

Karl Marx's Studies on Indian Village Communities

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Received on 5 April 2020.

Revised on 16 May 2020.

Accepted on 22 May 2020.

Abstract: Karl Marx's research has shown that residents of oriental countries live in small centres thanks to the paternalistic link between agricultural labour and the handicraft industry. Throughout history this situation has long created a special social regime called the “village community” regime. Among the oriental nations, India is the country where village communities persist and are most permanent. The following article introduces K. Marx's studies on the birth, administrative and economic organisational structure, and the economic, social and ideological constraints of Indian village communities.

Keywords: Village community, oriental society, Asiatic mode of production.

Subject classification: History

1. Introduction

India is a large country with a high population density and a long history. It is one of the oldest civilisations in the world. The country previously suffered from being closed in the stagnation of a society which was full of transformations on the surface, but underneath experienced terrible inertia of the village communities.

Village communities of India appeared very early in and persisted throughout the nation's history. Although unable to visit India, Karl Marx was interested in its history and prospects. By the mid-19th century, he had read the works of various Western scholars

on India and kept records of those works. Following the debate in the UK House of Commons on Indian rule, K. Marx studied the documents of the British Parliament and the history of the East India Company, and began to write a series of papers on India, including reference to village communities in India. Typical examples include *British Rule in India* (10 June 1853), *The East India Company - Its History and Results* (24 June 1853), *The Future Results of British Rule in India* (22 July 1853), etc., which were published in the New York Daily Tribune as a basis for opinions on oriental society and the Asiatic mode of production. In his *Preface of a Contribution to the Critique of*

Political Economy, K. Marx wrote: "In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society" [6, Vol.13, p.16]. This is the first time the Asiatic mode of production was mentioned and mankind has spent a great deal of effort on, and research time into, different findings. So far, studies have been made mostly on the Asiatic mode of production, though also including the basic features of the Indian village community, for example, the work by Professor Van Tao: *The Asiatic mode of production, Marxist - Leninist theory and Vietnamese practice*, or the essay "Village Communities and Oriental Village Communities", available on the internet, etc. Meanwhile, specific studies on village communities in India are still rare. In order to fully understand the oriental society and the Asiatic mode of production, it is necessary to understand K. Marx's research on the Indian village community, which is a typical example of the oriental village community.

This is a historical issue, so the article uses historical and logical methods. The historical method is based on historical facts and documents, which include writings related to India's village communities. The logical method presents a general overview with the essential relationships of relevant facts and documents. In addition, comparative and synthetic methods based on relevant sources and K. Marx's own writings about India are used to draw key points. The paper only focuses on K. Marx's studies on village communities in India, a country displaying typical village communities, in which the analysis of the process of birth, administrative

and economic organisation of the village community is clarified. How does its persistent existence limit economic development, curb social progress, lead to ideological constraints, and cause enemies to continue invading India? Also, some advantages of the village community are highlighted. Thereby, this paper works on K. Marx's perceptions on the oriental society and the Asiatic mode of production in human history.

2. K. Marx's perceptions on the birth and organisational structure of village communities in India

2.1. On the birth of village communities in India

Since ancient times, India has been inhabited by many ethnic groups with different customs, habits, languages and levels of civilisation [12]. Many ethnic groups were already living in India before the Aryans invaded the country. Northern India was inhabited by the Naga people, while in the south the Dravidian people, one of the oldest ethnic groups in India, lived according to the clan structure. "The family and clan formed the basis. In the home, the father was head of the household. In the family line, the patriarch was the head. In the clan, there was a clan leader. Many clans formed a tribe. The head of every tribe was a political-military leader called the Rajah" [1, p.31]. When the clan system was replaced by the village community regime, the latter structure formed the social cells where clan and residence relations were combined. Indian inhabitants

existed during the Bronze Age until the Iron Age when the Aryans invaded northwestern India, and gradually took control of the country. After a long period of cohabitation, the Aryans and the Dravidians assimilated. Due to the capture of fertile lands favourable for agricultural development, the Aryans shifted from nomadic farming to settled agriculture. They acquired from the Dravidians not only religious beliefs and farming techniques, but also tax policies and the organisation and management of the village community structure. J. Nehru remarked: "We might say that the first great cultural synthesis and fusion took place between the incoming Aryans and the Dravidians, who were probably the representatives of the Indus Valley civilisation. Out of this synthesis and fusion grew the Indian races and the basic Indian culture, which had distinctive elements of both" [9, Vol.1, p.109].

