

DHARAMPAL • *COLLECTED WRITINGS*

Volume V

ESSAYS ON TRADITION,  
RECOVERY AND FREEDOM

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Volume I

Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century

Volume II

Civil Disobedience in Indian Tradition

Volume III

The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education  
in the Eighteenth Century

Volume IV

Panchayat Raj and India's Polity

**Volume V**

**Essays on Tradition, Recovery and Freedom**

# ESSAYS ON TRADITION, RECOVERY AND FREEDOM

*by*  
Dharampal

Other India Press  
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**Essays on Tradition, Recovery and Freedom**

By Dharampal

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## Publisher's Note

Volume V comprises five essays by Dharampal which not only deal with some of the themes covered in the earlier volumes, but also place them within a broad philosophical perspective. Some of these essays are actually lectures delivered by him before audiences in Pune, Bangalore and Lisbon. Wherever possible, the original informal style and tone of the lecture has been retained.

These pieces have all been published in one form or another; in scholarly journals, popular print media, in booklet form, and in different languages. The merit of the present collection is that it brings these wide-ranging essays for the first time together within a single volume.

Dharampal has written and spoken richly and wisely on other areas and aspects of Indian society and culture as well, including some lively and insightful articles on Mahatma Gandhi. Hopefully, these will also be published as a separate volume in the not-so-distant future.

In the meantime, the interested reader can find a comprehensive bibliography of Dharampal's writings (including articles on him and his work) in a small booklet called *India Before British Rule and the Basis for India's Resurgence*, published in 1998 by the Gandhi Seva Sangh, Sevagram, Wardha 442 104, Maharashtra.

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# I

## SOME ASPECTS OF EARLIER INDIAN SOCIETY AND POLITY AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO THE PRESENT

*(Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity and their Relevance to the Present consists of three lectures delivered on Jan 4-6, 1986 under the auspices of the Indian Association for Cultural Freedom at Pune. These were later published in New Quest [Nos. 56, 57 and 58] and also translated into Hindi and published in Jansatta in 12 parts during March-April 1986. They were also translated from English into Tamil a year later and published in book form. Soon thereafter, the pieces published by Jansatta were brought together in book form under the title, Angrejon se Pahle ka Bharat by Satabdi Prakasan, Vidisha, 1988. These lectures were also published in Marathi as Paramparik Bharatiya Samajik Va Rajkiya Vyavastha Ani Nava Bharatachi Ubharani as well as in Malayalam in somewhat briefer versions. The compilations of lectures in Hindi continues to be published now and then in a few journals like Himalaya Rebar as well as in book form by the Azadi Bachao Andolan, Allahabad.)*

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The theme of these talks relates largely to the society and polity of India as it appears to me to have existed just before the beginning of British rule (i.e. around 1750), and in many of the areas which came under direct British occupation or protection later (till around 1820). That the basic concepts and fabric of the society and polity I am describing did not come into being just around 1750 but had existed from much earlier times is obvious.

I begin today's talk with an account of how I came to be personally aware of our archival material. From this, I move to a brief reference to our present general understanding of what our society is assumed to have been like around 1750, or in the decades and centuries preceding it. Next I make some reference to the institutions and manners of British polity in the 18th and early 19th century, and I end today's talk with some mention of

the economic differential in Indian Society and of life in India at the top levels before the beginning of British rule, as also what it became soon after we began to be ruled by Britain

The second talk is devoted to a description of Indian society and polity, some of it in detail along with some tabulated data. I also briefly touch on certain other aspects of this society: education, technology, the practice of civil disobedience, etc.

In the third and final talk I will attempt to explain why my presentation may seem so contrary to prevalent understanding and belief about the nature and functioning of Indian society and polity before British rule. Then I move on to our present public and institutional frame, most of which I believe— and with which most of you will perhaps agree— is a continuation of what we have inherited from the way the British ruled India. At the end I suggest a few steps which may possibly deserve consideration and discussion. My hope is that such a discussion, (though not necessarily restricted to what I propose), may possibly help our society to come into its own.

• • •

To begin with, I want to mention to you a certain disquiet I feel about ourselves. This disquiet, I expect, is partly a product of my involvement with archival material. Going through most of it is, for me, like reading high drama, or modern mystery or detective stories: it leads me to an overcharged imagination. Thus, the disquiet I feel may, to a large extent, be without any basis.

I find, however, that many of the points which I am later going to mention to you seem to have been discussed and published in the 1920s and 1930s. For instance, Mahatma Gandhi's *Young India* in the early 1920s published a great deal on indigenous Indian education in the late 18th and early 19th century; on the various crafts of India; on Indian social conditions before the British and on the impoverishment of Indian society during it; on the relatively superior status which the so-called pariahs of South India or the Mahars of Maharashtra had till about 1800, etc. The writers of such articles included not only those who were Gandhiji's followers or admirers but also men like Sir Sankaran Nair, a member of the British Viceroy's council, who expressed similar views. According to Sir Sankaran Nair, the major erosion in the socio-economic status of the pariahs or the social and cultural life in general took place during the previous century and a half. I expect there is much more material of this



kind in our early 20th century newspapers, journals and scholarly as well as other works.

It is perhaps true, that though this information had come to the notice of many 50–60 years ago, it was not brought together then to form an integrated picture of Indian society. Even when the latter might have been attempted, it was probably done cursorily or in what looked like a highly romantic idiom.

Gandhiji, in most of his writings, and even more so in *Hind Swaraj* (which he wrote in 1909), tried to give a fairly integrated picture of Indian society and polity as he understood it to have functioned during its long past. As many here may recollect, while writing in *Hind Swaraj* on passive resistance he had indicated that this practice had always existed in India, and he had also then given an illustration of it. It is my belief that it is such an understanding of the working of the Indian mind and society which enabled Gandhiji to commune with it with such great ease, and pave the way for the adoption of much of what he suggested, by the Indian people. As he said in 1944, what he did when he returned to India was to provide a voice to what the people themselves felt and basically already knew. It is true that it was not only this communion between the people and Gandhiji but also his organisational and related skills which could bring about what India was able to do and achieve under his leadership.

Yet, despite what Gandhiji said in *Hind Swaraj* and what was written by many in *Young India*, and elsewhere, about the earlier Indian society and polity, little of it seems to have got internalised and expressed in the institutions which have been managing India since the regaining of freedom. What continues in the governmental as well as the non-governmental spheres is in a great measure that which the British created during the period of the demolition of Indian institutions and structures between 1760 and 1830; or is modelled on the structures they imported and imposed on India for the consolidation of their rule.

By 1920, a fairly substantial section of the elite in India had become alienated from their society; had taken up the manner and idiom of the British; and had begun to mould their personal and public life according to British concepts and modalities. The period of 25 years when Mahatma Gandhi had the supreme leadership of India was too short for battling on several fronts. It may also be true that the elite which joined him— and which thereby inherited political power— did not take him seriously as regards his understanding of Indian society; and could

not conceive that such a society could be viable in the modern world. As one of the more enlightened of this elite, and some one who was quite dear to Gandhiji said: how can one accept that the village people have any virtue when they are so ignorant?

However, even if this substantial elite could not internalise the Indian past and shape its future accordingly, if it had any creative capacity it could have certainly internalised what it had learnt from the West, and used this learning, by recasting it into an Indian idiom, for India's benefit. But even in this it has failed dismally so far. I don't have to labour this latter point however, as enough has been said on it from more august quarters in recent months.

Yet, it seems to me that this incapacity to recreate or regenerate has been with us for a much longer period. Perhaps the Vijayanagar *rajya*, as well as the indigenously rooted *rajya*, which the Marathas tried to create in the early 18th century, had not fared very differently than ourselves. Notwithstanding that the inspiration of Vijayanagar came from the great Acharya Vidyaranya and of the Marathas from Samarth Ram Das, both of them seem to have failed to unite society and polity; that is, to make them function according to a shared idiom and shared concepts.

It is possible that most civilisations have such intervals when the links between society and polity get shattered, or vitiated; or, they remain in a state of hibernation. It may be that for several centuries we have been passing through such a phase, and that a time will soon come when India's polity will begin to reflect not only the aspirations and urges of our society, but also its manner and idiom. It is also probable that I am being unduly impatient, and that such processes are already functioning, and will, in due time, make the present split between our society and polity a matter of little consequence. About the time we regained freedom, Gandhiji had written to someone that no quick results should be expected; and that the situation created by an enslavement of 150 years will take at least half that much time to restore India to health.

Yet, even after reflecting on such possibilities and projections, the disquiet I feel does not wholly disappear. I have somehow a feeling that the rather separate worlds in which our society on the one hand and our polity on the other hand have tended to move is due to some deeper and more philosophical causes. Perhaps, the Indian psyche, and the private universe of the Indian individual, are averse to existing in a world in which

hostility between groups and areas is a permanent feature. As you will realise, I am putting this before you merely as a layman. But it is my hope that if my disquiet is in any way shared by the learned and the wise amongst us, they will try to look into this question.

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I expect what I have said so far must have made it apparent to most of you that, except for a general interest, I have no academic background or professional training in the art of the historian. Till about twenty years ago, I was more involved with the problems of rural reconstruction, and like many of my age, education, and interests, I was interested in a general way also in questions relating to the rebuilding of a new India. I also may have naively believed in 1947, that such rebuilding and national resurgence was just round the corner. Such a belief seems to have continued with many of our generation until several years later.

But as years passed, these expectations began to take a back seat. It appeared to me, and I suppose to others, that what we were achieving in most fields amounted to very little; and even what we achieved was more a result of certain material inputs rather than of our ingenuity, methodology, or a result of the application of any mental effort on our part. The output of most planned effort seldom seemed to exceed the material input; and the human factor seemed to have played little role in these relatively meagre achievements. Around the same time, I was also of the view, which I retain even today, that the ordinary human being in India, especially the Indian villager, was in no sense inferior to his counterpart in England, or other countries of the West, as regards his ingenuity, capacity to innovate within his circumstances, and in terms of the total amount of hard work done by him during comparative periods. Further, the fact that he was able to produce most of what India needed in agriculture or craft products, with meagre capital and investment, indicated that he perhaps was far superior to the mid-20th century peasant or craftsman of the West.

During the 1950s and around 1960, though I knew that we had what is called the National Archives of India— I often passed it in Delhi— I did not exactly know what relation such archives had to our society, or to our past, or to our lives. But the work I did in connection with rural areas, which included visiting

various centres for rural development and the post-1957 institutions of panchayat raj, in several parts of the country, gradually made me conclude that perhaps most of us— while we may have been very dedicated to the objectives we had in view, or may have had a great love for our ordinary compatriots— did not really know much about what these compatriots of ours thought, how they solved any problems which confronted them, what their priorities were. Even more surprisingly, we were quite unaware of the social and cultural past of the particular regions or communities we were concerned with. True, we had some sort of general picture about this past. This picture usually implied that our village folk and their ancestors had wallowed in misery for a thousand or more years; that they had been terribly oppressed and tyrannised by rulers as well as their social and religious customs since time immemorial; and that all this had mostly left them dumb, or misguided or victims of superstition and prejudice. From this we assumed that what we had to deal with was like a blank slate on which we, the architects of the new India, could write, or imprint, what we wished. We seldom thought that these people had any memories, thoughts, preferences, or priorities of their own; and even when we conceded that they might have had some of these, we dismissed these as irrelevant. And when we failed in writing on what we assumed to be a blank slate, or in giving such writing any permanence, we felt unhappy and more often angry with these countrymen of ours for whom we felt we had sacrificed not only our comforts, but our very lives. If I may say so, what I have stated here was, I think, in a large measure shared by most of our generation who were given to social or public work.

