.
Change was very much in the air. Nearly a century after Plassey, the
country depicted in the reports and plans of the reformers was amaz-
ingly undeveloped; now, ironically just before its past sins of omission
and commission were overtaken by the retribution of 1857, British
rule was turning over a new leaf. What Marx seems to have been
expecting was methodical development of a plantation-economy of the
kind the Dutch were to create in Java (though Holland was of course
not like Britain an industrial country), supplying cotton and other
raw materials, with coal-mines, to fuel locomotives, thrown in. About
the coming railways he was as enthusiastic as Dufferin. They would
enable food to be moved from surplus to needy provinces, they would
make the army more mobile and enable it to be reduced (this has an
odd sound, just before the Mutiny). Marx did not count on all this
leading to industrialisation of India by the British; but he was hopeful
of something even better, industrialisation by Indian enterprise. Once
railways started, and railway workshops were set up, in a country
endowed with coal and iron, it would be impossible to prevent tech-
nology from sprouting further, and industry making its appearance.
Indians would be perfectly equal to the technical requirements; they
had revealed "particular aptitude", for example as engineers at the
Calcutta mint. And in the long run this, he clearly thought, was what
would get India moving once more, and would pave a highway
towards both economic and political independence.

Marx's vision, then, was not of an effete Asiatic society changing,
adapting itself, evolving into a modern one—as Japan was about to
do. He was thinking in catastrophic terms, of a new Deluge followed
by the building of a new world. He had full confidence in the ability of
Indians to learn, but to learn Western science; he complained of their
being supplied with education by the British "reluctantly and spar-
ingly". Macaulay's dismissal of Hindu learning, of geography made
up of "seas of treacle and seas of butter" was not much more peremp-
tory. For several decades now Ram Mohun Roy and his followers
had been endeavouring to put India's intellectual house in order, while
making room in it for Western knowledge. But of this aspect of the
"Bengal renaissance" Marx seems to have had no inkling.

His notion of the Indian slate being wiped clean and promptly
covered with fresh writing had too close an affinity with the tabula rasa
thinking of 1789. Burke had seen one half of the truth when he
argued against the National Assembly that men and nations cannot,
for good or ill, be so transmogrified—

"As if the world were now but to begin,
"Antiquity not known, custom forgot. . . ."
An exile from a country not yet gathered and from a religion his fathers had abandoned, brooding between the British Museum and Hampstead Heath with only family, Engels, Shakespeare, Cervantes, for constant companions, Marx contemplated his world from above oftener than from within. Bigotries of cult or nationality belonged for him, like dynasties or Horse Guards, to the realm of Maya. In some ways, it came more naturally to him to think of society as a machine, in a universe governed by Newton, than as, in Burke's sense, an organism. Bourgeois rule in the West he believed had "destroyed as far as possible ideology, religion, morality, etc.", or reduced them to "a palpable lie". But the past is never mere dead rubble to be carted away; it has living and multiplying cells, among which any potent new contact stimulates reactions. Romanticism, Evangelicalism, were two of the antibodies generated by capitalist industry.

In the Communist Manifesto its authors light-heartedly laughed religion out of court, as no longer capable of throwing dust in the workers' eyes. All such abstract, unreal teachings, Marx had written still earlier, had been thrown off, or never seriously embraced, by "the mass of men", and for the proletariat "nationality is already dead". In fact, the workers everywhere carried over with them from their past many shreds or habits of feeling, nationalistic in particular, that would gradually enable their rulers to integrate them into a new bourgeois order. There is a close parallel between the way Marx had been thinking of the proletariat in the West and the way he was now thinking of the colonial masses in the East. The Juggernaut of industrial capitalism had rolled over them both. Antiquated habits and the outlook on life that went with them might still linger, but only by inertia, and would vanish with little further delay. Here too Marx was travelling too fast. On the one hand, he was overestimating Britannia's efficacy as a new Kali or goddess of destruction. Grind taxation was in a measure balanced by cessation of internal strife; the hum of machinery was still faint. On the other hand the subtler influences by which the West today corrodes the mental furnishings of an old society --cinema, radio, gadgetry—were missing. Marx counted on railways and factories to dissolve caste prejudices, "those decisive impediments to Indian progress", and railways were indeed to be lauded in days to come as bringing an "electric shock" to India. Even this was a comparatively mild shock; trains could not reach into the recesses of the countryside as the bus does nowadays. Caste was to wane very slowly, even sometimes to grow afresh, not only because technology came slowly but also because in the social dislocations accompanying it, men would cling to whatever forms of mutual aid and comfort they could find shelter in.

Marx was not aware that one effect of the British presence had been
to invigorate a Muslim religious revival which was one of the powder-trains leading towards the Mutiny. In his gloomiest mood he would not have guessed that India's march towards independence would take the form very largely of rival Hindu and Muslim communal excitement. In his own familiar Europe, he was painfully conscious at times of the persistence of archaic ideas. "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living," he wrote bitterly in 1852 of the rise to power of Napoleon III. Far away in Asia things of this type did not force themselves on his attention in the same way. As a result, in his impatience for the new broom and the fresh start, he did not see how important it was that the better, healthier ideas of an old society should be preserved as binding links between one epoch and another. Remarkably enough he could find it in his heart to declare that it would be less damaging to India's self-respect for a worthless feudal aristocracy to survive than for there to be no class of eminent Indians at all. But it might even more humiliate and demoralise India if no Indian ideas were to survive, and all wisdom to be a foreign gift. When the better side of the past is written off, the worse is promoted. English rule and English education meant for India a break, an interruption, that China and Japan did not undergo; past and present were never dovetailed as men like Ram Mohun Roy hoped, but lie side by side today, amid a chaos of castes and railway-carriages, sacred cows and chemical works, nonsense and sense, more separate and incongruous than anywhere else in the world.