With the advancement of agricultural production together with animal husbandry and crafts, the process of asset division took place among tribes. The powerful turned the collective wealth into their own [11]. The pattern of collective ownership of the means of production and equal distribution of products among members of the tribe were gradually abolished, while conflict among members of the tribe appeared and developed. Eventually, that conflict was resolved by dividing large tribes up into small families. Those small families became an economic unit, with their own assets such as tools and means of production. Based on this, the chieftains or military chiefs were able to exploit working people with surplus wealth. In addition, wars among tribes also helped the chieftains

and military leaders become rich quickly. The majority of wealth, in the form of livestock, land, means of production, etc., was passed down to their children from generation to generation. They in turn became rulers, with political and economic power, so in ancient Indian society a distinction of caste and social status arose.

The division of property and social status resulted in the breaking of the tribal bloodline while the boundary between tribes and clans was disturbed. People working in a common land area, sharing a common economic interest, gathered together in an organisation called the village community. They were not tied to bloodlines. Within the organisation were people working in agriculture and the handicraft industry. On the other hand, India's terrain was (and still is) diverse, people were widely scattered, production levels at that time were low while natural conditions were difficult. So the people had to contact one another through agricultural production. One of the first conditions of agricultural production was the collective use of water - a key factor determining the outcome of production. K. Marx wrote about the importance of using water in India and ancient oriental countries: "A system for artificially improving soil fertility as such, a system that depends on central government and will immediately collapse if this government has a negligent attitude towards irrigation and drainage" [6, Vol.9, p.173].

In addition, tasks such as draining swamps, clearing forests for reclaimed land, fighting wild animals, etc., made everyone join forces to achieve results. The people gathered together in an organisation for the sake of economy and life, under collective management. This was the village community-

the first union of free people. Regarding the birth of village communities in India, K. Marx wrote: "Like all peoples of oriental nations, the people of India entrusted the central government with the task of taking care of large public works which were the basic condition of their agriculture and commerce. On the other hand, the Indian population scattered throughout the territory of the country, and concentrated in small centres thanks to the paternalistic nature between agricultural labour and handicraft labour - both situations, from the earliest periods, spawned a special social regime called the village community regime. The regime gave each of these small units its independent organisation and isolated life" [6, Vol.9, p.175].

In addition, India's earliest civilisation was the Indus Valley Civilisation that appeared around the 3rd millennium BC. In the end of the 2nd millennium BC this civilisation began to decline and was followed by the Vedic Civilisation. This was the period of the creation of slave nations. These countries often waged wars on neighbouring tribes to seize land and possessions and to capture slaves, while also fighting one another for dominance. This continued to the 6th century BC when the struggle ended with the victory of the Magadha Empire. From the end of the 6th century BC to the 1st century BC, ancient Indian society was deeply influenced and dominated by the special nature of the village community and the slave regime. "Slavery in India was as brutal and harsh as any other slave system in history, although not as developed as those of other civilisations due to the patriarchal exploitation of slaves by slave owners and the stagnant, conservative, narrow way of organisation in the village community regime" [1, p.37].

2.2. *On administrative organisation*

The village communities in India were almost the same as the villages in ancient Vietnam. They were the administrative cells of the state headed by the king, and administrative units with great autonomy. In India, the number of village communities was the same as the number of autonomous administrative units. Village communities existed in isolation, having almost no relation with other communities. They had to fulfill the obligations imposed by the state, from taxation and public services to making other contributions. Highlighting this situation, K. Marx wrote: "Those villagers did not worry about the destruction or division of a whole series of kingdoms as long as their villages remained intact and were not damaged, even if their villages fell under the jurisdiction of a great power, or had to submit to a king, they did not care" [6, Vol.9, p.176].

In ancient India, the state hardly interfered in the internal affairs of the village community, and the latter did not care about the fate of the state either. All obligations to the state were those of the village community, not of the individual members. Each village community had its own administrative office, and the administrative positions of this agency were either elected by the village community or were inherited [1, pp.38-39]. The head of the village community was the village head (*potail*). Under him were a number of people with different responsibilities, such as the manager of agricultural production, the manager of water resources, the manager of law, the children's teacher, the astronomer, the deity worshipper, and guards, etc. In addition, there were some slaves in the village community, who were owned by the village