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But from about 1960, I began to feel, at least for myself, that I knew very little about these people for whom I claimed to work; I knew nothing of what their habitations or society had been in the past, and not much more of their present day lives. As it has some bearing upon what I later read about our society in the early British records, I may mention a few of the points which I learnt about our society while I was still engaged in this work of rural reconstruction.

One of the early incidents which gave me a different understanding of our village life took place during a study which we had undertaken of the Rajasthan panchayats in 1961. In one particular village (perhaps this was in the district of Sawai

Madhopur), we learnt that there were some irrigation tanks. As I did not find any reference to these tanks in the proceedings of the panchayat, I asked the panchayat members present if any thing ever happened to these tanks. They replied that they were indeed occasionally repaired, etc. On my asking as to who did the work, they said 'we' repaired them. I then asked did the 'we' mean the panchayat. They said it did not mean the panchayat, but it meant those whose fields were irrigated by these tanks. They further described how labour, cash, etc., was collected for the purpose of repair. When I asked why the panchayat did not repair the tanks, they said that this was not the panchayat's work. On my asking them what was the panchayat's work then they replied that the panchayat's work was 'development' and, according to them, 'development' was that which the government wanted them to do. As they understood it, the repair of irrigation tanks did not fall in any development category. So they regarded it as something that they had to do themselves, as had been done for centuries. We had visited this village, like many others, as a team, which included a former member of the first Indian Planning Commission. A young I.A.S. Officer, the Block Development Officer of this area, was also present during this conversation.

The same evening, we visited a village-cum-town panchayat. This panchayat had, just a few months earlier, built a spacious panchayat-*ghar* in which we were then sitting. While looking at their proceedings book, I said to them that the book did not seem to record any decision about the construction of the panchayat-*ghar*. They agreed it didn't include such a decision, but said that it included the entry of the money they had collected for its construction. I asked them when and where did they take the decision to construct this place. They said they had another panchayat in which every section in the village was represented, which they called the *Bees-Biswa* panchayat. According to them the decision to construct the panchayat-*ghar*, and everyone's contribution towards this work, was taken there. I asked them why this matter was not decided in the statutory panchayat. They said the statutory panchayat- I think they called it *sarkari* panchayat- was not the place for such a decision. I then asked them if they needed to take some similar decision again what would they do? Their emphatic answer was that they would take such a decision in the *Bees-Biswa* panchayat, and not in the statutory panchayat.

I heard more or less similar narratives in villages of Andhra Pradesh a few months later. Subsequently, during 1962, I was

in Jagannath Puri, and called on the President of the Puri Zilla Parishad. He told me about the shortcomings of the panchayat bodies in the new system: their lack of power, resources, etc., and as is common with us, he had many things to complain about. I told him that while I mostly agreed with what he had said, I would like to know what the position of panchayats, etc., was in earlier times. He then told me that near Puri, there had been 52 *sasana* villages, which had continued as communities with common ownership, etc., for several centuries; but, that these were dissolved after 1937, when we began to implement the national objective of land to the tiller. At my request, he arranged my visit to one of these *sasana* villages: the village of Veer Narasimhapur. My impression after visiting that village was that as regards aesthetics, design, the state of its agriculture and plantation of coconut and other trees, social amenities, etc., the village compared well with any Israeli Kibbutzim, or a village in England, or elsewhere in Europe. I was then told that this was a Brahmin village, which created some doubt in my mind that perhaps it was a very special place. But I was assured that out of the 52 villages there were many which were inhabited by various other communities (including fishermen), and that these were organised similarly.

From 1962 onwards, I began to find traces or residues of such village communities in many parts of south India, especially in Tamilnadu which I visited more frequently. In 1964, I was informed in Thanjavur, that till 1937, it had at least 100 villages which had long been organised as *samudayam* villages; but that these again were, even formally, dissolved because of our national objective of land to the tiller. On further enquiry, I learnt that the long existence of the *samudayam* villages in Thanjavur was brought to the notice of Acharya Vinoba Bhave when he visited there in 1956 or 1957; but that there was no reaction on Vinobaji's part to this information. Later, I mentioned this to an esteemed Sarvodaya friend. He reacted by asking me what did I expect Vinobaji to do? Did I expect him to start researching about it? I replied that I did not expect any research from Vinobaji, but if Vinobaji had felt that his idea of the village community, etc., as expressed through the term *gram dan*, possibly may have had some psychic and historic linkages with his society, and had he mentioned such a feeling to his, then countless, followers, surely at least a few scores of them could have helped him, and thus the country, to establish or disapprove such an assumption.

A more tragi-comic aspect in this narration of how I came to archival exploration relates to the holding of statutorily laid down meetings of the village panchayats at certain intervals. During the early stage of a study of panchayats in Tamilnadu in 1964 and 1965, I found that a large number of village panchayats were actually unable to meet because of the lack of a panchayat building; and, instead, the statutorily laid down meeting was considered as having taken place by circulation of the resolution. Realising that because of factionalism, etc., the members were reluctant to meet at the place of any one member or that of the panchayat president, I asked why did they not meet in the village school. Most villages in Tamilnadu, even in 1964, had a school of some sort and also a large or small school building. They said they could not meet in the school building while the school was on, which was from Monday to Saturday. They then told me that no panchayat business could be transacted on a Sunday, according to the rules and regulations of government. A year or two later, I was to learn that this rule of not transacting any 'public' business on a Sunday dated to around 1800; and that this rule was enacted here in India within a few years of the enactment of an Act in Great Britain pertaining to 'A Stricter Observance of the Sabbath Day', which prohibited most public activity in Britain on a Sunday. Incidentally, such enactments in many matters like the prohibition of stage plays, opening of most shops, etc., or prohibition of privately washing clothes and putting them in the back garden to dry more or less continued in Britain even till recently. And as many here know, the observance of the Sabbath, on a Saturday, is even more strictly observed in the modern state of Israel.

It is facts like the above which made me realise that most of us had completely lost touch with the reality of our country. Simply because our people by temperament were mild and tolerant, and did not throw stones at us, or murder us in our beds— even when they went without food, clothes and shelter— we had thought that they were nearly dead, or wholly inarticulate and assumed that it was for us to determine their future and to initiate them into prescribed activity. While we believed this to be the state of our people, we who had been left in positions of power, authority and what we called knowledge, did not even know or certainly did not comprehend, the laws, regulations, procedures and plans which we administered and believed would herald this new India.

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It is in Madras that I first came in close contact with government records, mostly relating to the 20th century but some to the early and late 19th century also. Two things which I learnt in the Madras archives have some relevance here. They were:

(1) Around 1805, the district of Thanjavur had around 1800 villages which were known as *samudayam*. These formed about 30% of the total number of villages in the district of Thanjavur then.

(2) The governmental revenue assessment fixed by the British in India was fixed at 50% of the gross agricultural produce in Bengal as well as in the Madras Presidency. This fixation was made during the years 1760 to 1820, as and when the British became masters of an area. This particular information initially baffled me and later when its implications sank in my mind, I was aghast.

I tried to share this information with some of my knowledgeable and esteemed friends. These included political personalities, planners, former high officers of government, and many others who were intimately concerned with land and rural problems and cared as much about India's continuing poverty as I did. But for a long time none of them could believe this data. One of them, who had been a district collector and later a minister as well as a planner, was categorical that this never could have happened; that it was impossible for any land to pay such an exorbitant government revenue. A friend, also a historian, but more concerned with the 20th century, told me some months later that the British did fix the land revenue at 50% of the gross agricultural produce; that few Indians today knew this fact; and that the only important Indian who perhaps was aware of it was the first Prime Minister of the Indian Republic.

In the context of *samudayam* villages, a former chief of land reforms in the Indian Planning Commission was of the view that there could not have been any such *samudayam* villages in Thanjavur as this fact had not been mentioned by Beveridge—the celebrated late 19th century British authority on Indian land tenures.

Such incidents and experiences ultimately led me to a sustained study of some of the material in the archives on India. Only then did that I realise what they contained and what purpose they could serve. This path to the archives may indicate the sort of mind I possessed; the search I was pursuing; and explain any subjectivity and erroneous or exaggerated impressions which



some may feel have resulted from my approach. But, I leave this for you and others to judge.

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Before I move to a description of what I have understood about Indian society and polity from these British records, I must mention some other points. The first relates to my exclusive dependence on British records. This I realise is indeed regrettable. But, as far as I know, no very detailed Indian records relating to the functioning of Indian society and polity at the primary level are to be had, even today, i.e., nearly four decades after we regained freedom. It is indeed tragic that during these decades, but for a few exceptions in the archaeological sphere, the exploration of our past, especially our institutions, our scholarly and popular concepts, and the nature, details, and the underlying principles of our sciences and technologies, is more or less at the stage where it was about fifty years ago.

I have a hunch that such records must exist, though perhaps, not in every village, town, and district of India, but at least in a few scores of places in our vast land. The places which possibly may have such records will be India's religious and cultural centres, old kingly or aristocratic families, old families of bankers, merchants, etc., and many of those who traditionally functioned as registrars and account-keepers in India. That Indian villages maintained detailed voluminous records is borne out by British and other testimony.

So far our history is mostly based on royal court chronicles, on some stone or copper plate inscriptions, or much more on the writings of foreign travellers; and its structure and direction seem to have been determined less by the data, but much more by a variety of ideological formulations. According to 19th century European formulation, for example, feudalism was a necessary stage in the evolution of society; therefore, it was assumed that feudalism must have existed in India too. As society, according to European notions, is supposed to have had a linear or spiral upward movement, so India also must have had this phenomenon; and hence if the standard of ordinary living in India in the 1860s (for which there is some published data) was at a certain level, this standard must have been at a much lower level 60 or a 100 years earlier. Again, if a Dutch traveller in Jahangir's reign found that Indian food did not suit his palate or stomach (his complaint was that beef was prohibited at that time), this meant

that food in India then was poor and miserable, and most ordinary people had a terrible life. But according to the same traveller, even the ordinary labourer in places like Agra ate khichri with butter daily, a statement which is usually ignored.

Or as a prestigious recent economic history of India tries to convey, the life of the royalty and nobility and those in their close circle, was indeed fabulous during India's so-called mediaeval age. As an illustration of such sumptuous living this new history quotes a remark of around 1739 from a writer in Delhi. According to this writer 'in Delhi's bazar a young nobleman could expect to buy only the barest necessities with Rs.1,00,000.' Whether this was meant as ridicule, or was a serious statement of fact, is not mentioned in this history. The inference of such a quotation obviously is that the life of the ruling class or the nobility in all parts of India, prior to the British, must have been very fabulous indeed; and as a corollary of this the life for the ordinary people must have been very hard. Or, if a European writer in the 17th century said that Delhi looked as large as Paris, and modern research finds that Paris then had half a million inhabitants, Delhi by inference must have had a similar number then. Or, lastly, as some royal chronicle of the 17th century says that the Mughal empire (whatever this may mean in terms of area, etc.) had an army and militia of 50 lakhs, assuming that one in every 30 persons (including women and children) was in this army or militia, the Indian empire of the Mughals is assumed to have had a population of 15 crores. And so on and so forth.