The proletariat, and now in another sense the colonial peoples, were the new forces that would liberate mankind from the series of class societies that had enslaved it, like Buddha bringing emancipation from the cycle of birth and death and rebirth. Each seems at times in Marx's conception to lack inner strength or volition, to be an inert battering-ram for History to knock down the walls of the capitalist Bastille with. Because Marx was in such haste to turn his back on the past he saw his progressive forces, sometimes at any rate, too mechanistically; because of this, in turn, he had to deny his own finer intuitions, to copy Bentham's clockwork psychology and "springs of action", and to think of working-class and Asia as kept in motion only by the crude pressure of increasing misery.

In 1853 Marx had drawn up an orderly chart of British India, and was looking forward to its regeneration "at a more or less remote period". In 1857, the Mutiny broke out. He could be excused for not foreseeing this, because hardly any of those who knew India foresaw it, though there had been many uneasy premonitions. All the same, in some ways the outbreak went against the grain of his preconceived notion of a society paralysed, if not actually pulverised, by the British
steamroller. In the political sphere he had written of a “levelling of all that was great and elevated in the native society”, yet the leadership, such as it was, in 1857 was held by princes and aristocrats new or old, under the banner of the descendant of Akbar and Tamberlane—that “little shrivelled yellow old man” on whom Marx had poured scorn as symbol of the dead past.

Under the surface agitation over things like greased cartridges, Marx discerned significant currents; and it is a notable fact that he viewed the Mutiny as in some sense a “national” rising. He thus anticipated the present-day Indian view of it as the starting-point of the independence movement. But he laid less stress on this aspect of it than Indian Marxists have sometimes done, and his caution was reasonable; 1857 may be said to have been nationalistic in the same rudimentary way that the Taiping rebellion was socialistic, and the starting-point of the modern Chinese revolution. It was the army alone that Marx recognized as a new, coherent force, “the first general centre of resistance” of modern India; and this mercenary army was to be quickly reconstructed afterwards, and to serve the British Raj faithfully down to almost the very end. Even at the time, he was struck by the sepoys’ lack of solidarity, and ascribed their defeat at Delhi to dissensions between regiments, and between Hindu and Muslim, as well as between the soldiery and the traders whom they looted.

Marx was aware of an agrarian as well as national flavour in the Mutiny, but, again realistically, he did not credit the peasantry with a line of action of their own. In spite of the huge Taiping revolt, it was not to peasant movements that he was looking for progress in Asia, and he did not guess their coming importance. It should be recalled that in western Europe, the most active peasant movements of recent times had been of a reactionary clerical-feudal or monarchist complexion, as in the Vendée, Calabria, and Carlist Spain; while in central Europe in 1848–49, though peasants had sometimes risen against feudal burdens, some had been mobilised in the service of Hapsburg reaction. This record must have helped to concentrate Marx’s hopes on the new class, the proletariat.

Marx found no time during the rush of events to ponder the fact that the scene of most widespread resistance to the British was the province of Oudh, round Lucknow, which they had only just taken over, and where, under a feeble local monarchy, the taluqdars or revenue-collectors had been lately turning themselves into big landlords. These men had no place in Marx’s earlier scheme of things, in which all the soil belonged to State or rural commune. Before the end of the conflict he was recognizing them as mushroom feudalists who had risen by encroaching on both the peasantry and the King of Oudh, and who had joined the sepoys out of fear of the British trespassing
on their "rights". There had been talk of sweeping these usurpers away altogether: it was encouraged by the new reforming mood at Calcutta as well as by desire for more revenue, and Marx felt constrained to admit that the arguments in favour of it were "very plausible". He would have been entitled to conclude that Oudh in 1857 bore some resemblance to the Vendée. As to Engels, he was always inclined to button himself up in his Prussian uniform when he wrote on military matters, (and was less ready than Marx to sympathize with mutineers); but he may only have been saying bluntly what his friend was surmising when he dismissed the resistance in Oudh as "a miscellaneous rabble, collected by insurgent zemindars".

Their attention was monopolised by the fighting areas, most of them little touched by modernity, along the Gangetic valley from Delhi to Bihar. About Bengal Marx was curiously silent. Engels remarked disparagingly that "Bengal proper is easily held, because its people have fallen terribly". Militarily they had, long before Plassey, and they had been a long time under British rule. But this meant too that there had been time for closer ties to form between some Bengalis and the ruling power, and to enlist their sympathy in 1857 (no doubt with many misgivings) on the British side. Landowners were content, and relied on British protection. Of more moment for the future, here alone was there a numerous intelligentsia—partly of the same social stratum as the landowners—permeated by Western education. It believed far more deeply in Britain's civilizing mission than Marx himself, or most Englishmen, and it was the only class capable of leading India into the modern age as he desired.