community as a collective organ, and who had to carry out hard labour. All of these individuals helped the village head manage the affairs of the village community. Village communities in India operated as a miniature society with a caste system. Those in positions of authority and power belonged to the upper caste, while working people belonged to the lower caste. The following paragraph of K. Marx was quoted in a report of the UK House of Commons describing in full detail the administrative organisation of India's village communities: "Geographically, a village is a few hundred or a few thousand acres of land, consisting of arable land and wasteland; politically, the village is like a guild or an urban community. There are often the following authorities and officials in a village community: the *potail* or village head who as usual takes over the affairs of the village, settles dispute between villagers, functions as a policeman and tax collector. To fulfill such a duty, he must be the most appropriate person due to his personal influence and a thorough understanding of the situation and affairs of the villagers, capable of monitoring on a yearly basis the local agriculture and keeping track of everything related to agriculture. Then at a lower level were the *taliari* and the *toti*. The duty of the *taliari* was to investigate serious crimes and misdemeanors, to escort and to protect those people who travelled from village to village. The scope of obligations of the *toti* seemed to be more limited within the village and, apart from other jobs, he was obliged to protect crops, to help with statistics and harvest. The *taliari* was charged with guarding a village boundary, defending a village boundary or providing evidence of that boundary in case of a dispute. The *toti* was charged with overseeing water reservoirs and

canals, and distributing water for agricultural needs. A Brahmin officer was charged with overseeing the ritual work in the village. The teacher was charged with teaching children in the village to read and write on the sand. Another Brahmin officer was charged with keeping track of the calendar, or worked as an astrologer, and so on. Those authorities and officials together functioned as the village community administration" [6, Vol. 9, pp.175-176].

On the basis of public ownership of land, the mode of agricultural production closely linked to handicrafts turned India's village communities into administrative autonomous units. These were the basic factors regulating the inertia, isolation and persistence of India's village communities, followed by the complexity of caste and religion along with the tyranny of the state government. All these made Indian society, which was inherently stagnant and backward, even more stagnant and backward. K. Marx pointed out: "People had lived in this form of rudimentary village community management for very long periods of time. The boundaries of villages rarely changed and although the villages themselves sometimes suffered heavy losses or were even completely devastated by war, hunger and disease, still the same names, the same boundaries, the same benefits, and even those families and clans continued to exist from century to century" [6, Vol.9, p.176].

2.3. On the economic organisation

In *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations*, K. Marx distinguished between three different types of village communities: the Asiatic, the ancient and the Germanic. The basic

characteristic of the Asiatic type was that the land ownership belonged to the state (the king), while village community members only had the right of possession. In *Das Kapital - Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*, K. Marx also outlined the economic organisation of village communities in India. He explained that these small communities, which have been around since ancient times and still more or less exist today, were based on a common ownership of land, on a direct combination of agriculture and handicrafts with a fixed purpose, which is always used as a plan and model for newly formed communities. Established on a plot of land from one hundred to a few thousand acres, these communities were self-sufficient production entities. The majority of what they produced was directly consumed by the community members. This meant the products could not become commodities, hence production was unrelated to the task due to the nature of trade throughout the Indian society [7, p.195].

The highlight of village communities in India is the combination of public and private property ownership regimes. In village communities with a weak slavery regime, the means of production, land, pastures, forests, ponds, irrigation systems, etc., were entirely publicly owned. All members worked together and divided up the products equally. In those village communities where the slavery regime was relatively developed, land, water and public facilities were still under common ownership. Collective ownership of the main means of production was still one of the basic principles of the communal regime, but co-working was no longer available and the equal sharing of products was not practiced because the land in those village communities where

the slavery regime was relatively developed was usually re-divided every three years among the community members for them to cultivate, to collect their own yields and pay taxes to the state through the intermediaries of the village communities themselves.

Each member of the village community was considered a very small nucleus in the social element, working independently in accordance with the family unit on the allocated land. The village community members cultivated their plot of land, but they only had the right of possession, while land ownership rights still belonged to the state. The head of state was the king as the father of all the village communities. In a letter to F. Engels, K. Marx quoted Bernier instead of the conclusion and generalisation of the ancient Indian society in particular and the ancient oriental society in general: "Bernier rightly considered the basis of all phenomena in the East to be the absence of private property in land. This is the real key, even to the oriental heaven" [7, p.48].