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It is possible that numerous local social histories, narratives, etc., are being written today in the languages of India, as well as in other foreign languages which provide much more solid data and sounder hypotheses, of which I am not at all aware. I am indeed sorry for that. My knowledge of languages is limited and does not go beyond my own language, Hindi, and some English which I have learnt over the past five decades. It was, therefore, the English records which I obviously turned to.

My selection of the 18th and early 19th century period also seems to require an explanation. I treat the mid-18th century, or a period immediately before it, as a sort of benchmark point for the understanding of Indian society and polity. If we had detailed records, say for 1700, I would certainly prefer them to those post-1750. To my mind the records prior to 1750 would be, if they are as detailed as the post-1750 British

records, much more representative of actual Indian life. What we have in English referring to Indian society and polity is mostly post-1750.

There are certainly a few records in Madras and, perhaps, some in other archives relating to Surat, Bengal, etc., which go back to the period before 1750. A few of the 1680 Madras records describe in some detail the difficulties which the British had with what were known as the Right hand and Left hand caste groupings, and the protests these groups launched against the Madras British authorities. Or, there are a few records, even at this early date, which mention that the practice in Madras was, it possibly prevailed in most parts of India, that the militia and police received a certain proportion of the total agricultural produce of an area, and in lieu of such remuneration, it was their duty to protect all those who contributed to this charge from local disturbance, thefts, etc. In case the police failed to recover any stolen property, it was its responsibility, and that of its superiors, to compensate the sufferer up to the value of his loss. But most of the British pre-1750 record does not have very much to tell about the details of the socio-political structure of that time. Incidentally, there are accounts, as that of Henry Lord, of around 1620, who described in much detail the life of the Baniyas and Parsis of Surat and then presented the narrative to the Archbishop of Canterbury for his Lordship's judgement on these heathen tribes. Or the travels of Peter Della Valle, from about the mid-17th century, which amongst other matters described the functioning of a school, and the method of teaching, in a village of Karnataka.

The post-1750 records (which really describe the society of particular areas) usually refer to the decade or two following the formal occupation of an area by the British. Naturally, these narratives vary in their quality, extent and depth from area to area— depending on the person who reported, or the condition under which the reports were made.

But to better understand the Indian society of that period, and the manner in which it was broken and the concepts and structures which were tried to reshape it, the more important record is to be found in the archives in Britain. For it is in Britain that the formulation of policies and structures took place, and the thinking which led to such formulations at various levels (political, academic, mercantile) obviously has to be located in a variety of internal British records. What finally resulted from such consultations, etc., in Britain, in the way of

formal instructions, is of course available in the archives in Madras, Calcutta, Bombay, Lucknow, and Delhi. Incidentally, what are called Indian archives either have little archival material (except that of British creation); or have an insignificant amount which the British collected or copied from earlier Indian sources.

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Most such internal British record (i.e., what I find relevant in comprehending pre-British Indian society), again relates to the period from about 1740 to 1830. It is true, as Macaulay also said, that the British East India Company in the 1830s was no different from the Company when it was formed in 1600. From the very beginning, it was endowed by the British State with the powers of sovereignty, conquest, and rule; in the same manner as the countless other companies established by England and other States of Western Europe were endowed with such powers, through royal charters, etc., from as early a date as the 1480s. By a royal charter around 1480, King Henry VII of England granted to one John Cabot and his sons, the licence to occupy and set up the king's banners, etc., 'in any town, city, castle, island or mainland whatsoever, newly found by them' anywhere in the 'eastern, western and northern sea' belonging to 'heathens and infidels in whatsoever part of the world placed, which before this time were unknown to all Christians.' The king empowered them to 'conquer, occupy and possess' all such places, the main condition being, that they will give in turn to the king 'the fifth part of the whole capital gained' by their enterprise.

To understand the manner of European expansion, it must be realised that, by and large, these companies were instruments of the various European States. Even when the state and a particular company had their inner quarrel, they were under the military and political protection of the state; and when any company, especially the British company, actually began to conquer and rule any area, it was the state which took effectual charge of the conquered territory. The formal rule, in some instances, may have continued through the particular company (as it did in India in certain matters till 1858), but the decision-making, and the political and military control was effectively exercised by the British State, and the detailed instructions in all instances had invariably been examined, amended, and approved by the state. In the case of India, it was statutorily so from 1784 onwards, but even from about 1750 no major steps were taken by the British East India Company in India without the instructions

or approval of the British State. For instance, the British attack on the Maratha Admiral Angre in the 1750s was based on British State policy and instruction, and had little to do with any initiative by the British East India Company.

It has been generally assumed, and western liberal thought perhaps had a hand in spreading such an assumption, that the western states, especially the British, while subjugating the rest of the world were rather democratic and compassionate at home. Nothing seems to be further from the truth than this assumption.

Most of what Britain did in India was not basically very different from what the British State had done in Britain since about the Norman Conquest of England in the 11th century, and which it more or less continued till after 1800. Later on, the same was attempted by England in Ireland from about the 16th century; or experimented upon in North America in the 16th-17th-18th centuries; and the same was continued by the successors of British power in the fast expanding territories of the USA in the late 18th and the 19th centuries.

In a certain sense, because of the largeness of India, or the density of its population, or the unsuitability of Indian climate to large scale European colonisation, what the British did in India in the way of destruction, oppression, disruption, etc., though long sustained, may have been of a slightly milder degree. For instance, inflicting of the death penalty was legal and statutory in Britain for more than 200 offences (including the stealing of anything above 5 shillings in value) till 1818. Further, till about 1830 or so, the infliction of 400–500 lashes (with specially prepared whips) on a British soldier, for what may have been considered a serious offence, was quite common. In India, British executions, hangings, lashings, etc., were perhaps much larger in number, but their intensity, etc., may have been relatively less. Perhaps, even 20–50 lashes, or even the idea that one was to be lashed, was enough to kill most Indians who were naturally unaccustomed to the manners, habits, and the rigour of ordinary British usage. At any rate, it was not possible for the British, or other Europeans (who happened to become rulers in India), to always personally engage themselves in the correction and punishment of those whom they ruled. This does not mean that domestic servants were not caned by their master and mistress, leading at times to death; or that heads of villages and other Indian officers of state did not personally receive lashings from certain British collectors, again leading to the death of many so punished.

Quite naturally, the British officer, in his private and official capacity, initially tried to play the role of the English Justice of the Peace, who had long been authorised in England to inflict summary punishment on any one who seemed to him to deserve it. But in an area as large as India, this was hardly functional; and therefore more sophisticated political, legal and economic devices were used, which could serve similar purposes of control and punishment much more effectively and on a far larger scale. The wiping out of half or one third of the population of an area as a result of fiscal devices (though initially these may not have been devised for such vast destruction), was found much more effective; and in one or the other part of India this began to occur from about 1750 onwards and lasted for some 150 years. In many areas, such catastrophes perhaps occurred every decade.

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The above may seem a rather harsh historical account of British rule and perhaps even far-fetched. Two British statements, the first relating to 1600 Ireland on how best it could be entirely subdued and brought under English obedience, and the second pertaining to 1800 southern India, again dealing with the problem of entirely subduing it, to an extent confirm what I have said above. The first by Sir John Davis, English attorney general of Ireland, suggested the following as a more effective policy for Ireland:

The defects which hindered the Perfection of the Conquest of Ireland were of two kinds, and consisted: first, in the faint prosecution of the Warre, and next, in the looseness of the civil Government. For, the husbandman must first break the land, before it be made capable of good seeds and when it is thoroughly broken and manured, if he do not forthwith cast good seed into it, it will grow wild again, and bear nothing but Weeds. So a barbarous country must be first broken by a Warre, before it will be capable of good Government, and when it is fully subdued and conquered, if it be not well-planted and governed after the conquest, it oft-soonest return to the former Barbarism.

The second about India by Mr Henry Dundas, President of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India, was sent in a despatch to the Government of the Madras Presidency on 11 February 1801. Advising against a permanent settlement (of revenue, legal arrangements, etc.), it stated:

There is a material difference between the state of several of the provinces in the Carnatic and those of Bengal, where the measure of the permanent settlement was first taken into consideration. The Bengal provinces were infinitely farther advanced in the habits of order and subordination to Government than most places in the Carnatic. They (i.e. the Carnatic) are not so ripe for the reception of those benefits and blessings intended for them— any attempt to introduce a popular system of order— would be idle and nugatory, till once their minds to a certain extent were prepared to feel the importance of the benefits they were about to receive. This can never effectually be done, till you have suppressed that spirit of rebellion and insubordination, which is so conspicuous in many parts of the Northern Circars. The countries to which this observation applied must be brought to such a state of subjection as to acknowledge and submit to this principle. As they must be indebted to our beneficence and wisdom for every advantage they are to receive, so in like manner they must feel solely indebted to our protection for the continuation and enjoyment of them. We hold these truths to be so incontrovertible.

Incidentally, Mr Henry Dundas' descendants were intimately connected with the British governance of India from early on at highly elevated levels for some six to eight generations till the British quit India in 1947. Quite possibly, at a rather conservative estimate, several thousand British families might have constantly been similarly connected at fairly high levels with the British governance of India from about 1780 to 1947.

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Before I end this rather long and rambling introduction, let me give a description of the life of the people at the very top of the Indian polity. Despite the impressions of luxury and fabulous life created by chronicles of the Mughal court, or the accounts of celebrated European travellers and especially descriptions like the one given earlier on the life-style of the young nobleman of Delhi, the impression which ordinarily comes through from the British record is of a certain simplicity and fragility in India at the top levels. Even in the Muslim ruled Hyderabad, in 1780, a perceptive British officer found it difficult to distinguish the great nobles from their servants. According to him, the only things which seemed to separate the two was the fact that the clothes of the servants looked less clean. It was not that he was fascinated

by such a state of affairs. He was, perhaps, actually disgusted with such indiscriminate mixing of the two.

According to one of the more powerful early British Governor Generals, and what he said is echoed by many others before 1800 and even till 10–20 years later, the Hindu rulers in fact spent very little on themselves. But, according to him, they suffered from two great vices. These were that they gave away most of what they had to the Brahmins and to the temples.

It is possible that the terms Brahmin and the temple were used in this period in a much wider sense and included all who were given to scholarship of one kind and another, and to institutions which catered not only to religious needs, but also which served purposes of scholarship, culture, and entertainment and comfort. For instance, in the detailed description of the practice of inoculation against smallpox in India, it is said that the Brahmins performed such inoculation. Obviously, anyone who exercised some intellectual, medical or other professional skill seems to have been taken to be a Brahmin, even by fairly knowledgeable Europeans, in this period.

It also appears to have been the practice in places as far apart as Kedarnath in the Himalayas on the one hand and in the Thanjavur region of Tamilnadu extending to Rameswaram on the other, to provide *chatrams* for the stay and comfort of the pilgrims. Public funds, in the shape of assignments of sources of revenue, including revenue from seaports and similar other sources, were given over to such institutions to cover the expenses of these *chatrams*, etc. In the case of the *chatrams* at Kedarnath, it was further stipulated, that if an unspent balance got accumulated over a number of years, such a balance was to be wholly spent on the *Kumbh*, which happened every twelve years, and a fresh start was made again, beginning from an empty treasury. This may remind many friends here of a similar practice, which seems to have prevailed in India in the time of Harshavardhana. Perhaps much more is known of such practices in earlier and later times.