In the excitement of the contest an instinctive fellow-feeling with the rebels checked for the time being any sober estimate of what India stood to gain or lose. After it was over, unluckily, he was not at leisure to draw lessons from the Mutiny or decide how it fitted into his previous picture of India. He had an occasion to begin a reconsideration when writing his final Indian article in 1858, about the debate on the India Bill transferring authority from the Company to the Crown. But the dust had not yet settled, and as often he was unable to banish his King Charles's head: he gave too much of his energy to detecting in the Bill another sinister design on the part of that fiend in human shape and mutton-chop whiskers, Lord Palmerston.

It may seem however to follow from the logic of Marx's thinking about India that the Mutiny was a premature explosion of feeling, provoked so far as the masses were concerned by the harshness of British rule, colliding with and frustrating its more beneficial tendencies. If a mode of production and its ruling class cannot be dislodged before they have exhausted whatever development they are capable of, the same may be true of a colonial régime like the British in
India. On Marx’s analysis, its potential development, so far from being exhausted, was only just starting. He was, it may be added, prepared to acknowledge in war, as its "redeeming feature", the ultimate test of peoples and societies. The Mutiny failed; but it brought about a new alignment in India, not in all ways favourable to progress. After 1848 in Europe, autocracy was obliged to take into partnership the defeated bourgeoisie: conversely after 1857 viceregal autocracy had to take into partnership, as less dangerous than the masses, the defeated feudal interests. The Oudh taluqdars in particular were to remain a cancer of India down to the close of the British epoch.

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Marx’s prediction of an industrialised India, and its very lagging fulfilment, has a bearing both on his understanding of India and on his doctrine of how industrial capitalism came into being in its original habitat, England. These themes were in his mind in the same years, and here as in other ways his thoughts about East and West intertwined. He did not enquire why industrial capital had not developed in India spontaneously, and to Asian society as he saw it the question could have little relevance. Yet of the three necessary conditions that he listed in 1857–58—labour made available by detachment of peasants from the soil; specialised craft skills; accumulation of money from trade and usury—the second and third were undeniably present in old India, while as to labour there were at any rate numerous urban craftsmen, village artisans, and a large vagrant population. Clearly also there was a connexion, of the "putting-out" type, between merchant capital and handicraft production. We talk of the world market that made Britain's industrial revolution possible, but Indian cloth had something like a world market long before: it sold in Persia, in east Africa, in Indonesia.

Eight or nine years later, when he finished the first volume of Capital, Marx had worked out a fuller account of the genesis of capitalism. To have labour available is not the same thing as to know what to do with it. All sixteenth-century Europe teemed with vagabonds—disbanded retainers or dispossessed peasants—but only Tudor England, with its flogging-and-branding magistrates and its Puritan discipline, kneaded the loose mass into a useful labour force. Marx sometimes seems to run the two stages together causally, as if Ancient Pistol was dismissed and Hodge evicted in order that capitalism might
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brought about by an opening of Indian mills, instead of British, would be still more objectionable. Cotton textiles were the obvious thing for India to begin industrialisation with, as Britain had done; Lancashire's reluctance to be supplanted in the Indian market was the most tangible obstacle in the way.

Marx could argue that India would be starting from the level of the locomotive instead of the spinning-jenny; industrial technology once in being, new countries could adopt it ready-made. He was studying Spain, where Liberals after the revolution of 1854 were hopefully expecting their country to be hauled non-stop into the future by steam traction; and he may have transferred some of this hopefulness to India. Both he and the Spaniards were crediting railways with a bigger horse-power than they really possessed. In 1857 Engels wrote an article on the theme of how a genuine modern army must be a slow growth in any Asiatic country, demanding moral equipment as well as uniforms and rifles. Marx might have been expected to reckon similarly with the manifold social, cultural, psychological adjustments necessary for a real transition to industrial society.

The prime requisite for industrialism was a corps of industrialists. Marx seemed to take it for granted. By defeating the military powers of India—Muslim, Maratha, Sikh—Britain had, it is true, cleared the way for commercial elements to come to the front. But for the traditional money-spinning groups, Jain and Marwari and so on, this only meant a return, after an interval of disorder, to business as usual, the old grooves of speculation. They had been used ever since the Muslim conquest of India, or from earlier still, to living as campfollowers of an alien government, keeping in the background, practising esoteric arts by which they could become opulent, though never secure. Banking in their hands continued in British times to be not much more than money-lending. The Parsees who flocked into Bombay were exceptional. Still only half-Indian after a thousand years in India, these descendants of refugees from Persia had not previously been a specialised business group, and now, as if wakened by the British touch from a refreshing slumber of centuries, they showed extraordinary readiness for experiment. They followed the British into the opium trade with China as adventurously as Bengalis followed them into English literature and political theory, and eventually it was a Parsee firm that founded Indian steel. But the more westernised they grew, the less Indian they were.

The more truly Indian and hidebound had as a rule mediocre success when they ventured out of old lanes, starting tea-plantations or coal-mines for instance in the wake of the British. Emancipation from the past proceeded much more slowly than Marx expected. Religion of a specific minority type had been one ingredient in the
crucible where Western capitalism was first formed; in India religion and the social habits that went with it were, as Catholicism had been in Europe, a dead weight on change, an incubus from which China and Japan were comparatively free. An analogous question arises in the same epoch in Ireland, where the Protestant trader often seemed able to thrive under the same conditions as the Catholic who could only sigh and blame the government.