In India, since ancient times, the state headed by the king had supreme ownership of the land. Under the king there was an administrative apparatus that governed the land and was responsible to the king for the taxation regimes of village communities. The king, who owned the entire land of the country, had the authority to delegate to village communities the distribution of land to community members. Thus, the economic basis of the village community regime in India was the state's ownership of the land. While village communities or their members had the right to own only the parcel of allocated land, they were not permitted to sell or to transfer such land. They had to work hard to pay enough taxes to the state and to

support themselves and their families. The workers living in village communities were free men. However, in cultivating public land village community members had to pay taxes to the state. Tax rates ranged from one twelfth to one sixth of the harvest. In addition, village community farmers had to provide obligatory services such as constructing embankments and roads, digging canals, etc. The whole of Indian society was a system of village communities, subject to the authority of the state headed by the king. On the basis of public ownership of land, these village communities in India had joint ownership of slaves in areas such as digging rivers and dredging canals, reclaiming virgin land, deforestation, fighting wild animals, etc. Some craftsmen carrying out certain jobs in village communities were also slaves. The existence of village communities strengthened the state ownership of land in India as well as the ancient oriental states.

The production activities of these communities were a close combination of agriculture and handicrafts. They were always self-sufficient, turning the village community into an independent, self-contained economic unit. Self-sufficiency was defined in the family economy of village community members. Each family formed an independent economic unit with a close association between agriculture and handicraft, which was the textile industry. Therefore, the people themselves were self-sufficient in the two basic needs of food and clothing. K. Marx pointed out: "These family-based village communities with family industry, a special combination of hand-weaving, hand-spinning and manual farming methods made those things self-sufficient" [6, Vol.9, p.176]. In the village community, there were a number of craftsmen

such as blacksmiths, carpenters, potters, etc., who specialised in producing essential tools and utensils for village community use, paid for with agricultural products. In general, the village community economy was almost completely closed. The exchange of goods between one village community and another and between rural and urban areas was almost negligible, except for those commodities that the village community was unable to produce such as salt, iron, etc. Hence, commodity relations and monetary relations developed slowly, and K. Marx pointed out: "The structure of the community was based on a planned assignment, there could be no manual assignment, and their markets did not change, labour products were directly used and consumed" [7, p.197].

Clearly, the close combination of agriculture and handicrafts defined the economy of village communities in India as a natural self-sufficient economy. Therefore, the village communities existed separately and were subject to strict rules under the direction of the administrative organisation which contained within itself traditional manual production conditions. K. Marx concluded on the Indian village community: "The manual loom and the hand-drawn spin spawned a large army of spinning and weaving artisans who were the main shafts in the structure of Indian society" [6, Vol.9, p.174].

3. K. Marx's view on the limitations of India's village communities

3.1. Restricting economic development

The persistent existence of village communities was a major factor limiting India's economic

development. The basic characteristic of the village community was the public ownership system of land. This contradicted and prevented the development of the private ownership system, inhibited the accumulation of private property; and private property rights were not free to develop. At the same time, the public ownership regime also bound village community members in a narrow, rigid and passive framework. It was this characteristic that slowed the transition from public to private ownership of land and major means of production, and it neither created nor stimulated the development of new production forces. The close combination of agriculture and handicrafts turned India's village communities into closed economic units. This resulted in the absence of a timely improvement in production tools, outdated production techniques, low labour productivity, nature-dominated labour achievements, and an unstable life for village community members. As a result, manufacturing industries in the economy were indivisible, handicrafts were inseparable from agriculture and could neither become specialised, nor become a driving force for economic development. Speaking of this inertia, K. Marx generalised: "Because their internal economic life remained unchanged, *potail* remained the leader of the village community and still acted as a conciliation judge and a tax collector, or a tax contractor in the village" [6, Vol.9, p.176].

One of the important criteria for assessing the growth or stagnation of an economy is the commodity economy. This is because the exchange of goods first took place between village community families and their village communities. Once different communities established relationships with one another, the

exchange of products among them developed gradually turning them into commodities. In contrast, village communities in India were completely isolated and closed. Their products were only for domestic consumption within these communities and there was almost no exchange. Therefore, the products could neither become commodities nor be converted into currency. The monetary function had little or no relevance for brokers and intermediaries in the area of trade. Specifically, regarding this situation, K. Marx concluded that the majority of products were for the community's direct consumption rather than in the form of commodities. As such, production and the distribution of goods throughout Indian society were unrelated [7, p.195].