## II

An idea of how Indian society functioned at least at the rural level comes out fairly clearly from the late 18th century record. Perhaps the data (circa A.D. 1770) pertaining to the villages of the district of Chengalpattu demonstrate it best, though in a slightly different way. The data from pre-1800 Bengal seems to tell a similar story.

This data was collected through a survey of about 2000 villages of the Chengalpattu district during the 1760s and 1770s. The survey recorded the total land belonging to each village, the utilisation of this land for various purposes, the net cultivated land in each village (irrigated and unirrigated), and the details of *manyams* (the land which had been assigned to various village institutions and functions). Such assignments were of the tax which any land might have been liable to pay to a duly constituted political authority, whether such authority was at the level of the village, or at any other region, or national level. The assignment customarily did not interfere with the right of the person, or persons who cultivated, or otherwise used such land. The only alteration which took place was that the cultivator of the land, after such an assignment had been made, began to pay the amount of the tax to the assignee instead.

The most important part of this survey, however, concerns the details of the deductions from the total agricultural produce of the village, generally called *swatantrams* (in pre-1800 south Indian records), for the maintenance of the various institutions and infrastructure of the village, and for intra-village institutions and offices. The shares of the produce that were allocated for different functions and different institutions evidently had been determined by ancient custom and usage. This sharing was clearly not merely an economic arrangement, but was a way of defining the role and importance of the various recipients in the village or regional polity.

The following table (*Table 1*) gives the details of these deductions for eight villages: four from the Ponneri area, and four from the area of Carangooly (both part of the district of Chengalpattu, then as well as today). These villages have been picked at random, the only criterion used being, that the amount of land in each of them is relatively larger than in those in their neighbourhood.

**Table 1: DETAILS OF DEDUCTION FOR VILLAGE AND INTRA-VILLAGE INSTITUTIONS/FUNCTIONS IN THE DISTRICT OF CHENGALPATTU (CIRCA 1770)**  
(Deductions per 100 cullums of agricultural produce, in cullums)

Name of Institution or Function for which deduction was made	(Ponneri)				(Carangooly)			
	Cayneem-bacum	Naithe-voil	Coloor	Madoor	Purruncor	Cadumago-latoor	Coonavancum	Foodapattanam
Land in village (in caunis)					696	650	600	650
<b>A. Intra-village</b>								
1. Temples (Totals)	*C M P	C M P	C M P	C M P	C M P	C M P	C M P	C M P
(i) Canchipuram	3-1-4	1-2-0	2-1-0	1-3-0	1-0-7	2-0-3	4-9-5	4-2-0
(ii) Chingaperumal	1-0-4(a)	0-4-6	0-0-0	0-5-0	0-11-5	0-11-5	0-11-4	1-0-4
(iii) Tinkichoor	0-0-0(b)	0-0-0	2-1-0(i)	0-0-0	0-5-7	0-5-6	0-5-6	0-6-2
(iv) Tirkichoniam	0-10-0(c)	0-4-5(g)	0-0-0	0-5-0(j)	0-5-6	0-5-7	0-5-6	0-6-2
(v) Shrepernadoor	0-10-0(d)	0-4-5(h)	0-0-0	0-11-5	0-11-5	0-11-5	0-11-4	1-0-4
(vi) Perumal	0-2-4(e)	0-0-0	0-0-0	0-0-0	0-0-0	0-11-5	0-11-4	1-0-4
(vii) Perumal	0-2-4(f)	0-0-0	0-0-0	0-5-0(k)	0-0-0	0-0-0	0-11-5	0-0-0
2. Brahmin Scholar (Poallogachari)	-	-	-	-	0-5-6	0-5-7	-	0-6-2
3. Cannooogoe	-	0-9-3	-	0-10-0	0-11-5	0-11-5	0-11-5	1-0-4
4. Dovedraw	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1-0-4
5. Deshmukh	-	1-6-6	-	0-8-0	1-11-2	1-11-2	1-11-0	2-1-0
6. Palegar	0-2-4	3-4-0	3-6-0	1-2-0	2-4-5	2-6-0	1-11-5	4-2-0
7. Tookery	2-6-0	2-9-0	-	-	-	-	-	-
8. Pirzada	-	0-4-5	-	0-5-0	-	-	-	-
Total	5-10-0	9-11-6	5-7-0	5-4-0	8-8-1	9-9-2	9-7-7	13-0-2

Names of temples marked thus: (a) Harikrishnaswamy, (b) Davadam, (c) Ragunathaperumal, (d) Vellerigoodaswami, (e) Buttaraja, (f) Buttan, (g) Paliswaraswamy, (h) Chicodier, (i) Colaralghiperumal, (j) Paliswaraswamy, (k) Coombaconomichalier

Table-1 (Contd.)

Name of Institution or Function for which deduction was made	Caveyem-bacum	(Ponneriy)			(Carungooly)			Poodaput-nam
		Nalthe-vail	Colour	Madoor	Purrunoor	Caudamagolloor	Coonavai-cum	
B. Village Infrastructure:								
1. Temples:								
(i) Easwar	0-3-2	0-4-2	0-4-4	0-1-0	0-1-2	0-4-3	-	0-1-2
(ii) Perumal	0-3-2	0-3-2	0-2-0	0-1-0	0-1-2	0-4-3	0-3-0	0-1-2
(iii) Pilliar (Ganesh)	0-3-2	0-2-0	-	0-1-0	-	0-1-7	0-1-0	0-2-4
(iv) Dharmura	0-3-2	-	-	-	0-5-0	0-1-2	0-3-0	0-10-0
(v) Amman Padary	0-8-4	0-4-0	0-7-0	0-7-0	0-2-4	0-3-6	0-2-0	0-5-0
(vi) Outside temple	-	-	-	-	0-0-5	-	-	-
2. Dancing Girl ( <i>Devadasi</i> )	0-2-4	0-2-4	0-5-0	0-2-4	-	-	0-3-0	-
3. Temple Flower Garden	-	-	0-2-4	0-2-0	-	0-1-7	-	0-2-4
4. <i>Choultry</i> Fund	-	0-2-4	-	-	0-1-2	0-1-7	-	-
5. Lamp Oil	-	-	-	0-0-6	-	-	0-0-4	-
6. <i>Pullavan</i>	0-4-0	0-4-0	0-5-0	-	-	-	0-0-4	0-2-0
7. Vadavarthy	-	-	-	-	0-1-2	0-1-7	0-3-0	-
8. Pureshi	0-3-2	-	-	-	-	-	0-3-0	0-1-2
9. Panjagum	0-6-4	0-2-0	-	0-3-4	0-1-2	0-1-7	0-1-0	0-2-4
10. Davatwam	-	-	0-5-4	0-8-0	-	-	-	-
11. Vada Vadhar	-	-	-	0-3-4	-	-	-	-
12. Vadhar	-	0-4-4	-	-	-	-	-	-
13. Panican	0-3-2	-	0-4-4	0-3-4	-	-	-	-
14. Water Pandal	-	0-3-0	0-2-4	1-2-0	-	-	-	-
15. Purdesti Brahman	-	-	-	-	0-0-5	-	0-1-0	0-2-4
16. Karnan	2-8-4	3-4-0	3-5-0	2-4-3	1-6-7	3-4-0	1-10-7	3-1-4
17. Talliar	-	-	2-6-0	1-0-0	1-0-4	1-3-0	-	1-0-4
18. Landholders	4-7-0	3-4-0	2-6-0	-	0-11-2	0-10-0	0-6-0	3-5-2

19. Cultivators Servants	-	2-0-0	10-9-0	4-7-6	6-11-5	8-7-5	7-8-2	7-8-4
20. Artificers (Carpenter & Blacksmith)	1-10-4	2-2-0	1-9-0	0-10-0	1-4-6	1-6-6	0-6-0	2-4-0
21. Corn-Measurer	0-11-0	0-10-0	1-3-0	0-7-0	1-1-5	1-11-6	0-6-4	1-4-2
22. Barber	0-7-2	0-10-0	0-10-4	0-5-0	0-2-4	0-3-1	0-3-0	0-6-2
23. Washerman	0-7-2	0-10-0	0-10-4	0-5-0	0-1-7	0-3-1	0-3-4	0-6-2
24. Paraseven	0-5-2	0-8-0	0-4-4	0-3-4	-	-	-	0-5-0
25. Cornbounty	0-6-2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
26. Wochien	-	0-3-0	-	-	-	-	-	-
27. Potmaker	0-10-0	0-7-0	-	-	-	-	0-3-0	0-6-2
28. Cowkeeper	0-3-2	0-2-0	0-4-4	0-3-4	0-1-2	0-3-1	-	-
29. Chumam Maker	-	0-2-0	-	-	-	-	-	-
30. Shroff	-	-	0-10-4	-	1-4-4	1-6-2	0-5-5	1-6-0
31. Goldsmith	-	-	-	0-5-0	-	-	-	-
32. Doctor	-	0-2-0	-	0-2-0	-	-	-	-
33. Snake Doctor	-	-	-	-	0-1-2	0-3-1	0-3-0	0-5-0
34. Tope Pandaram	-	-	-	-	0-1-2	-	-	0-1-2
35. Village Servant	-	-	-	-	-	0-3-1	0-3-0	-
36. Irrigation (Vary Fund)	2-1-0	4-2-0	2-1-0	4-2-0	1-11-2	1-11-2	-	-
37. Vary Servant	-	-	-	-	0-4-3	-	0-3-0	-
38. Gram Khurch	0-5-0	0-10-0	0-5-0	0-5-0	-	-	-	-
Total B (1-38)	19-3-2	23-0-0	31-3-0	20-4-7	18-11-5	24-4-3	14-10-6	25-6-6
Total Deductions (A+B)	25-1-2	32-11-6	36-10-0	25-8-7	27-7-6	34-0-5	24-6-5	38-7-0

\*Units of measuring grain in 18th Century Tamihadu.

C-Cullum; M-Mercal; P-Padi; 8 padi = 1 mercal; 12 mercal = 1 cullum

As will be observed, the deductions in these villages range from about 25% to 40% of the total agricultural produce of each village. Incidentally, according to John Malcolm, a major British military commander and later Governor of the Bombay Presidency (A.D. 1827–30), the deductions for such purposes in villages of Malwa were in the range of 25% of the total agricultural produce. Further, in many of these Chengalpattu villages, there were several other functions for which the deductions were made, like the Malabar (vernacular) schoolmaster, the *Muttum*, the *Siddhum*, the *tom-tom-man*, the *Banian*, the *Fakir*, the oil-seller, the *Totty*, the *Vettiyan*, the Mosque, etc., while a few of the functions mentioned in the above table may not have existed in other villages. Besides, about one-sixth of the cultivated (or cultivable) land was classed as *manyams*. In many of the districts of Bengal (circa A.D. 1770), in the Ceded Districts of Cuddapah, Bellary, Anantpur, etc. (where British power and authority was consolidated by Thomas Munro during 1800–1807), and in many other areas the amount of cultivatable land traditionally and historically classed as *manyam* was as high as half the total land of the area, and perhaps in various parts of India whole districts were denominated as *manyams*, largely for the support of the cultural and religious institutions, but some also for the support of local and regional militias. According to a later (circa 1830) British note, the number of institutions, and individuals who had *manyams* assigned to them in the districts of the Bengal Presidency (Bengal, Bihar, etc.) ran into tens of thousands in each district and in one district the number of claimants of *manyams* was around 70,000 in the 1770s.