Meanwhile, industrialisation in Japan and Germany (as in socialist Russia and China in later years) was being accelerated by a strong national afflatus, an impulse to make up for lost time, to cast off the reproach of barbarous backwardness—of being "a dark people", as Russians used to call themselves. A genuine entrepreneur cannot, any more than a statesman, be reared on narrow self-regarding calculations alone. He too is a social animal; he needs a fostering climate, the oxygen of public approval; he must have his admiring audience, like an actor or artist. Absurd as the modern company-director's cant of "service" often sounds, a historical reality underlies it. Urges and incitements from his environment are as much required to make a man strive at building a factory as at building a pyramid, a party, or a Grand Army.

Since there was no Indian State, there was no tariff policy to protect Indian industry.87 Several independent countries shared the same disability. Turkey was shackled by the Capitulations, and Japan had a long struggle to throw off the "Unequal Treaties" imposed on it in its days of weakness. Japan made headway in spite of the handicap. For one thing, it could indulge in imperialistic forays abroad which, profitable or not, helped to draw the jarring classes together. Indian soldiers fought abroad far oftener, up and down Asia and Africa, but the glow and glory were Britain's, India only paid the bill. Unlike India, Japan enjoyed political autonomy: unlike Turkey it had a ruling class bent on industrialisation, both for public and for private advantage, and an active mercantile, with a long and close connexion with the ruling class, and Japanese in a sense in which no comparable group was either Turkish or Indian. And far more than either of the others, Japan was already a nation. Here again the national State appears as the parent or guardian of capitalism, its creator much more than its creation.

One other area where these factors counted was that of labour recruitment and discipline. Marx leaves it to be supposed that he thought the disintegration of the village commune would release the necessary labour. But surplus labour-power might easily form a stagnant pool in the countryside instead of flowing to distant mills. For construction work on roads and railways, local resources usually sufficed; for one purpose vital to British investment, manning the Assam tea-
plantations, a new labour force had to be got together by hook or by crook. Here the State power was fully exercised, and helped the planters to construct an elaborate recruiting organization with agencies all over India, drawing to a considerable extent on the aboriginal tribal reservoir; it also enabled them, especially in the earlier decades, to treat their coolies virtually as serfs. Mining was unimportant from the British point of view, so no such effort was applied to recruiting miners, or would have been made in favour of any primarily Indian industry. In Japan, regimentation of labour was comprehensive; employers backed by law and police could shut up workers from the villages, many of them women, in company barracks, and at the same time indoctrinate them with willingness to work for the glory of Great Japan.

Bengal, whose first generation of technicians had caught Marx’s eye, kept the lead intellectually, but showed small taste for industry. It might have been different if British capital had been setting a more spirited pace, or even if British capitalism had been more dynamic at home, and Oxford and Cambridge had fed Indian students on applied science instead of Cicero. It would be interesting to know how an India run by Germans or Yankees would have turned out, and some computer may one day tell us. As things were, other openings had superior attractions for educated Bengalis. Their province, which had been racked to pay for Britain's conquest of the rest of India, was now getting something in return, in the form of a junior partnership; whatever government posts were not monopolised by Britons were likely to go to them. Britain, like the Bourbon monarchy, allowed the middle-class man to buy his way into its service, or if not his own way, then his son's, by investing his savings in the young man's education. Other savings must have gone on being drawn into government loans, as those of the old French rentier were.

Worst of all, a vast deal of money that might have fermented into industrial capital was sucked into the land, like a river of central Asia seeping away among desert sands. The estates erected by the British in Bengal were being let and sub-let and sub-let again by their owners; the failure of British-sponsored landlordism to evolve into rational agrarian capitalism, as expected by the makers of the Permanent Settlement, foreshadowed the failure of industrial capitalism to spring up, as expected by Marx. Not only the right kind of landlord, but the right kind of man to serve as wage-paying farmer, was missing in the countryside, as the entrepreneur was missing in the towns. There was the same story, the same clinging to habits of usury and extortion and absenteeism, in the Spanish countryside, where the selling off (to itself) by the Liberal bourgeoisie of Church estates and village commons had results parallel with those of the zamindari system in Bengal. Marx
might have been forewarned by Spanish experience ever since 1833 that a half-baked middle class in a backward country will not put its money into industry so long as it remains free to buy land and rack-rent tenants.

The longer industry hung fire, the more problematical it became, because technology was growing more complex and costly. Japan had started just in time. By 1914 India was the world's fourth biggest manufacturer of cotton textiles, and mining and heavy industry had made a start, but this meant little when set beside the huge and increasing population. In 1928 the Comintern in its Colonial Thesis was proposing to miss out the stage of capitalism in such lagging areas, by dint of an alliance of progressive forces there and socialist parties in the metropolitan countries. Independence when it came at last in 1947 brought to power in India a bourgeoisie still, like that of Spain, bearing strong marks of its past. The pace of industrialisation became more brisk, but only as a trot is brisker than a walk; the "private sector" of industry was to devote less energy to expansion than to preventing the "public sector" from expanding.

Marx had no time to speculate about how Indian capitalism would behave, or how it would benefit the Indian masses; possibly also no inclination, from an unconscious desire to get technology in India without paying the price in capitalist misery. The nobility or gentleness he found in the Indian character had no place among the satanic virtues he held to be the stamp of a successful bourgeoisie. In one enigmatic allusion, he wrote that the new technology would do the Indian people no good until India became independent, or Britain socialist. What a socialist Britain should do with India, he did not specify; why capitalism should be any less villainous in an independent India than in independent Britain or France, he did not explain. If he really expected it to be less villainous, he was sadly astray.

