"A PASSAGE TO INDIA":
TEMPLES, MERCHANTS AND
THE OCEAN

(Contributions to Indian Studies in JESHO with Particular Reference to
Economic History)*

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India has had its due share in JESHO. Second only to the Near East, India is represented by altogether some ninety-seven articles. Chronologically, they cover the whole period from the Indus Civilization through "the coming of the Aryans", to early historical India, classical, early medieval, medieval (or "Muslim") India and to the consolidation of the East India Company in the late 18th century. The scope of various Indian topics covered by JESHO in its first thirty-five volumes is equally impressive. Before trying to summarize some of these contributions under a few selected subjects of Indian economic and social history, two special topics will be taken up. They may highlight both the importance of JESHO's contributions to ongoing debates, and the intensity with which such debates were taken up in JESHO itself. These controversial topics are the role of Indian feudalism and the so-called "Dravidian hypothesis" of the origin of certain Sumerian names of distant trading centers.

With regard to Indian feudalism, JESHO can rightly claim to have contributed to, or even partly initiated, this most important debate in contemporary Indian historiography. In 1956, two years before the

* In this case, the well-known title "A Passage to India" has been adopted from Prabhati Mukherji's article on the migration of the Indo-Aryans to India (vol. 29 (1986) 87-88).
first issue of JESHO appeared, D. D. Kosambi had already published the first two articles ever written on Indian feudalism and his famous book *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, in which he elaborated on his concept of "feudalism from above" and "feudalism from below". This book was reviewed in the first volume of JESHO by A. L. Basham, one of the founding board members of JESHO and the academic guide of the temporarily London-based new school of Indian historians. 1) It is worth quoting at some length from Basham's review, as it precisely predicted the further course of the debate on Indian feudalism and on Kosambi's role in this debate: "Kosambi's book will find numerous critics both in India and elsewhere. Many Indian historians, writing in a period of resurgent nationalism, will be horrified at Prof. Kosambi's attacks on many dogmas cherished in the undergraduate classes of Indian universities. Marxists of the orthodox school may well find fault with several of his conclusions. Many passages in the book will be found irritating by non-Marxists while professional Indologists will be quick to point out errors in detail. In fact the book will please no one... Nevertheless we believe that this book is in its class, a great book." In the following years, JESHO published two more of Kosambi's papers on Indian feudalism which too did not tally with the mainstream of the early phase of the orthodox Marxist debate on feudalism in India. His paper on Indian feudal trade charters emphasized the administrative decentralization through *sāmanta* chiefs whose rise in the post-Gupta period accelerated the conversion of communal property into feudal property 2). His second article on social and economic aspects of the Bhagavadgītā stressed certain cultural values, particularly *bhakti*, fostered by India's medieval feudal regimes 3). Kosambi may have to