As may be observed from the data of the eight villages, the deductions for individual institutions and functions varied a great deal. But by and large, wherever there was irrigation, around 4% of the total agricultural produce was allocated for its maintenance. Similarly, the Devi, Dharamaraj, and what was known as the village temple (there is no example of the latter in these eight villages) had generally much larger combined allocations than the combined allocations to the Easwaran, Perumal and Pilliar temples.

According to a 1818 British survey, the district of South Arcot had over 7,000 great, medium and small temples, and several hundred *muttums* and *chatrams*. Most other districts in the Madras Presidency where such a survey was ordered, reported 3,000 to 4,000 temples, etc., and at a rough estimate in 1800 the Madras Presidency might have had about 1,00,000 temples,

*muttums*, and *chatrams* of varying importance and size. The number of such institutions for the whole of India might have been in the range of 5,00,000 in A.D. 1800. Possibly around 5% of them might have been places of Islamic worship and learning; and perhaps around one thousand those of Christian worship, most of which would have been in Kerala.

The *Karnam* or Conicoply (which really implied the office of the registrar of the village, a sort of secretariat, rather than a single individual) generally had an allocation of 3-4% while the *Taliar* (i.e. the village police, which may have included several persons) generally had an allocation of around 3%. Incidentally, it may be useful to know that the offices of the *Taliar*, the Corn-Measurer, the settler of boundary disputes, and a few other village offices, were generally filled by persons from the Pariah and allied castes. As many will know in Maharashtra, it was the Mahars who constituted the village police. It is also worth noting that in cases of theft etc., if the police, or the *Palegar* (the head of the militia and perhaps one who also acted as a modern Inspector General of Police for his area) were unable to recover the stolen property, they were expected to compensate the aggrieved party from the incomes allocated to their offices.

Though this and similar data requires a much deeper analysis, it does imply that every person in this society enjoyed a certain dignity and that his social and economic needs were well provided for. Food and shelter seem to have been a natural right, given India's cultural norms, and made easier by India's fertility, etc. According to a historian of medieval India, the only data which was available about the expenditure details of the pre-British rulers of Delhi referred to the feeding of the people who required such a provision. It is possible that perhaps this was the major expenditure of this state and the state had adopted this practice from the prevalent norms of Indian society.

As is clear from the above table, the deductions were not merely for internal village institutions– varied and complex as these deductions were– but also for the support of the intra-village religious, cultural, political, accounting, and militia purposes. Thus, while the village or the locality (for it may be taken as granted that similar arrangements though based on other productions, earning, etc., also existed in towns and cities) managed and organised its own internal affairs and thus in a way could even be symbolised as an autonomous republic or corporation, it was by no means isolated, or unlinked from other

localities. In fact it seems to have contributed to the support of the intra-local systems, and it can reasonably be assumed that the intra-local systems looked after the requirements of systems, which in their own Indian way provided support and integration to much larger areas. In a sense, the polity which such data suggests is the kind of polity that Mahatma Gandhi tried to spell out in his idea of the oceanic circles, where the innermost circle retained the utmost internal autonomy, and only such fiscal, moral and other support was extended by them to the outer circles, essential for performing those residual tasks which could not clearly be performed at any local level.

Thus, it is, that, while a fairly large proportion of the production went towards the maintenance of the social infrastructure and its small and great institutions, the proportion which went to the apex state (whether at regional or at a more central level) was fairly small. According to early British authorities, there had been no land tax in Malabar till A.D. 1740, none in Canara till the 15th century, and an insignificant amount in Ramnad, etc., even in the 1790s, and no more than 5% to 10% even as late as the early 19th century in Travancore. That any land tax (for the purposes of the Apex State) which had been levied in India had historically been very low also is apparent from the amount of rent (or share of the agricultural produce) which the cultivators of the *manyam* lands paid to those who held these *manyams* till at least A.D. 1800. According to Thomas Munro, it was no more than one-fourth of the rate of revenue which the British had imposed; and at times, according to him, the cultivator only paid what he wishes, to the holder of the *manyam*. The Bengal collectors in the 1770s report a similar situation and mention that because of the heaviness of the British land-revenue (again about four times the traditional rate) and because the *manyam* lands were around one-half of the cultivated land, in many districts, the cultivators in large numbers tended to give up lands which paid revenue to British authority and instead moved over to cultivate the *manyam* lands. This problem of cultivators leaving land paying revenue to British Authority and moving on to *manyam* land continued even in 1820 in the Madras Presidency. Thomas Munro as Governor then threatened that such holders of *manyams* who allowed this to happen would have them confiscated. It may, in the context of the above data, be worth knowing that the exchequer receipts of the Mughal rulers (A.D. 1556–1707) at no time exceeded 20% of what was termed as the total revenue of the empire (perhaps a wholly notional estimate); and in the reign of Jahangir, these receipts were

no more than 5% of this supposed total revenue. It may also be worth noting that the land tax in China historically is said to have been about one-sixteenth of the agricultural produce. If this was the position in China it may be assumed that a similar arrangement had also obtained in other areas of East and South East Asia as well. The maximum which the *Manusamhita* ordained in India was one-sixth; but what it seems to have advocated far more was one-twelfth of the gross agricultural produce. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that for various reasons, the *Manusamhita* was given great importance by the British from about 1780 onwards. Around 1815, when London had begun to discourage the translation and printing of various Indian texts, the published version of the *Manusamhita*, with the commentary of Kulluka Bhatta, was the only book which was encouraged to be printed again.

It is true, however, that in 18th century Western Europe, the land rents collected by the landlords ranged from about 50% to 80% of the agricultural produce. And it seems that the assumption that in India the situation was similar to that in 18th century West Europe is one of the bequests which the Indian historian and intellectual had received from his Western masters.

The village (or the locality) having contributed for the maintenance of the cultural and religious institutions, for the support of the accounting, political and militia systems (the *Cannongoe*, the *Deshmukh*, the *Palegar*, etc.) probably also made a contribution of around 5% of the above deductions (which would have meant an immense amount as it must have been received from tens of thousands of localities) for the direct support of the apex authority (or, to Mahatma Gandhi's outer-most circle). That such arrangements led to a militarily weaker system (at regional or wider levels) may possibly be true; but it is quite possible that the elements of such military or institutional weakness lay elsewhere, and not primarily in the decentralised fiscal and social arrangements of Indian policy.

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There seem to have been various systems of land-rights in different parts or regions of India and also in the same region. But most of these systems seem to have assumed the supremacy of the village community over the land, its disposal, or the way it was worked. There were villages where the village community (perhaps the community of only those who cultivated land and



those who held *manyams* and not necessarily of all the families in the village) seems to have been organised as a *samudayam*. While its members had specific shares in the land of the village, the land which any of them cultivated was changed from time to time. Such a change in the district of Thanjavur, where around 30% of the villages were classed as *samudayam* in 1805, was stated to be based on the assumption that a certain alteration occurs in the fertility of all land from time to time, which creates inequality amongst the members of the community; hence, occasional redistribution was considered necessary. Again in Thanjavur in 1805, the number of mirasdars (i.e. those having permanent rights in land) was put at 62,042, of which over 42,000 belonged to the *sudras* and castes below them. The number of cultivators of the group termed Pariah in the Baramahals (the present Salem district) was estimated at 32,474, out of a total population of around 6,00,000 just before 1800. The number of mirasdars actually listed by the Chengalpattu collector in the district in 1799 was put at 8,300. But the collector was of the view that the actual number of mirasdars there, was about ten times more i.e. around 80,000. In 1817 the number of mirasdars in 1080 villages of Tirunelveli district was estimated to be 37,494. It is unnecessary to add that throughout India, the rights of the actual cultivator were permanent and hereditary; and these began to be scrapped by the British from 1790 onwards: first, to enable them to realise a greatly enhanced land revenue; and second, because British ideas of ownership did not admit of any such cultivator rights, even in Britain.

With regard to agricultural production and the wages in agriculture, according to the journal *Edinburgh Review* (A.D.1803–1804), the wages of the Indian agricultural labourer in the Allahabad-Varanasi region around 1800 were in real terms substantially higher than the wages of his British counterpart. The journal at that time wondered that if these wages were so high at this late period of great economic decline, how much higher such wages must have been when they were first established. According to a recent computation by an economist of the University of Madras, the wages of the agricultural labourer in Chengalpattu during the period 1780–1795 at 1975 prices would have been about Rs.7.50 per day, while in 1975 itself such wages were Rs.2.50 per day only. The productivity of wheat in the Allahabad-Varanasi region was more than double of that in England on similar land. Further, it may be mentioned that Britain, like the rest of Europe, produced only one crop a year, while in India many lands produced more than one crop.

An idea of the Indian economy and consumption patterns is provided by some 1806 data from the district of Bellary. It is concerned with an estimation of the total consumption of the people of the district, and further indicates the detailed consumption pattern of the three categories of families in which the population was divided by the British authorities.

The three categories were: first, the more prosperous (total population: 2,59,568); second, the families of medium means (total population: 3,72,887); and third, the lowly (total population: 2,18,684). According to this estimate, the consumption of the first article in the schedule, food-grains, differed in quality and value between the families in the first category on the one hand, and those in the second and third categories on the other. But the quantity of food-grains estimated to have been consumed in all three was the same, i.e. half a seer of grain per person per day. The schedule included 23 other items including pulses, betel-nut, ghee, oil, tamarind, coconuts both fresh and dry, drugs and medicine, cloth, firewood and vegetables, and also betel-leaves (*pans*). As illustrative of the pattern of this consumption, the number of *pans* consumed per year in a family of six is given as 9,600 *pans* for the first category, 4,800 for those in the second category, and 3,600 *pans* for those in the third category. The consumption of ghee and oil was in the proportion of 3:1:1 approximately and of pulses 8:4:3. The total per capita per annum consumption was estimated at Rs.17-3-4 for those, belonging to the first category Rs.9-2-4 for those belonging to the second category, and Rs.7-7-0 for those in the third category.

The pattern indicated in the above para is, of course, very broad. In reality a number of people may have had a much higher consumption than the average of the first category. An indication of the extent of such differential between the really high and the really low is provided by some 1799 data from the Karnataka area. After much enquiry about the incomes of the officers of the state in Tipoo's domain, the British came to the inference that the highest paid officer of Tipoo (the governor of the fort of Chitradurg) had a total salary of Rs.100 per month during Tipoo's reign. The wages of an ordinary labourer in this area at this period was about Rs.4 per month. The new differentials which were brought into being around this period by the British are indicated by the salary of the British district collector (about Rs.1,500 per month) and a member of the British Governor's Council receiving Rs.6,000-Rs.8,000; while the wages of the labourer were constantly reduced during 1760 to 1850.

What the Indian labourer, craftsman, etc., received as wages around 1850 was in all probability no more than one-third or at the most one-half, of what he would have received till around 1760. The new disparities, however, were not altogether limited to British salaries. Where state policy so dictated, similar decisions were taken with regard to the emoluments of Indians at high levels. An example is provided by the raising of the personal allowance of the Maharana of Udaipur. Till Udaipur came under British protection in 1818, the Maharana was supposed to have had an allowance of Rs.1,000 per month. Within a few months of British protection, while various other expenses of the kingdom were either abolished or reduced, the allowance of the Maharana was raised to Rs.1,000 per day.

