

Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings

by D. D. Kosambi, comp., ed., and introd. by B. Chattopadhyaya. Pp. xxxvii + 832, b.&w. illus., tables, diagrams, line drawings. New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002. Rs. 1,495.

Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi (1907-66) was one of the few Indian academics capable of researching and commanding universal acknowledgment for his writings on the archaeology, numismatics, history, philology and ethnography of ancient India. Harvard-educated Kosambi was, however, by vocation a scientist of pure and applied mathematics and theoretical statistics at Benares Hindu University, Aligarh Muslim University, Fergusson College, Pune, and Bombay's Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. Widely acknowledged as the 'Father of Indian Scientific History', Kosambi outpaced his forebears and contemporaries, including his present-day compatriots, in his polymathy, impressive facility in Classical, European and Oriental languages, and an intellectual intolerance for those who disfigured the Indian historical canvas with idealized or partisan sketches. He wore his Brahmin erudition, unlike his brethren, lightly, and possessed an "instinctive respect for facts", as the late Daniel Ingalls of Harvard, a trenchant critic, would recount as well as an "inner morality": a meticulous scholar, Kosambi was also a rational humanist who empathized with black Southerners and threw himself into relief work during partition, floods in his hometown of Pune, and, during his later years, the International Peace Movement.

Unlike professional communists fixated with ideology, Kosambi approached Indology as a Marxist genuinely convinced that though its trajectory of historical development driven by the material means of production ill-fitted with the periodization of India's past, Marxism could be a valuable analytical tool for culling socio-economic data from texts and *realia*. Hence he supplanted the chronological narrative gleaned from defective and meagre sources with inter-disciplinary investigation and a comparative approach. To this he brought to bear his splendid intellectual range and rigour thereby altering not only the scholarly paradigm but judiciously pioneering and persuading us to reconsider the framework of Indian historiography, a point in fact recognized by many a non-Marxist from studying his *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay 1956; rev. reprint 1999); *Myth and Reality: Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture* (Bombay 1962; repr. 2000); and *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (London 1965; several reprints).

The editor has marshaled fifty-three important and inaccessible essays, reviews and opinion pieces in this volume some thirty-five years after Kosambi's passing, which duration has witnessed the publication of two *Kleine Schriften*, three *Denkschriften*, a Marathi biography, and the endowment of a lecture series in his honour at the University of Bombay (now Mumbai), all of which convey the enduring legacy of his originality and learning.

A reasonably informative introduction by the editor precedes Kosambi's papers, which have been sensibly arranged under the rubrics of methodology; historical themes; archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics and ethnography; philology and textual criticism; and reviews and rejoinders. Regrettably there is neither an index nor a complete bibliography of Kosambi's publications, both of which were desirable despite an editorial plea that no exhaustive compilation exists to date for the latter. Some typographical errors were evident (which in all likelihood must have occurred at the press) but not serious enough to mar the reading. One is grateful, nevertheless, to the editor for his yeoman's service to the field and for enkindling awareness among successive generations of students of a veritably Renaissance scholar of twentieth-century India.

(BW)