It would not be easy to extract from Marx's comments on India a socialist doctrine on imperialism. Clearly they do not point towards Hobson's idea of Britain evolving into a "rentier-State", living off the profits of colonial factories and workers, nor towards the theory of "decolonization" discussed among Marxists in the 1920's, although they might be said to look forward to the same result by a different route. Marx's silences are at times as striking as his utterances. There is copious detail on New Zealand, nothing on India, in the final section of Volume 1 of Capital, "The Modern Theory of Colonization". It was the nature of the capitalist relationship that he was concerned to elucidate here. But his analysis of capitalism in Britain might seem to stand in need of further consideration of the colonial empire and
its contribution, clearer light on his epigram that "to be free at home, John Bull must enslave abroad."

In a less explicit yet deeper fashion, India's fate may have helped to mould Marx's philosophy of capitalism. A ruling class often recapitulates in its colonies the more lurid episodes of its early career. The suppression of peasant or tribal revolts in Bengal had something in common with the suppression of peasant revolts in Tudor England, likewise with the aid of foreign mercenary troops; the mass executions after the Mutiny were akin to the Cromwellian reprisals after the Irish Rebellion. The exhibition of Western capitalism in Asia, red in tooth and claw, must have helped to inspire in Marx a conviction of the absolute, incorrigible badness of capitalism altogether. One of his articles has a peroration on "The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization", displayed more nakedly in colonies than at home. Imperial exploitation writes large, he declared, "the inherent organic laws of political economy now at work". His mind may have been working from imperialism to these laws, as well as outwards from economics to empire. Emotionally at any rate, British India supplied him with a magnified illustration of man's inhumanity to man in class society. Increasing misery there may have helped to convince him that the masses at home too were doomed irrevocably under capitalism to grow poorer. To suggest this is to attribute to Marx some thinking of a not exclusively logical character; but this great thinker did not always, as Nietzsche advises philosophers to do, keep his thoughts on ice.

How much of a motive Lancashire's voracious need of markets supplied for the continuing subjugation of India in the first half of the nineteenth century, is a question Marx does not clearly pose. It would be about as simple or as tortuous to prove that Napoleon conquered Europe to oblige the French manufacturers (a proposition Marx would certainly not always have endorsed). The disorder prevailing before the arrival of the Union Jack can scarcely, it might be thought, have hindered reception of British goods more than the absence of roads which the E.I.C. did so little to remedy. John Bull looked on at the process of conquest complacently. From time to time he was called on to pay some expenses, but that could be treated as part of the national pastime of beating the French, or the Russians, and patriotic pride was already to him what family pride was to Pooh-Bah. As a rule the campaigns were self-sustaining; they were paid for by Indian peasants, or loans from Indian financiers, and most of the casualties were borne by sepoys, who could well be spared, or by Irishmen, Highlanders, and younger sons, who would never be missed.

Of more practical significance for the time when Marx was writing
is the question whether India, if it had ever been necessary to Britain economically, was still a necessity, or only a luxury. Marx gives no categoric answer, such as Adam Smith had given to the same kind of question, but Smith's conclusions were of a piece with his more tentative ones; there is often a straight line between Marxism and the early, ingenuous phase of bourgeois economics. "Dreadful misfortunes" were what Smith, as much as Marx, saw as having been the result of European contact for the native peoples of Asia and the Americas. He was arguing chiefly from the case of the North American colonies then just breaking into revolt, as Marx was concerned chiefly with the Indian Mutiny. Smith argued that Britain's foreign trade pattern had been distorted by the selfish interests of groups of traders, to whom the wider interests of Britain as well as of the colonies had been sacrificed. Several scattered observations by Marx are in the same vein, and suggest that he was willing to think of imperialism as a morbid excrescence on capitalism rather than (as Lenin—of course at a later stage—considers it) an integral, inescapable part of capitalism.

Marx was impressed from the first by India's precarious finances, its deficits only bridged by the opium profits from China. When the Mutiny came he was convinced, a trifle hastily it may be, that all the immense cost of its suppression would have to be met by the British taxpayer. He noted with gloomy relish that Indian bankers would lend no more to the Company (they were also extremely reluctant to lend to the rebels), and that loans were having to be floated in London, which would be the starting-point of a heavy "Anglo-Indian Home Debt". It might have struck him that this would create a fresh vested interest in favour of India being held on to. For the British public, however, it seemed quite clear to him now that India was a dead loss. Moreover it was dragging Britain into expensive quarrels with neighbouring countries. Who then gained? Marx reckoned some ten thousand officials or officers—about six thousand planters or men of affairs in India—pensioners—and E.I.C. stockholders drawing a guaranteed 10½ per cent profit. He found room too for the English aristocracy, who kept British India involved in wars "in order to find employment for their younger sons". As to Lancashire, its Indian market was costing John Bull "a damned high price". "India is now our best ally", he could even write to Engels—not thinking of the Indian masses as an ally of the working-class at home, but of the Indian empire as a millstone round the neck of the bourgeoisie.