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Before arriving at a conscious policy regarding education in India, the British carried out certain surveys of the surviving indigenous educational system. A more detailed survey of it was carried out in 1822–25 in the Madras Presidency (i.e. the present Tamilnadu, the major part of the present Andhra Pradesh, and some districts of the present Karnataka, Kerala and Orissa). The survey indicated that 11,575 schools and 1,094 colleges were still in existence in the presidency, and that the number of students in them were 1,57,195 and 5,431 respectively. Much more important and, in view of our current assumptions, unexpected information which this survey provided is with regard to the broader caste composition of the students in the schools. According to it those belonging to the *Sudras* and castes below them formed 70%–80% of the total students in the Tamil speaking areas, 62% in the Oriya areas, 54% in the Malayalam speaking areas, and 35%–50% in the Telugu speaking areas. (The tables relating to the details of this education are omitted here as they are given in *The Beautiful Tree* (Vol.3 of the *Collected Writings*.)

The Governor of Madras estimated that over 25% of the boys of school-age were attending those schools; and that a substantial proportion, and especially girls, were receiving education at home. According to data from the city of Madras, 26,446 boys were receiving their education at home, while the number of those attending schools in Madras city was 5,523. The number of those engaged in college level studies at home was similarly remarkable in Malabar: 1,594 as compared to a mere 75 in a college run by the family of the then impoverished Samudrin Raja.

Further, again in the district of Malabar, the number of Muslim girls attending school was surprisingly large: 1,122 girls as compared to 3,196 Muslim boys. Incidentally, the number of Muslim girls attending school in Malabar 62 years later in 1884–85 was just 705. The population of Malabar had about doubled during this period. It is possible that most higher education in 18th century India was imparted in small groups, and by single teachers. But a report on the University of Navadweep in Bengal for around 1790 stated that the number of students there was 1,100 and the number of teachers 150.

Similar information is available, in the British records, on 17th–18th century Indian science and technology. Much more is of course known today about them, partly due to extensive work in this field in the 1920s and 1930s, and because of more recent research by many scholars. We obviously know a great deal about the manufacture of iron and steel in India since ancient times, and of its world-wide fame and superiority. As has been established recently, iron was being manufactured in India, in places like Atiranjikheda in Uttar Pradesh, at least as early as the 12th century B.C., but what is little known is that even around 1800 the industry was wide-spread and flourishing and the technical details of this manufacture were highly sophisticated. A rough estimate of the number of furnaces which manufactured iron and steel may be put around 10,000 around A.D. 1800; and each of them seemed to have had a potential capacity of producing about 20 tons of very superior steel annually, if the furnace worked about 35–40 weeks in the year. These furnaces were very light and could be moved by bullock carts.

That 18th century India produced artificial ice by freezing water, and not in Himalayan winter but in moderate cold weather in places like Allahabad, or that India long had the practice of inoculation against small-pox, and that the art of plastic surgery had continued to be practiced in late 18th century India, centuries after Susruta and Charaka, and that this practice of plastic surgery was noticed by the British initially here in Pune, may come as a surprise to many. Similar surprise may be felt at the details of Indian agricultural practices, the agricultural implements which the Indian peasant used, and the much higher productivity which he achieved. Incidentally, a set of the implements (including drill-ploughs, etc.) was sent to Britain by one of the pre-1800 British Collectors from a Madras Presidency district, with a view to help improve some of the agricultural implements then used in Britain.

The reality indicated by the above data does not seem to have depended merely on some dead custom or mechanical routine. A moral sense about things seems to have been deeply entrenched; and whenever it seems to have been violated, there was much recourse to opposition, protest, *dharna* or *traga* or to peasant movements, to even what in modern usage may be called civil disobedience. The prolonged protest against the imposition by British authority of a tax on houses in 1810–11 was centred in the city of Varanasi. According to official reports, the whole city had completely stopped work for days together creating a situation that not even the dead could be cremated and had therefore to be cast in the Ganga without the performance of customary rites. According to the Varanasi collector, over 20,000 persons had been continually sitting in *dharna*, while another estimate placed the number of people collected between Secrole and the city at more than 2,00,000. The data on the frequency of peasant movements in Canara, Malabar and parts of Maharashtra is indeed vast.

One of the early documented protests against the salt tax took place at Surat in the 1840s. A more curious case of protest relates to two men of Nagore and Nagapatnam area in Tamilnadu just before 1800. They felt wronged regarding their claim to some land and in protest climbed the spire of a temple and threatened to kill themselves by jumping from it unless their grievance was redressed. As a result, the men were promised that the wrong would be righted and they agreed to climb down. The newly established British collector, however, did not take kindly to such a solution.

While protest in the form of *dharna*, *traga*, etc., was resorted to when the populace felt that they had been wronged by some particular action of the political authority, and when such a protest occurred, it was taken, by the relevant authority, to be a legitimate expression of the political process and as an occasion for reviewing the disputed action. Yet recourse to such protest was perhaps not often necessary. It seems that the polity allowed for continued dignified dialogue between the populace and the representatives of the political authority: the king and the *Palegars*, etc.; and dignities due to the populace in such dialogue were sanctioned by long-standing custom, which continued to operate to some extent even during the early phase of British occupation. In South India, the offering of presents, usually in the way of a piece of cloth, a shawl, etc., by the British governmental authority to the heads of villages or even ordinary

peasants, who happened to visit such authority, was all too frequent till about 1800. Where the British had yet to learn this gesture, and the gesture was still important to the British as their consolidation was not yet complete, the villagers themselves suggested the offering of such presents, and even volunteered to defray the expenses of these gifts themselves, as happened in Baramahals in 1792. According to another report, from Ramnad in 1796, even those who had to present themselves before the British courts to sign bonds of good conduct expected to be offered, and received, betel at the cutcherry.

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### III

I had tried to indicate in the previous lecture that just two centuries ago, we had an organised and functioning society and economy in most parts of India. Not that the society had no travails of its own, that it had no wars at all, that it had no social and political disturbances. To an extent it was disturbed from time to time: neighbouring polities quarreled with neighbouring polities; and many areas of the country for long periods were overcome by such conquerors and adventurers whose main aim was plunder, and who did not seem to share the conceptual world of those whom they had over-run. Such incursions, wherever they happened and succeeded, naturally created a split between society and polity, and the fallout from any prolonged alien incursions had its influence over much larger areas. Even many of those areas which were not directly affected, at least for any length of time, by foreign conquerors and adventurers, were put on the defensive. Their defensiveness and the changes which that brought about tended to sour the relationship between the local society and the larger polity. As is well-known, the Vijayanagar *Rajya* was created with the blessings and support of the *acharyas* of the great Sankara *Math* at Sringeri. In all probability it was also supported by neighbouring smaller *rajyas* all of whom wanted to counter the threat of external incursions in southern India. But even the Vijayanagar *Rajya* is said to have raised its revenue assessment from the traditional to of the produce to of it (which latter was permitted by the Dharmasastras only in a period of great crisis) and made it a permanent feature. Such an act, if true, is indicative of the tensions which such defensive situations and consequent unjust policies must have created in the affected society.

Another illustration of a similar nature is provided by the expansion of Maratha power in most parts of India during the 18th century. The process of this expansion led the Marathas to bring other Indian rulers under their supremacy. To symbolise this, and because of the needs of expansion, they introduced the levy of *chouth* (i.e. the Marathas demanding a tribute of of the supposed revenue of the particular area). Naturally, this was resented by many, especially by the ancient *Rajyas* in Rajasthan, and such non-recognition of supremacy or non-payment must have at times forced the Marathas to take to the plunder of the recalcitrants. If one concedes that the Marathas were trying to free India, bringing it back to its indigenous polity, and had to

adopt such measures only to achieve such an objective what they did may be considered excusable. But it seems that despite such possible objective the Marathas really did not know how to go about it, as is evident by their adoption of the idiom and practice of the Mughals, and further by their failing to maintain even their own cohesiveness.

However, in spite of such disturbances, either because most of the polities of India continued to share at least a minimum conceptual framework and retained similar social and cultural priorities, or because the political and organisational framework which the alien conquerors, prior to the European entry into India, brought with them was much more elementary, and in no sense could become as stable or deep rooted as what had existed in India, the society and polity of India as we have seen above was in a fairly flourishing state even as late as the 1750s, and in many areas till around 1800. The living standard of the people (or in 18th-19th century British parlance, of the lower orders) seems to have been adequate and appreciably higher than that of similar classes in Britain around 1800; productivity in agriculture was much higher than in British agriculture; agricultural tools, implements and practice were diverse and sophisticated; the crafts not only of the celebrated textiles, but also the production of iron and steel, of various chemicals and dyes, of gur (jaggery) and sugar, the construction of ships, the art of building, or the craft of the digging of tanks as well as river and road transportation compared and, perhaps with advantage, to that which prevailed elsewhere in these spheres. Society and polity was highly organised, and had an incomparable sophistication in its various arrangements.

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If what I have been saying is based on reliable historical data, how is it that the picture of Indian society and polity, which generally prevails today, is so very contrary to what I have represented? It is not easy to answer such a question. Nearly two centuries have elapsed between the society and polity which I have described and the present. In between, we have not been our own masters. Even the privileged amongst us (including even the great maharajas, nawabs, bankers and what remained of our traditional teachers and scholars of ancient learning) have been deprived of all public and social initiative, and the vast majority of our people during most of this period existed under sufferance, and at the very edge of physical survival.



That this latter picture is not overstated is confirmed by a variety of late 19th century and early 20th century writing, by illustrious Indians like Dadabhai Naoroji, R C Dutt, and countless others. Even Englishmen, starting in 1824 from Thomas Munro himself (who seems to have been having an introspective interval at the time, but perhaps with a view to make British rule more stable) and ending with men like John Bright, William Digby, and Keir Hardie corroborated this fact. So, what conclusion do we draw from such presentation of the state of India in the 19th century?

Lacking hard data for the earlier period, or having neglected it thus far, the conclusions which we draw from Thomas Munro's or Dadabhai Naoroji's narration largely depend on the ideological position which we subscribe to. Leaving aside the admiration and praise which men like Voltaire or Prof W Robertson of Edinburgh, and others had for the then Indian civilisation, its manners and accomplishments, there have been two main western approaches of judging India. Both of these treated India as more or less barbaric. It is possible that both approaches drew their inspiration from the ancient Greeks, for whom the rest of the world was sunk in barbarism. The first was the evangelical Christian view, which in Britain was very forcefully and effectively put across by Mr William Wilberforce, and his great many followers, the more important of them being known as the saints or the Clapham sect. For them, it was impossible to conceive that there was any virtue in India; and it was axiomatic for them that India was sunk in superstition, ignorance, misery, and wretchedness. Only their use of the terms ignorance, misery, wretchedness, etc., was according to the then current British Christian terminology; and was used by them in the Christian religious sense (i.e. their belief that the people of India were in constant misery and sunk in wretchedness because of their ignorance of Christianity), and not as regards the material or secular condition of the people of India. For them, even if the Indians were all literate and scholars, and led the most luxurious worldly lives, it was all worthless, as long as they had such life without the knowledge of Christianity and a belief in it. A large number of British officers and many British writers on Indian affairs subscribed to such a view till the end of the 19th century and many even till later.

The main author of the second view who weighed Indian society and civilisation from the pedestal of materialism was James Mill. For him the highest form of civilisation, was a successful

military civilisation. Consequently, he was all for manly virtues and, according to his measure, India was in fact very effeminate and so came very low on his scale of civilisation. Being the celebrated author of the voluminous *History of British India*, considered the major text about India (which every British officer, who came to India had to digest from 1820 onwards), it was natural that James Mill's strictures and judgement had even greater sway with the British who ruled India, than even the strictures of William Wilberforce.

