INTRODUCTION

Over a decade ago, at a gathering primarily dominated by archaeologists, Romila Thapar made a strong appeal for a productive and synthesis/collaboration between the disciplines of archaeology and history. She stated that this "... collaboration inevitably becomes a two way process, where the historian has to familiarize himself with archaeological data and methodology and the archaeologist has to be aware of the kind of evidence which the historian is seeking. Where as the method of data-collection may differ between the two ... the interpretation of the data is similar to both disciplines ..." (1973:378). Thapar ended with the plea that "... the archaeologist's concern should not be limited to the typology of artefacts and the sequence of cultures ... it is equally necessary for many of us as historians to ask these questions and there is a need to change the orientation towards data and analysis of those historians who are concerned with social and economic history. It is only when such questions are jointly asked by historians and archaeologists that there can be a termination to the present divorce between the two disciplines" (ibid. 389).

The vital necessity to induct an interdisciplinary approach to the study of archaeology and history in south Asia attracted greater attention primarily within the past decade. Some beginnings were made in this direction well before 1970. D.D. Kosambi and B. Subbarao are outstanding individuals in this context. The former used the Marxian approach to understand institutional formation and simultaneously drove home the vital necessity of
combining social sciences and humanities with physical and natural sciences for interpretative purposes. Some of his theories were either modified or rejected after new evidence emerged from research. Yet, the application of Kosambi's methodology gave insight to his successors to open up new areas in research. His was an alternative to research based purely on textual analysis. Nor did he adhere to crude evolutionary determinism to interpret processes of institutional formation based on changing forms of production relations from one epoch to another (e.g. S. Dange, India from Primitive Communism to Slavery. Bombay).

Subbarao on the other hand gave insight to the vital interaction between man and his environment, including its expressions found in techno-cultural formation. In other words, he opened up a new area of research locating archaeological data within an ecological context. Subbarao gave strong emphasis to the environmental basis as an important factor capable of shaping the individuality of techno-cultural zones. This was not environmental determinism, as he did not identify it as a primary determining factor per se.

II

The present study in reality is a preliminary archaeological-historical analysis of the formative period in south east India and Sri Lanka. At this juncture it is useful to elaborate on the nomenclature. We use the Primary Region for the geo-physical area covered by the present political and administrative boundaries of Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu (both areas forming south east India)
and Sri Lanka (Ceylon), the island which 22 miles across the sea to the south east of Tamilnadu.

The Primary Region is differentiated in our study from the rest of the subcontinent, though there are obvious physical, cultural, material and economic links between the two. All areas outside the Primary Region have been therefore termed Extended Regions. The Extended Regions will be indicated by specific terms of identity e.g. the Gangetic plain, the Indus plain, the Malwa plateau, western India, northern Deccan, etc.

For the purpose of our study certain specific zones have to be demarcated within the Primary Region. We have decided to name the present major political and administrative entities as Macro Zones viz. Macro Zone I (Andhra Pradesh), Macro Zone II (Tamilnadu), Macro Zone III (Sri Lanka).

Within each Macro Zone we have identified a series of micro zones on the basis of ecological, cultural and archaeological factors. These micro zones form the crux of the discussion in our study. They will be identified by a dominant geographical feature e.g. the Raichur doab, Krishna-Godavari alluvial plain; the lower Kaveri valley, the Salem uplands, the Nilgiri hills, the northern plains of Sri Lanka, the Central hills of Sri Lanka etc.

A micro zone may be a nuclear/core area or a peripheral area. Here we may borrow the categorizations used by Subbarao for larger geographical-economic-cultural zones, in order to use it for the micro regions as 'areas of attraction' and 'areas of relative isolation' respectively (vide Subbarao 1958).

A nuclear area is essentially a zone possessing physical potentials i.e. water, alluvial soil, raw material, communications
and a population for institutional development. Here the interaction between man and his environment gives rise to more developed forms of political, social and economic institutions and at the same time technology and production techniques advance at a relatively greater pace.

As opposed to the nuclear/core areas, the peripheral areas exist as auxiliary sectors of the former. Here the changes are relatively slow and the communities display a greater degree of backwardness vis a vis those in the nuclear areas.

There is a notable dearth of interpretative studies from a multi disciplinary perspective on the history and archaeology of south east India and Sri Lanka. Generally what we get is either a dogmatic formulation of the 'stages' theory in history (e.g. Satyanarayanan 1975) or the dependence on a single group of sources e.g. Singaravelu 1966; Pillay 1975; Minaksi 1977; Reddy 1976.