Transport is considered the lifeblood of the economy, performing a function of circulation and trade between regions, and effectively supporting economic development. But in India, the closed nature of village communities resulted in underdeveloped roads and transportation facilities. Their isolation led to an absence of roads which in turn maintained this continued isolation. Discussing the Indian economy with the existence of village communities, K. Marx concluded: "It is well known that Indian production forces were paralysed because of the complete lack of means of transportation necessary to transport and exchange Indian colourful products". He explained that nowhere in the world was there such poor social status within an abundance of nature as in India and this was due to a lack of means for exchanging the products [6, Vol.9, p.288].

The pattern of public ownership of land and major means of production, coupled with the lack of means of transport and commodity exchange, made the Indian

economy backward. At the same time, it created favourable conditions for the aristocracy to take advantage of the situation. The latter mercilessly exploited villagers through taxation. In ancient India, taxes were paid in the form of food or cattle, while craftsmen and artisans were given jobs to do instead of paying taxes [8].

When talking about Asian village communities, the generalisation of the four basic characteristics of oriental societies, namely the public ownership system of land, autocratic monarchist state; the persistence of village communities, and conservatism and inertia, was also true of India's village communities. In his work, Prof. Van Tao explained that backwardness has existed since ancient times. This is due to the natural, self-sufficient, closed economy, coupled with a slow-born and underdeveloped commodity economy, where handicrafts and agriculture are inseparable. Urban centres are only the humps of the economic structure [10, p.32].

3.2. *Inhibiting social progress*

The permanently closed nature of the underdeveloped economy of village communities hindered and inhibited the development of society in India. "Slavery in India was quite particular in the sense that it was a social regime which had not yet reached the level of mature development compared to Greece or Rome, and was constrained by the consolidation of the village community regime, which were based on the paternalistic relationship between agricultural labour and handicrafts, making the economy of the village community natural and self-sufficient. Therefore, social activities were characterised

by over-stagnation and slowness" [1, pp.37-38]. In western communities, the process of private property was strong, which facilitated the rapid development of production relations. In contrast, in village communities in India, the process of private property was weak and slow-moving. India was home to numerous tribes and divided into many small states. The complexity of the population and the power of the warlords always led to wars and the annexation of territories. This situation caused great separation between ethnic groups and dispersion among regions. K. Marx wrote: "In Hindustan (i.e. India), like Italy, sometimes only the sword blade of the invaders could reluctantly link them together into nations. Even in the periods of Hindustan not being suppressed by the rule of the Muslims or the Mogul people, or the British, all the cities and villages were seen to be divided into many independent and hostile entities" [6, Vol.9, pp.170-171].

The impact of civil wars, invasions, putsches, conquests, years of famine, and consecutive disasters inflicted on the Indian society was extremely complex, intense and devastating.

In any case, it only touched the surface of Indian society because village communities in India focused all their interests on small areas of land while casually watching great nations collapse, witnessing unimaginable acts of cruelty and the destruction of people's ways of life in big cities.

They looked on indifferently without thinking, just like watching phenomena of nature. K. Marx concluded: "In this situation, village communities existed at a certain low standard of living, almost did not deal with other village communities, did

not show any desire for social progress and made no effort to make that progress” [6, Vol.9, p.289].

Village communities in India existed in isolation as the basis for upholding the dominion over, exploitation and enslavement of people by the authoritarian state apparatus.

To retain dominance, the ruling class not only maintained the economic base and administrative organisation in village communities but also established a complex caste system. This was based on two concepts - ancient Varna and medieval Jati. Both these regimes contributed significantly to the formidable and rigorous division of the population into castes in Indian society in general and in village communities in particular, causing people to lose their equal rights. In ancient India, the upper caste held all the privileges, while the lower caste had little or no power, being treated even like animals [11].

Caste division was explained and regulated by the laws of the “supreme” king. In essence, it was in the economic and political interests of the upper caste to suppress, oppress and exploit the lower caste as much as possible.

In addition, the spreading of the so-called “mystical power of the divine” [5] - the gods - turned workers into passive tools and servants, causing them to lose their creative energy, unable to bring into play hidden talents and intellect, unable to rise up against, and overthrow, the brutal rule of the ruling class. Studying village communities in India, K. Marx concluded that no matter how great India’s past political changes had been, its social conditions, prevalent since ancient times, had not changed until the first ten years of the 19th century [6, Vol.9, p.174].