Vested interests, Adam Smith complained, conjured up a myth of America's indispensability to England. The fiction that loss of control of America must mean irretrievable ruin for the British people had quickly turned out, in the light of experience, to be the merest
deception; but the habit of living on a myth is not easily shaken off, and the blank space left in popular emotion was soon taken by India. In point of fact, the U.S. Civil War was to reveal that the cotton industry had made Britain perilously dependent, not on India, but on America. Many countries offered markets, one country alone an adequate supply of raw cotton. But the lesson was a few years too late. The Mutiny had come to the help of the vested interests, by plunging the whole question in hysteria. If taxpayers had begun to ask themselves, like Marx, what they were getting out of India, the passions now let loose, the tales of sepoys' atrocities, the murders of English women, the frenzied howls for revenge, put an abrupt end to any cool discussion for many decades to come. From now on, holding India at all costs was a national dogma, subject to as little rational scrutiny as the annual liquefaction of St Januarius's blood at Naples. Unluckily, the Mutiny came just after the Crimean War had whipped up jingo excitement, and it coincided with wars with Persia and China; these made India necessary at least as Britain's base of operations in Asia, and as the bulwark of British prestige without which John Bull's customers everywhere would no doubt throw his piece-goods back in his face.

Carrying Marx's train of thought a step further, one might conjecture that possession of India and similar captive markets was for Lancashire more and more a superfluity, a featherbedding; and that this retarded the flow of capital and invention into newer, more advanced industries, such as Germany was soon developing, and thus held Britain back at a less advanced technological stage. Venturing one step further still, one might conjecture that all the later stampede of colony-grabbing up to 1914, for which the Indian empire supplied the malign model to Britain and its rivals alike, was a fit of atavism rather than a logical dictate of the pure thing-in-itself of capitalism.

What might prove less difficult to demonstrate is that some sparks from the explosion of 1857 fell into a magazine of patriotic powder in Britain, whose existence in the working-class as well as middle-class consciousness Marx had not suspected; and that the lingering spirit of Chartism, if it had not been put to flight by the charge of the Light Brigade, was finally routed now. In that case, instead of the bourgeoisie being weakened by any drain of Indian costs, it was being greatly strengthened, and the way prepared for class collaboration all round. The half-truth, or quarter-truth, that the Lancashire mill-hand had the same interest as the master in upholding Britain's civilizing mission in India, may have done as much as anything else to make revolutionary socialism in this country impossible.

From these points of view the storm and sack of Delhi by the
British army on September 18, 1858, which may have been a painful blessing for India, was a disastrous triumph for England.

Marx's jottings on China offer some sidelights on what he was thinking about India. Here too his interest first displayed itself in 1853, in a long article followed a few years later by a running commentary on the second Opium War where some of his views emerge more maturely.

In China he observed, and found detestable, the same stagnation, immobility, as in pre-British India, made ridiculous by Chinese self-satisfaction, "delusions of Celestial perfection".6 Here if not in India, he noted from the first the factor of over-population. This, he thought, must have been the prime cause of the unrest flaring up in the Taiping rebellion, but he assumed at the same time that foreign imports must have worsened the situation by crippling hand-spinning and weaving as in India and western Asia.7 By 1859 he had revised this judgment, and was impressed by China's imperviousness to Western competition: it made its own rough cloth cheaper than Lancashire could undersell it, because each household produced its own supply in its spare time, at no labour cost at all.8 This concept of "Asiatic society" in China "depending upon the combination of minute agriculture with domestic industry"9 stands in contrast with Marx's picture of India. In both countries, the family may deserve to be regarded as a more nearly indestructible unit than the village; and in India too it was an economic unit, doing its own spinning though less often than in China or old Europe its own weaving. The distinction may be of importance, though Marx was not struck by it; he equated the two economies when he spoke of China having the "same combination of husbandry with manufacturing industry" as India. He spoke of this also as an impediment to imports of foreign cloth in both countries, and gave a new turn to his theory of the disruption of rural India by adding that there the British, having seized political power, were able to undermine a "peculiar constitution" of landed property, and to turn part of the soil into plantations growing opium, indigo, and so on.10

In 1853 Marx was indulging both the hasty optimism he sometimes gave way to, and his taste for epigram, when he declared that Chinese events would do more than any nearer home to quicken revolution in Europe.11 He was expecting not socialist revolution but fresh democratic risings of the 1848 pattern, provoked by economic hardship: turmoil in China meant loss of customers for Western industry, already suffering as it was from over-production. This was giving far too much importance to the China market, whose capacity he soon, and rightly, came to think overrated.12 He was pointing to a more serious danger
for Britain when he said China was likely to grow its own opium, to avoid silver payments to India, and this would put a further strain on Indian finance.\textsuperscript{113}

On a larger view, Marx was very conscious during these years that his world was expanding, acquiring new dimensions—California, Australia, the Far East—, as if, he remarked, the sixteenth-century age of exploration and discovery were happening over again.\textsuperscript{114} The old China was collapsing, he wrote in 1857, under Anglo-French pressure and internal revolt, and this meant "the opening day of a new era for all Asia";\textsuperscript{115} but by next year he was afraid that "bourgeois society" was going to strengthen and consolidate itself by extension into new regions of the earth, leaving socialism suffocated in its narrow Western cradle.\textsuperscript{116} So far as can be seen, what he had in mind was not a further spread of Western imperialism but a proliferation of autonomous capitalism, such as he expected in India and did witness in north America. This would mark a new enough era for Asia, if not a socialist one. In 1894 Engels was to rejoice in the thought that defeat in the war with Japan must finally shake to pieces the old China and "the old economic system of small peasant agriculture, where the family also made its industrial products itself",—and that industrialisation must follow. With unquenchable optimism, forty years after he and Marx had first thought of it, he prophesied once more the ruin of Western capitalism, but now in a new way: Chinese industrial competition would be so overwhelming that Europe would be submerged by the deluge of Chinese goods.\textsuperscript{117} It was a bugbear of many Westerners by then, a new spectre haunting Europe. Like Marx earlier with India, Engels took for granted that China once forcibly prised loose from its past could perfectly well industrialise itself if it chose. But capitalism was to prove even more stunted there than in India.