In this sense the work by Maloney (1968), Champakalaxmi (1973-76), Chatterjee (1976), Gunawardana adds a refreshing new approach.

In contrast to the studies made by Subramanian (1932), Vasudeva Rao (1979), Adikaram (1953) or Rahula (1956), we do not wish to present a narrative account of the history of Buddhism, its institutional establishments or its patrons. For our purpose, it is useful to start from the premise that Buddhism invariably arrived in regions that had achieved some degree of institutional development. Similarly, we also have a fairly clear idea from the sources about the social groups that went to form the social base of Buddhism in the Primary Region. Our study clearly indicates that the quantitative growth of Buddhism in the Primary Region had different phases and that these phases were in turn characterized
by socio-political and institutional transformations. This provided us with a starting point to pose a series of questions on the evolution of this social base and for that purpose work back in time to understand the antecedents of institutional development during the Early Historic period.

By way of introduction, the first two chapters cover the techno-cultural matrix and the pre-urban institutional formation. The common homogeneous techno-cultural matrix covering the Primary Region turns up as the most interesting feature. In other words, these sections, more specifically chapter I, cover the peopling of the Primary Region through migrations, interaction and acculturation. The second aspect that will be highlighted in this chapter is the beginnings of settlements in areas that were to develop as nuclear zones. Thirdly, these two chapters in unison describe the introduction of new technological innovations. In specific terms, Chapter II totally analyses the structure of the pre-urban society and economy. These two chapters also outline the emergence of the agrarian base i.e. peasant society, rudimentary craft specialization including the establishment of a firm exchange network.

Following this, Chapter III, makes a complete analysis of the pre-state polities and the gradual development of political differentiation leading to the emergence of the state, which coincided with class formation. The external impetus was given by long distance trade and the Maurya–Sātavāhana hegemony. Chapter IV closely follows Chapter III in taking up the most prominent section among the laity i.e. agrarian and commercial elite. This Chapter clearly indicates that with the upward mobility of certain groups who gained economic affluence through agriculture, trade and commerce,
Buddhism saw a tremendous upsurge during this period.

Chapter V is a study related to the social role of Buddhism, which in reality can be developed as a separate study for a thesis. This Chapter literally indicates the culmination of this study by establishing certain connections between Buddhism and its social base. We pose a series of questions on the nature of connections Buddhism maintained with different groups. Such questions include: to what extent Buddhism received royal patronage and its impact; its ability to act as an agency of acculturation and as a force giving social legitimacy; to what extent it acted as a mediator in social tensions; in the process of playing a social role, was it modified by this role?

Clearly all these questions could not be adequately answered. However, the structural analysis made in relation to regions and communities can be of use for another study related to society and Buddhism.

In view of the multi-disciplinary study involved in this research, the sources varied accordingly. The most reliable evidence was derived from the Brahmi inscriptions from all three Macro Zones. An analysis of these inscriptions can give volumes of information on most aspects related to resident communities (vide Paranavitana 1970). For Andhra and Sri Lanka we have heavily relied upon these inscriptions for a period covering nearly six centuries.

Throughout this study archaeological data plays a crucial role. This source proved to be invaluable to understand peripheral communities in western Andhra during the Neolithic period or the imposing structures of the Ikṣvākus during 3rd Cent. A.D. Its
information range from stratigraphic excavations to artefacts and other analytical data obtainable from such sites. More specifically it is only with archaeological data that we can reconstruct the Proto Historic period and its origins.

Numismatic evidence also occupy a significant segment among source material. This is more true in relation to economic and political history of the Primary Region. The coin types mainly include the Punch-marked coins, local coins issued by local chieftains, the Sātavāhana coins, Roman coins and the local coins of south India and Sri Lanka.

The literary sources cover a broad range from the Pāli texts in the north and south (India and Sri Lanka) to the south Indian Tamil Sangam texts. Perhaps the most useful texts for our purpose are the Tamil Sangam texts where we found it to be a valuable corroborative source for archaeological studies. Much of this can be corroborated especially by the Classical texts.

Ethnographic studies formed another important source in our research. These ranged from notes on pastoral tribes to settled agriculturists and pre modern craftsmen. Most of these refer to the pre Industrial period and they become invaluable in understanding kinship structures, exchange mechanisms, technology and a host of other economic activity. The continuation of these traditions proved to be a boon to our research especially where cross cultural studies became essential to understand the substratum cultural matrix.

It is hoped that this study will contribute even in a small measure to the on going research work on south Asian Historical Archaeology. What we have explained and understood can be treated as a microscopic portion in comparison to what is yet to be revealed.