James Mill was followed a few decades later by Karl Marx. Though not a great admirer of British imperialism, Marx was even much less an admirer of Indian civilisation. Perhaps, like many of us, he felt great scholarly anger regarding the material misery which British rule had brought to India; and being a humanist, perhaps, loved the Indians no less. But as a western scientific theoretician, he saw no point in anything which the Indians did or had; and felt that however cruel the British might have been, India deserved all that the British did to her. To him the only solution for India was its westernisation; and such westernisation had to come only through the agency of a victorious European working class.

Because of her defeat, two things happened in India at the level of knowledge and its promotion. The first was that traditional Indian scholarship withdrew itself from the arena of social affairs, and, to the extent it could, under the very adverse new circumstances, wholly immersed itself in the sacred texts or ritual. The second was that from about 1830, the British began to establish a new knowledge elite in India. This elite had to be brought up on a very selective British educational and cultural content. This elite in time created various sub-elites; and thus, over 4-6 generations, the new literate and scholarly India mainly knew and believed what they had been taught by this selective British system. It is true that some of the brilliant ones amongst these elites began to treat themselves as equal to the British of similar education; and when the British tried to put such persons down, some of these brilliant Indians turned critical and hostile. It is in this context that a prominent governor of Bengal wrote in 1875: 'No doubt the alumni of our schools and colleges do become as a class discontented, but this arises partly from our higher education being too much in the direction of law, public administration and prose literature, where they may possibly imagine, however erroneously, that they may approach to competition with us. But we shall do more and more to direct

their thoughts towards practical sciences, where they must inevitably feel their utter inferiority to us.'

I suppose, it can be assumed, that when even this teaching of practical science did not fully serve the purpose the next change was towards the teaching of the simple version of the western social sciences; and, after that, to equally simple versions of the western philosophy; and later to the particularly literal brand of Marxism, which to a greater or lesser extent has been affecting the thinking and assumptions of our educated elite during the past half century.

Another point which may make many suspicious of the picture given earlier is our belief in *Satyameva Jayate* (that truth ever wins). If our pre-British society was so desirable, etc., why did it get defeated? There is no appropriate answer to it except perhaps that *Satyameva Jayate* must not be taken too literally, and has to be appreciated in relation to a much larger canvas. That the best organised and highly powerful societies do often lose to others, or to circumstances, is a commonplace of man's history.

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We can now attempt to establish some link between the past described so far and our present. It is in this context that one can perhaps say that the society and polity which was envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi for a free India (and by others who shared to a large extent Gandhiji's ideas and concepts) was very similar, at least in its structure and form, to the society and polity which had widely prevailed in India before the onset of British rule. It may be claimed that what Gandhiji envisaged was founded on much deeper and stronger foundations. It may also be argued that large parts of this 18th century society and polity, due to historical and spiritual causes, had perhaps been reduced, more or less, to a relatively hollow shell, without much real inner cohesion or recreative capacity by the time it came under European dominance.

It can perhaps also be claimed, that even if the 18th century type of Indian society and polity had retained its cohesion and a capacity for recuperation, it still may not have been possible for it, in the long run, to withstand sustained European pressure and encirclement. As I mentioned earlier on, most other civilisations in the world began to succumb to Europe from 1500 onwards. Many of them which were numerically as large as Europe

(as the civilisation of the Americas was till A.D. 1500), in fact got actually more or less annihilated by European pressure. A few others (like Japan) were to an extent able to save themselves, only by isolating themselves for over two to three centuries, from this European onslaught.

Moreover, it does not seem that it was the supposed scientific quest of the late 15th century Europe, or the enlightenment produced by the European renaissance, or Europe's supposed democratic norms, which led to its expansion in the world from about the end of the 15th century. In the late 15th century, or even three centuries later in the late 18th century, Europe was in fact deficient in most of these in comparison to many other areas, like China, etc. The nearest parallel to the expansion of Europe from about 1500 onwards is to be found in the expansion of Islam soon after the death of Mohammed, or in our own times in the expansion of the Marxist states and categories from the time of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917. Contrary to popular notions, it is not the scientific or the democratic spirit which won the world for Europe, but rather characteristics contrary to them.

Because of the largeness of the area and population of India, and because of the impossibility of ever adequately colonising it with people of European stock, and much more because it was realised that India could be a source of great productive wealth to Europe only if it had an immense number of people to labour but under total subjection, the British occupation of India was naturally primarily concerned with the subjection of India, and the drawing of the maximum possible tribute from it. In this process it eliminated whole populations where it needed to; or promoted or looked upon with indifference at unimaginable numbers of deaths by famine, hunger and consequent disease. To make such subjection prolonged, and relatively easier, it had to smash the earlier framework of Indian society and polity, and give it such new structures which it could neither comprehend nor master. Obviously, the basic elements of these new structures had long been tried and found to be of great utility in the establishment and maintenance of a steep hierarchical order in Britain itself. When applied to India, these were at times given an Indian garb, and variously mixed up with some similar Indian elements, to make them look more legitimate.

In the early days of this archival exploration, Shri Jayaprakash Narayan, after going through some of the data relating

to the dismemberment of India by the British, had once asked: If the British had gone thus far in their task of destruction, why did they not complete the job of total social dismemberment? I had no answer to it then; and consequently had mumbled, that it seemed that after a certain stage, perhaps after 1857, the British had felt exhausted, or had lost interest in making any new efforts, or innovations. But it seems to me today, that this seemingly half-done job of dismemberment was in reality very deliberate. Once having realised that India could not be adequately colonised by European stock, the job was to make India a permanent source of surplus-value, or a supplier of raw products (both in materials and men), or a market for certain types of British manufactures. This was possible if India was broken up and sufficiently atomised; with the broken up constituents placed in opposition to one another, and the whole left in a stagnating state. As any perceptive and experienced administrator of present day India knows, this in-built situation of stagnation, where the total result of state action in most spheres more or less, amounts to a holding-on operation is true of the British created system we retain in India even today. That the pre-1947 position was even of greater deliberately induced stagnation is obvious from the huge record, which I suppose is one of the major useful endowments that the British have left to us. That Mr Winston Churchill even considered reducing Germany to a pastoral area, after its defeat in 1945, merely indicates the working of the ways of the European and British states and the elite which manage them.

What was suggested by Mr Churchill for Germany in 1945, obviously had been applied at various periods by Europe to their own people, as well as, in the wide world, where Europe became dominant especially from 1500 onwards. What happened to the people of western and central Africa, and to the people of America (who were estimated at 9–12 crores around A.D. 1500) is too gruesome to recount here. But most of this was attempted in India too, possibly on a relatively moderate scale. The cannon-ball firing of disobedient Indian soldiers from the mouths of guns (1760 onwards), or the flogging of Indian officers of the state who for one reason or another displeased the superior British officer, or the more extensive flogging of village heads, or of domestic servants, and much more the flogging, branding and executing of those who resisted British rule, may be assumed to have been necessary to bring about and maintain total subjection and subordination. What played even greater havoc was the constant enforcement and institutionalisation (from 1760 to about 1920),

of the practice of extensive forced labour and of extracting forced supplies, largely for military but also for civilian purposes. A high official of the government of India in the 1880s justified the practice, by saying that the people have to bear some suffering for the good of the state. 25 years later, another high official, in rejecting the recommendation of the British commander-in-chief that soldiers on leave might be exempted from such forced labour, stated that in the concerned area even the priests of the temples, much higher in status than mere soldiers, were liable to give such forced labour. Even more than subjection and subordination, the need of the state created by the British was to reduce the people to such a condition, that they got deprived not only of initiative but even more so of their sense of dignity. It seems that from some early period, (perhaps from the time of the Romans), the dominant approach of Europe, and of those who exercised power was to treat the world as a sort of zoo. Though, indeed, the holders of power in Europe were often kind and loving to those subjected to them, yet it seemed to have been inconceivable to them to grant any autonomy to those who happened to be weaker than them. This matter can perhaps best be investigated by our philosophers.

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One need not dwell long on the individual and physical suffering which the people of India experienced during some 8–10 generations of British rule. These were immense. One of the major consequences of such suffering has been that it has left the majority of the present descendants of these generations physically emaciated, without much hope, and rather in a state of coma. How a Bengali woman described what had happened to her, and her perception of it, is provided by the following which was published in a Bengali newspaper in 1828. She wrote:

To the Editor, *The Samachar*,

I am a spinner. After having suffered a great deal, I am writing this letter. Please publish this in your paper. I have heard that if it is published it will reach those who may lighten my distress and fulfill my desire. Please do not slight this letter from a poor sufferer.

I am very unfortunate. It will be a long story if I were to write all about my sufferings. Still I must write in brief.

When my age was five and a half *gudas* (22) I became a widow with three daughters. My husband left nothing at

the time of his death wherewith to maintain my old father and mothers-in-law and three daughters. He had several businesses. I sold my jewellery for the *shraddha* ceremony. At least as we were on the verge of starvation God showed me a way by which we could save ourselves. I began to spin on Takli and Charkha.

In the morning I used to do the usual work of clearing the household and then sit at the Charkha till noon and after cooking and feeding the old parents and daughters I would have my fill and sit spinning fine yarn on the Takli. This I used to spin about a tola. The weavers used to visit our houses and buy the Charkha yarn at three tolas per rupee. Whatever amount I wanted as advance from the weavers, I could get for the asking. This saved us from cares about food and cloth.

In a few years time I got together seven *ganda* rupees (Rs.28). With this I married one daughter. And in the same way all three daughters. There was no departure from the caste customs. Nobody looked down upon these daughters because I gave all concerned, the *Ghatakas* and Caste people, what was due to them. When my father-in-law died I spent eleven *gandas* rupees (Rs.44) on his *shraddha*.

This money was lent me by the weavers which I repaid in a year and a half. And all this through the grace of the Charkha. Now for 3 years, we two women, mother-in-law and me, are in want of food. The weavers do not call at the house for buying yarn. Not only this, if the yarn is sent to market, still it is not sold even at one-fourth the old prices. I did not know how it happened. I asked many about it. They say that *Bilati* (English) yarn is being largely imported. The weavers buy that yarn and weave. I had a sense of pride that *Bilati* yarn could not be equal to my yarn, but when I got *Bilati* yarn I saw that it was better than any yarn. I heard that its prices is Rs.3 or Rs.4 per seer. I beat my brow and said, Oh God, there are sisters more distressed than me. I know that all men of *Bilati* are rich but now I see that there are women there who are poorer than me. I fully realised the poverty which induced those women to spin. They have sent the product of so much toil out here because they could not sell it there. It would have been something if they were sold here at good prices. But it has brought our ruin only. Men cannot use the cloth out of this yarn even for two months. It rots away. I therefore

entreat the spinners over there, that if they will consider this representation, they will be able to judge whether it is fair to send yarn here or not.

A representation from a suffering spinner.  
Shantipur *Samachar Darpan*.

The above was reproduced by Gandhiji in *Young India* in 1931. It is possible that the women of Lancashire felt somewhat similarly after the post-1929 world-wide economic depression, and the boycott of foreign textiles by Indians as a result of the Indian noncooperation movement. But it is perhaps correct to assume that when Gandhiji visited Lancashire in the latter part of 1931, and met many of the Lancashire women, he was able to make them see that Lancashire had made the condition of Indian women even much worse for more than a century.