Like Marx's doctrine of imperialism, his conception of historical change, in the glimpses we have of it in these writings, has some ambiguous features. These are not cleared up by the \textit{Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations} written at the same period. In this rough scheme of universal history, Marx was working, as Hobsbawm says, "in highly abstract terms", and was more concerned with "long-term transformation" than with minutiae of transition from one stage to another,\textsuperscript{118} such as India was undergoing. To relate his general hypotheses to the concrete detail of the articles on India, or of Indian history as we know it, is far from easy.

Marxists are accustomed to look on every system as containing inner contradictions, and as changing primarily in response to these tensions. Marx's writings on Asia reveal that he conceived of much, or most, of human history as escaping from any iron law of change into a
timeless vegetative condition. It was the discontinuity, the jerkiness, of social evolution that impressed him, its lack of momentum, its habit of running down. Mankind was advancing only in sporadic rushes here or there, and Marx, who called on philosophy to change the world, gave his interest to these active sectors, or to the reasons that kept the others immobile.

A philosopher of a different order, writing on southern Africa, is likewise struck by finding history not in steady motion but "subject to only partially explicable and almost invariably violent mutations". He thinks of societies like the Bantu accumulating over long ages, like clouds, "great invisible charges" of electricity, suddenly discharged. Marx might have accepted this as a picturesque summary of a French or an Industrial Revolution. But he recognized no similar accumulation of energy in societies, like those of Asia, apparently quiescent.

About one of these at least, Japan, it may be a permissible speculation that the country was on the brink of some radical transformation when foreign guns, by toppling the old régime, allowed a new order to take shape more rapidly. External force might then be said to have played the part of "midwife of history" that Marx assigned to revolutions like 1789. In India there had been at any rate sufficient ferment to call forth talents that the old society had no tasks for, aptitudes that would qualify Indians when the time came to assimilate modern modes in law, philosophy, administration, if not in industry. Every society, and the oldest the most, gathers a surplus of moral and mental endowments beyond what its practical functioning requires. Marx might be said to have implied something of the sort when he praised Bengalis for their facility at engineering. Yet no such thought seems to be in his mind; he thinks, as Hobsbawm says, of Asiatic society resisting change "until wrecked by the external force of capitalism". Certainly, he was not impressed by the claim the British had been fond of making, that they liberated the Hindu majority, among whom modern aptitudes were most evident, from the dead hand of Muslim rule. India had to be conquered by Britain—Russia needed to be defeated by western Europe—in order to be dragged out of the quagmire on to the highroad of history, not in order that pent-up energies within them might be set at large.

At times Marx's eagerness for a clean sweep is strikingly close to Maoism in its latest (autumn 1966) phase, its indiscriminate denunciation of everything traditional in Chinese life. Anyone turning his eyes today from China to India might well conclude that it would have been better for India to have all its memories blotted out. "Every imprint of the past find and annihilate!" the great Indian poet of this century made God say to His angels. But no-one has discovered how such blotting out can be done. The Africans dragged across the
Atlantic in chains—the most drastic experiment in collective amnesia ever tried—carried Africa with them; nothing could be more Chinese than Maoism.

The Christian cannot be awakened from sin by any effort of his own, but only by Grace; Marx’s Asia could only be roused from stupor by the intervention of Europe. What then is to be said of former, unavailing revolts there? In mediaeval Europe, Marx had written earlier, risings against oppression were peasant risings, and "totally ineffective because of the isolation and consequent crudity of the peasants". If so, this must have been still more true in Asia. Marx might then have concluded that the Chinese or Japanese peasant, who rebelled often, was less sensible than the Indian who more often took refuge in religion. But a remote consequence is perhaps seen in our day in the slow, hesitant adoption of progress by India, compared with the Far East. Risings like those of mediaeval Europe may not have been barren; they shook the fabric of government, forced rulers to seek new methods, kept history moving. Cumulatively they altered social psychology and prepared for a new society at some time in the future. In Marx, and often in Marxist historians after him, there can be felt an unreconciled dualism between a historical scheme which made nearly all revolts useless or (by impeding the advent of new, more advanced régimes) worse than useless, and an impulse to applaud every struggle against oppression, as Marx did in 1857.

The Mutiny itself was something round which patriotic feeling could grow in years to come, and its memory may have helped India to gain independence in 1947. But at the time and for long afterwards its failure, and the extreme British reprisals, pushed many Indians back into their past, as the beaten sepoys drew off sullenly into their jungles. Westernisers and Western ideas were compromised by their association with the foreign despotism. The afrancesados of a generation or two earlier, Spaniards in love with French enlightenment, had been discredited in the same way by the brutal Napoleonic occupation of Spain. This ominous precedent might have led Marx to wonder whether one country really can be kicked or dragged forward by another. In Asia, the two countries that have progressed most, on divergent lines, are the two that managed to preserve their independence. But China and Japan, like Spain, were nations already; India, to its misfortune, was not.