3.3. *Ideological constraints*

The existence of village communities not only hindered economic development and inhibited social progress, but also led to ideological constraints. With a completely self-contained, isolated organisation, village community members operated in a confined fashion within the village community. They knew only their village community and families, regardless of the ideological, political, economic and social situations or the nation’s prosperity or decline. Regarding this situation, K. Marx pointed out: “Despite the devastating scene and the disintegration of countless peaceful, patriarchal, labour-loving organisations, from the viewpoint of pure human emotions, no matter how tragic people felt when they saw those organisations thrown into the sea of misery, each member of those organisations lost at the same time his/her ancient civilisation form as well as his/her long-standing sources of life” [6, Vol.9, pp.176-177].

Ancient Indian society was not only burdened by the suffering of unjust relations and the harsh exploitation by the upper class, but also suffocated by the regime of racism, skin colour, ethnicity and the so-called extremely harsh caste system. The class distinction structure was also called the Varna system. At first, the Aryan - the conquerors - established a regime of racism, skin colour and ethnicity to dominate the indigenous people - the conquered. W. Durant analysed the origins of the Varna system as follows: “First, the caste division was based on skin colour: on the one side was the high-nosed race and on the other side was the flat-nosed race, on the one side was the Aryan race and on the other side was the Naga and

Dravidian races (i.e. indigenous people) who had to follow the rule of marriage within the same race” [2, p.49]. But later on with social change, the Varna system expanded with the distinction of occupation, religion, taboo marriage, perception of purity and social interaction, etc., making the caste division even stronger. According to the scriptures of Brahmanism and the Law Code of Manu, ancient Indian society was divided into several *varnas* which can essentially be classified into the following four categories: the Brahmana *varna* including the Brahmin clergy; the Kshatriya *varna* of which the aristocracy and warriors were a part; the Vaishya *varna* with its merchants, landlords and free people; while finally the fourth and lowly *varna* group, the Shudra *varna* included artisans, labourers and slaves [15]. Lower than the above four castes in Indian society were the class of poor landless peasants and inferior people known as the Pariah. It can be said that the social caste system in ancient India was very particular. It was not only defended by the Brahminical doctrine but was also protected by the laws of the state. It was not just a distinction of status, education, nobility and humility, rich and poor as per class distinctions in Western countries with slavery, but also a discrimination in skin colour, race, occupation, religion, marriage, relationships and the perception of purity, etc., expressed in everyday life. That is why the caste system in India was so strict, and this is probably the difference between the caste system in the ancient India and those of other contemporary civilisations [1, p.52].

Because of such severe caste discrimination, village community members felt small and helpless against the power of

nature. They blindly revered outdated religions, and were subject to discrimination. Strict caste-based prejudice adversely affected the development of thinking, inhibited talent and hindered people’s creativity. K. Marx analysed in depth the consequences of caste-based discrimination in India: “We must not forget that those small village communities bore the mark of caste-based discrimination and slavery, that those village communities made people submissive to external circumstances, rather than elevated people to the position of masters of those situations, that they transformed the autonomous evolution state of society into an immutable destiny that was predetermined by nature, and thus created a cult of nature in an uncivilised way, whereby the degeneration manifested itself particularly in that man, the master of nature, had to respectfully kneel before Hanuman, the monkey, and Sabala, the cow” [6, Vol.9, pp.177-178].

Although ancient India had one of the earliest civilisations in the world with a brilliant Harappan culture [4], due to the special nature of the village community, not only material life was strongly influenced but also the spiritual, ideological and religious life of the ancient Indians were deeply imprinted. It restricted human reason, made human beings a docile tool of religious superstition, resigned to the circumstances of a strict caste system. In this situation, village community members could not rise up to master nature, or gain social and self-control. They lost their creativity, fell to their knees, threw their hands up in hunger and the backwardness of outdated rules, doctrines, procedures and religions.

In his research into village communities in oriental countries, Van Tao opines that:

“The inferiority, the limitation of thinking reflected in ancient religions and sanctification of nature, etc., limited human reason and lowered human dignity before both nature and society” [10, p.33]. And K. Marx concluded: “Those village communities restricted human reason within the most restrictive frameworks making it an obedient tool of superstition, binding it with chains of slavery by the traditional rules, depriving it of all greatness and of all historical initiative” [6, Vol.9, p.177].

3.4. Being the cause of enemies' successive invasions and enslavement

India was divided and scattered in ancient times. The root cause of this was found in social institutions, which were a terribly isolated, secluded, stagnant state of village communities. In addition, the harsh caste system and complex religious rituals resulted in a tremendous separation between village communities, ethnic groups and regions, to the extent that the number of village communities equaled the number of isolated entities, even combined at certain times and then dissolved later. In Indian society there was hostility not only between Muslims and Hindus, but also between various tribes, between castes [13], and between various classes of people. It was a society whose entire structure was based on a series of equilibria posed by popular mutual ostracism and caused by the inherent separation of village communities. It was natural for such a country and society to become bait for conquerors.

India had long been the target of aggression by ethnic groups and neighbouring countries. First, it was the Aryans who invaded and

conquered India. The Aryan invasion began as a peaceful expedition, but when faced with resistance from the indigenous people, they turned the expedition into an invasion. Soon they took control of North India and marched eastwards until they seized all the country. They occupied fertile lands and pushed indigenous people to remote areas in the south. They killed opposers and captured the majority of people turning them into slaves and servants. Then came the Greeks, the Xiongnu (the Huns), the Arabians, the Persians, etc., who successively conquered India.

By the early 16th century, the Moguls had conquered most of India. In fact, Indian history shows that the supremacy of the great Mogul ruler in India was overthrown by his governors, followed by the smashing of the governors' power by the Marathas, whose power was then destroyed by the Afghans.

Although the Indian people constantly stood up to fight for autonomy, the various invaders established dominance, oppression and exploitation. While they were all at war with one another, the British came to conquer. This invasion was different from the earlier ones because “The previous foreign invaders had nothing to do with the economic base and eventually adapted to its structure, while the British invasion would disrupt that facility and be an outside force to influence and to bring the tribute it earned outwards” [3, p.19]. K. Marx wrote that the treasures from India brought to Britain during the 18th century were not primarily due to the relatively negligible trading activities, but mainly by the direct exploitation of the former country and plundering large amounts of wealth to be brought to the latter country [6, Vol.9, p.205].

It can be said that all invaders whether before or after, big or small, far or near were of a dominant, exploitative and enslaving nature to the country of India. They all conducted armed aggression, brutally suppressed any protests and resistance forces. After the completion of the armed aggression, the invaders all imposed extremely fierce dominion over the Indian population, as K. Marx pointed out: "India could not avoid the fate of being conquered, and the whole history of India's past - if India generally had a history at all - was the history of successive conquests that it had to endure" [6, Vol.9, p.286]. The invaders' policy of domination was based on India's existing social base of the village community regime, except for the extent and tricks of oppression and exploitation. Indian residents were still tightly bound within the village community framework and the indescribable life of Indian residents was interminable. K. Marx pointed out that "India has no history at all". If anything, the history of India was just that of new invaders making war with previous invaders. As a result, whoever won would impose the yoke of domination on Indian society which was non-resistant and passive. Village community members in India did not care about the world's swirling and changing nature. They only considered their village communities as their highest "homelands". Regarding this situation, K. Marx wrote: "The Indian society has no history, or at least it is not known to us. What we call the history of India is nothing but the history of successive conquerors, who built their empires on the passive basis of this inert unresponsive society" [6, Vol.9, p.286].

4. Some remarks on K. Marx's views on village communities in India

Although village communities in India had limitations as stated above, they nonetheless had some advantages. That is, the village community was the first union of liberals for economic benefits whereby members joined forces in production. The long and solid existence of village communities ensured that Indian farmers had enough land to cultivate, thus limiting a farmer's bankruptcy and the development of slave relations. Therefore, the village community more or less maintained its tradition of solidarity and hard work, preserving harmony, mutual affection and assistance in production, and at the same time resolving internal conflicts, and directing tasks for the common good of the village community in a spirit of tolerance. The attachment of the entire people to the common good was the root of the Indian nation's strength. As Will Durant admitted: "India will teach us the noble lesson of tolerance, a sign of an old soul, teach us a peaceful soul receptive to new ideas, a calm mind, understanding all, forgiving all, ultimately having a loving heart to love all creatures, and only that loving heart can unite everyone together" [3, p.542].

Through the changes of history, the village community still preserved the Indian people's philosophical ideas of human morality and abundant vitality. In particular, Buddhism played a large and important role in the spiritual life and ideology of Indian people. Throughout India's history, village communities played a valuable and active role in the cause of national construction and defence. It not only gave rise to, and developed, good practices manifested through

the beliefs, customs and cultural traditions of the Indian people, but it also governed the viewpoint, philosophy and morality of life imbued with an Indian national identity.