Marx’s writings on Asia may often seem to throw more light on him than on it. But he was, after all, a pioneer in trying to look at Indian history scientifically; almost the first man to foretell an independent India, the first to see that its real emancipation must have come from industry. Indian socialists in our day have been inspired by the recollection that Marx tried so earnestly to understand their
country. They have still far to go in developing or correcting his rough ideas, and the divisions and crises that have been overtaking them are not unconnected with a failure to strengthen their armoury sufficiently in this way. Some of them, fortunately, have been growing aware of the need for a fresh and more thorough exploration.

NOTES


4. Article of 4.9.1857. See the collection of articles and letters by Marx and Engels, under the title The First Indian War of Independence 1857–1859 (Moscow, 1959), p. 91. This is referred to below as War of Independence. Some other articles and letters on India are included in an anthology of Marx and Engels On Colonialism (Moscow, 1960).

Marx's notebooks on Indian history have been published in English as Notes on Indian History (664–1858) (Moscow, 1960). For a survey of his reading on Asia see E. J. Hobsbawm, Introduction to Marx, Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, trans. J. Cohen (1964), pp. 20ff. This work is referred to below as Formations.


6. On Colonialism, p. 277. The idea came to him from Bernier, the seventeenth-century French traveller in India.

7. War of Independence, p. 16.

8. The passage in Marx's article (N.8) was taken more or less verbatim from a letter just received from Engels (text in On Colonialism, p. 278).

9. War of Independence, pp. 157–160; cf. Formations, p. 70. Modern opinion broadly is that the village community owned a territory occupied in hereditary, unequal holdings by the members.


12. Formations, e.g. pp. 92–93.

13. Hobsbawm, p. 47 N.


16. Ibid., p. 15.

17. The German Ideology, p. 69.


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27. e.g. *War of Independence*, p. 38.
32. A sari is 5 or 6 yards long. Two Indian friends agree that a family of five today, in modest comfort, would use not less than 80 yards of a cloth a year.
33. V. I. Pavlov, *The Indian Capitalist Class, a historical study* (English ed., Delhi, 1964), p. 120, refers to this passage, but points out that most of Dacca's cloth had gone to the court or army, or been exported. (As N.31. Marx had used the Dacca weavers as an example in his lecture on Free Trade at Brussels, 9.11.1848.)
36. Statistics have been very imperfect. See S. Kuznets, etc., edd., *Economic Growth: Brazil, India, Japan* (1955), chap. 4: "Long-Term Trends in Output in India", by D. Thorner.
37. A friend recalls that a generation ago in his village in Bihar there were a dozen weavers; now there are none.
40. See, e.g. Anon., *The Zemindary Settlement of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1879).
41. *On Colonialism*, pp. 73-74.
42. As H. Collins and C. Abramsky observe: *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement* (1965), pp. 296-8.
43. Hobsbawm, p. 50.
52. Ibid., pp. 30-31; cf. On Colonialism, pp. 24-25.

53. Marx did stress the power, but only of inertia, of the large India bureaucracy in London: On Colonialism, pp. 62-63.

54. As N.51.

55. War of Independence, p. 33.

56. Minute on Indian Education (1835).

57. The German Ideology, p. 57.

58. Ibid., pp. 32, 57; cf. p. 67.

59. War of Independence, p. 36. In 1881 we find him complaining of the railways being "useless to the Hindus" (On Colonialism, p. 304).

60. Knowles, p. 322.


62. On Colonialism, p. 68.


64. Ibid., p. 33.


66. See the centenary volume of studies, Rebellion 1857, ed. P. C. Joshi (Delhi, 1957).


68. Ibid., p. 112.


70. War of Independence, p. 130. This estimate is in line with that of Jagdish Raj, op. cit., pp. 55-56.


72. See Benoy Ghose, "The Bengali Intelligentsia and the Revolt", in Rebellion 1857, pp. 103 ff.

73. As N.2.

74. The Eastern Question, p. 576.

75. War of Independence, p. 43.

76. Hobsbawm, p. 46.

77. See, e.g. Pavlov, op. cit., chap. 1.

78. See Bal Krishna, Commercial Relations between India and England, 1601 to 1757 (1924), chap. 1.


80. The German Ideology, pp. 50 ff.; Formations, pp. 111 ff.

81. Formations, p. 84; there is a similar phrase in Capital, Vol. 1, p. 91, and again in Vol. III, p. 388.

82. See the early chapters of L. C. Jain, Indigenous Banking in India (1926).


85. In Marx on China, pp. 45 ff. As with India, some other articles and letters on China are to be found in On Colonialism.
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86. Jain, op. cit., p. 185.

87. See R. Dutt, The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age (7th ed., 1950), chap. xii, “History of Tariffs”.

88. On the early stages see W. N. Lees, Tea Cultivation... in India (1863).

89. See e.g. G. M. Broughton, Labour in Indian Industries, p. 75.


98. War of Independence, pp. 31, 47.


102. On Colonialism, pp. 63, 70.


104. Ibid., p. 208 (14.1.1858).


106. Marx on China, p. 55.


109. Ibid., p. 87.


111. Marx on China, pp. 1 ff.

112. Ibid., p. 87.

113. Ibid., pp. 9, 66.

114. On Colonialism, p. 286 (to Engels, 8.10.1858).

115. Marx on China, p. 51.

116. As N.114.

117. On Colonialism, p. 313; cf. p. 311.

118. Hobsbawm, pp. 11, 13.


120. Hobsbawm, p. 38.


122. The German Ideology, p. 46.

123. This refers in particular to P. C. Joshi, formerly General Secretary of the C.P.T., who is editing at Delhi a “National Book Club” series.