J. Nehru wrote that every event, story and morality in epic or philosophy, the Indian religion was etched into the public's mind and gave it a rich content..., containing moral qualities, philosophy of life in a certain classical form [9, Vol.1, p.98]. The thought of India's lofty moral philosophy of human life was a beacon of light to many countries around the world giving a new perspective on human life. Therefore, the French scholar, J. Michelet (1798-1874), praised the image: "For anyone who has acted or desired too much, please drink a full glass of wine full of life and youth. In the West everything is cramped. Little Greece stifles me. The Jewish land makes it hard for me to breathe. Let me look forward to the lofty Asia and profound Orient for a moment... They are the places that create a peaceful atmosphere and an infinite love in the midst of conflict scenes" [14, p.167].

This profound philosophy of human ethics was an inexhaustible source of spiritual guidance for the notables and leaders of the Indian people to inherit, develop and apply to a full life. It became a strategic weapon in the struggle for national liberation, independence, freedom and happiness of the Indian people.

It was a tradition of a 'non-violent' and 'non-killing' struggle, with noble moral values and kindness which skillfully inspired and won over human hearts as demonstrated by J. Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, etc. The existence of village communities in India encouraged the village community members to live together, with sincere mutual assistance and affection. It also

preserved sustainability, stability, lessened social disturbance as well as inertia, thus creating a continuation of Indian history.

That is because it brought about a new concept, a new perspective on the world as Friedrich Max Müller espoused in his anthology entitled "*India: What Can It Teach Us?*" - *A course of lectures delivered before the University of Cambridge* (1882), which was quoted by J. Nehru: "If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant, I should point to India" [9, Vol.1, p.137]. And with a dialectical view, as early as in the middle of the 19th century, while India was colonised by the British, K. Marx believed that "Anyway, we can also be sure that, in a future, sooner or later, that great and interesting country will also be revived, etc., a country where its inhabitants even take a calm, noble spirit to balance their submission" [6, Vol.9, p.291]. As he predicted, the Indian people fought steadfastly to force British colonialists to give back independence to India on 15 August 1947. These positive sides and good traditions can and should be promoted.

5. Conclusion

The history of the birth of village communities in India reveals that they were based on public ownership of land and key means of production, with a mode of production that closely combined agriculture and handicrafts. Village communities were

turned into self-sufficient economic and self-governing administrative units.

These were the basic elements of the isolation, stagnation and persistence of village communities in India. In addition, the complexity of the caste system and religion, together with the tyranny of the centralised state government, made Indian society more stagnant and backward. It was the persistence and isolation of village communities that hindered India's economic, social, cultural and ideological development, and at the same time became the cause for the succession of aggressions and enslavement by various enemies. It was also from the study of village communities in India that K. Marx found the solid basis of oriental society and was a precondition for assessing the Asiatic mode of production. In studying Indian society in particular, it demonstrated his vision of how traditional oriental society could show the Indian nation and other oriental countries how to free themselves of the yoke of colonial imperialism.

K. Marx's research on village communities in India provides an important perspective and approach, helping oriental countries in general and India in particular to discover some aspects of their own.

However, K. Marx's studies on Indian village communities, which were dominated by European academic background and the specific historical contexts at the time, were neither exhaustive nor comprehensive, but should be continued as K. Marx himself admitted: "Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are

already present or at least in the course of formation" [6, Vol.13, p.16]. K. Marx's studies and remarks require the clarification of pre-capitalist society in many countries, especially in oriental nations that he was not able to extensively research. His studies on village communities in India are the basis and premise for the in-depth study of the Asiatic mode production as mentioned by him. The mode of production was not only an issue raised by K. Marx but also a category he himself and many generations followed later on. This is because it is a separate mode of production that differs from all Marxist standard theories and remains to be clarified. K. Marx saw the characteristics of oriental society but without a full understanding thereof due to the limitations of ideological science in previous centuries. He and most scholars in the world shared the same view that ancient oriental countries underwent a production mode called "the Asiatic mode of production", though there were still different and even contradictory ideas. According to the rule of development and destruction of socio-economic patterns, modes of production, including the Asiatic one, also share the same fate.

However, oriental society has its own characteristics compared with Western society. Therefore, an understanding of the village community in India, a typical one in the East with the Asiatic mode of production, will help not only better understand the historical process that human beings have gone through, but thereby also predict the future process, promoting the good and the positive while reducing limitations and eliminating conservatism and backwardness.

Note

¹ The paper was published in Vietnamese in: *Khoa học xã hội Việt Nam*, số 4, 2020. Translated by Luong Quang Luyen, edited by Stella Ciorra.

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