As a corollary to the massive emaciation of the majority of Indians, the rest in India, who could somehow overstep the emaciating process, became socially separated from the majority of their fellow beings. As their own condition was based on fragile foundations it made them behave callously all the more— and, at times brutally— towards this emaciated majority.

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Even from amongst this remainder, who in material terms were relatively secure, even privileged, a very small section — perhaps only a quarter percent of the Indian population— became, in time, alienated from their own civilisation, and felt proud to be living like foreigners in the innumerable civil lines, military stations, and the post-1947 enclaves of India's metropolises, and of India's other major cities.

Their life style became western, with some of them grotesquely so, and with others in a less ostentatious manner. As early as the 1830s, the British Viceroy Bentinck was very pleased with such a development and was happy that the prosperous Hindu families of Bengal were giving up feeding Brahmans, or contributing to temples, and had taken to the ostentatious entertainment of Europeans instead.

A ridiculous fallout of such alienation can be seen practically in every district headquarters, more so in northern India. Here the governmental officer-core of about 200–400 persons, and their families lead lives, which have little to do with the community they are supposed to serve. Their children live away from



them in convent and college hostels, if the place of their postings has no convents, etc., and as most such districts cannot afford cultural appurtenances of modern life (good libraries, theatres, sangeet bhavans, art galleries, softly-lighted restaurants, etc.); and they have no way of mixing with the local people, or find it tedious and uncomfortable to do so. Their life is indeed nearly barren. It is possible that it is they who uphold the might, power and grandeur of the state in their areas. The state that they uphold, however— except that it may be taken to represent some abstract ideas or fills the generality of the citizens with a sense of fear— even after freedom has not been able to acquire any deeper meaning. It may be said in defence of this officer elite, that the manner of their lives, the uncomfortable and mostly ugly designs of the residences they are housed in, the amount of legitimate or even illegitimate money they are able to make, does not, in any major sense, qualify them (except perhaps just a few who occupy positions of relative decision-making) as objects of envy. It is rather that most of them seem harassed, even pathetic, and would be objects of pity in a society which was not so deprived and disorganised as ours.

Yet another consequence of British rule has been, that practically no one engaged in the service of the state or its dependent institutions, comprehends in any real sense, what he or she is engaged in, even as regards the job which has been assigned to the particular person. Further, the way the job is done has no possible linkages with the general and social life of the community, or its priorities, or even with one's family life. The life of such people has got split in two unrelated compartments; instead of one enriching the other, what gets created at best is a general bewilderment. The general assumption that the huge army of those who are in the service of the state are having tremendously entertaining or luxurious lives, or most of them at least enjoy the exercise of power which they are supposed to command, is mostly a fallacy, unless one treats occasional instances of individual sadism as entertainment.

This of course does not apply to some 10,000–20,000 persons who, in various capacities, decide major policies, or supervise or manage various departments and corporations of the state. Their life, indeed, is of material ease, of social graces, and will compare well with the life style of persons of similar positions in the more prosperous lands. To them may be added another 50,000–1,00,000 families of proprietors and managers of industry, those running mercantile and trading concerns, some

of those who have become prosperous through commercial agriculture, dairying and horticulture, and of course the more successful of the lawyers, medical doctors, academics and journalists.

While basically there never has been any animosity between society and polity in the Indian tradition and history, the present Indian polity, built as it is on alien concepts and theories, has been reduced to the state of a huge dying dinosaur or, more or less, continues to be the monster which the British had put together some 150-200 years before.

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It is conceivable that in the circumstances of today we cannot have recourse to the socio-political institutions and structures of pre-British India; that in our rather spiritually and physically emaciated state, we would be even less capable of creating the sort of society and polity which most of our people had in view in Gandhiji's time. Living in the world as it is today and in a sense having been forced to feel during the last 3-4 decades as if we lived on the world's sufferance, it is obvious that till we created a new conceptual frame for the functioning of our society and polity, and such a frame has a brilliance of some kind for the rest of the world, we have to adjust ourselves to present circumstances. One form of adjustment is the one which we have been pursuing since 1947: more or less walking in the grooves laid down by the west, while dreaming day-dreams that our time will come one day. Another version of the effort at adjustment, though presented more confidently and forcefully, is of bridging the so-called 300 years' gap which is said to separate us from the world of the west, and to aim to catch up with the west by the beginning of the year A.D. 2001: achieving a position that would enable us to compete with others in the world in the way those who have not been left behind by history do.

Put in this latter phraseology, it is rather an attractive objective, specially for many of us who have had adequate education and training in the ways of western science and technology, or to some extent in the working of its organisational structures. Looked at deeply, however, such an objective is seldom achieved. In history, as in life, one does not catch up with anything. Those who are given to striving go their own way, and the very fact that they move according to their volition eliminates the question of the need of their catching up with any one else. But

in a situation where one has to face a powerful adversary or adversaries— whether they are so termed or not— and in our particular case the whole of western civilisation is such an adversary, what one has to do is to aim at getting several paces ahead of it; and not merely aim at catching up or bridging some particular historical gap. In our own time, Gandhiji just did that, for at least 20–25 years, on the basis of what he could structure in the way of institutional forms, battle techniques, alternative modes of socio-economic life, etc., out of the indigenous constituents available to him, and by the genius of his great generalship. And as we know, what he created kept British power mostly on the defensive for over two decades. It is possible that what Gandhiji did is no longer repeatable— at least not in any literal sense; or even if it were, it might not be able to help us in the present situation.

Yet the sooner we get out of the present stagnation, and the state of hopelessness (both in our society and, even more so, in the manner in which our state functions), the better for the people of India and their state. In spite of the great freedom struggle, and four decades of political freedom, the Indian state has yet to wake up to the fact that it is not a colonial state; that it is not ruling a hostile people; that it in fact is amongst its own kith and kin; and that only to the extent these kith and kin feel a kinship with it, will it have legitimacy, as well as, inner confidence and strength. To say this is not to condemn what has gone on in the past four decades. In a way what happened was on the cards, it was an obvious result of our two centuries old subjection and alienation, and the diffidence we still had, till recently, in our relations with the world, or in our own capacities.

Our problems indeed are manifold. The problem of a rather excessive population growth without the means of an outlet, like the one Europe has had during the past 400–500 years, or Islam had before that, is only one of them and, perhaps, not the most intractable or urgent. Our major problem is to establish an organic linkage between our society and polity, both of which urgently require to be put on sounder and more indigenous foundations. To move in such a direction, we have to re-examine, not only our past and its concepts, institutions and manner of solving issues, but also various solutions which have occurred to our people during the past century, or so.

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The recent resolve to pay attention to our national heritage, of which the programme of the cleaning of the Ganga is one result, should indeed be welcome and receive nation-wide support. But a neglect of at least two centuries cannot be corrected by small gestures, or symbolic programmes. The restoration of our heritage requires at least as much attention and perhaps as many resources as we devote to our defence system; and more importantly, an organisational framework with much greater agility and local initiative. It is possible, that an awareness of our unbroken ancient heritage, its restoration, preservation and interpretation, and the self-knowledge which it will impart to our society, is of even more primary importance to the security and defence of India than any national military system, important though the latter is in the present day.

Similarly, the resolve of bringing 50,00,000 hectares of waste land annually under fuelwood plantation for the next ten years, if handled rightly, and if it leads to the planning of fuelwood trees (instead of trees of more commercial and industrial utility, as seem to have been the fashion in recent years), would be of great practical value to our ordinary rural and small-town populace, and may help initiate many other local activities.

Though at present aimed at a different and much smaller section of society, a welcome can perhaps also be given to the proposal of starting institutions of excellence (in the fields of education, health, culture, etc.) in each district of India. But the very idea of initiating such programmes or institutions requires that the whole machinery of the state soon undergoes a well thought out re-organisation, and the army of 10,000–20,000 of state employees in each district is placed at the disposal of responsible district bodies. Further, before such institutions of excellence can be of any national value, the service which they will impart, or the content of what they will teach or present has to have proper scrutiny. They have to be Indianised in every sense; and those who run them, and those whom they produce have to regain a sense of patriotism as well as a sense of compassion. As we know too well, patriotism as well as compassion are fast becoming scarce commodities in today's India.

Additionally those engaged in the administration or development of an area have to have local roots and loyalties. They have to realise, and appreciate, that they must be answerable to the people they serve, if anything really worthwhile is to come out of the new resolves and programmes.

This obviously would imply, that an end is put to the unnecessary moving around of official and other personnel from place to place. Simply because the British needed to continually move their armies over long distances to indicate their invincibility, and similarly move their top civil officers, because either such officers became too unpopular or they got too mixed up in local affairs and so became less useful instruments of British authority, does not imply that we have to keep on with this senseless and wasteful practice. A medical doctor, an engineer or a teacher, and even a policeman, will certainly be much more useful to society and to those persons and purposes, whom he was supposed to serve, if he stayed in one place over long periods, and conversely of much less use or value if he was moved from place to place as frequently as happens today. The assumption that he will become corrupt, exploitative, inefficient, etc., unless he was so moved around, is one of the major fallacies of the administrative system, which we inherited at the time of the 'Transfer of Power' in 1947.

If the above steps were to be taken, and similar measures were adopted in the political and other spheres, it would also obviate the need of the vast real-estate, the construction and maintenance of which seem to have become the major function of the Indian state at all levels, and more so at the national. That as foreigners the British had to build houses, dak bungalows, etc., for the use of British military and civil officers, and their immediate servitors and dependents, however wasteful of Indian state resources, can be understood in the context of the British conquest of India. The fact however, that this real-estate has multiplied 10-20 times of its pre-1947 size, can only be explained either as the result of total thoughtlessness on the part of those who have governed India since the British left, or because of the wholly mechanical working of their mind. India seems to be the only country, at least in the British commonwealth, where even members of legislatures are provided permanent residences in the capital city. It is small wonder, that within a year or two of their being elected, most of them become part of the capital, and have little links left with those who sent them to these legislatures. Given such an alien frame and practices, it is not surprising that the main function of the Indian state, as it has been operating till now, is to look after its decision makers and the vast army of those who are expected to implement the decisions. The framework was created mainly to keep the populace in, what the British called, a state of tranquility, that is, the activities of the people were kept at a minimum so

as not to disturb the state's tranquility. Given this frame the decision-makers, as well as their subordinates, obviously give first priority to their own security, comfort, etc. The decisions, therefore, are mostly of the kind which maintain tranquility; and provide security and differently graded comfort to those who surround the state; and try to keep it safe from the people whom it is supposed to represent. The result, more or less, is that instead of the state existing for the people, it is the people who are seemingly permitted to exist for the convenience of the state.

A step which can be taken fairly soon without waiting for the complete re-casting of the polity (a long-drawn process in any case), is to shed the unnecessary load which the state, more so the central state, has accumulated over the years. Many of the functions which the central state performs today can safely, and also more effectively, be performed at more local levels. The imbalance in terms of power and resources, which has become increasingly manifest between the government at the national level and the governments in the states, as also between the latter and more locally-based elected institutions, needs urgent correction. To the extent the national level reduces its load, and distributes a substantial portion of the resources at its disposal, the stronger and efficient it will become in performing such tasks which can be performed by it alone. Over the years, it has accumulated too much fat and flabbiness. The job is for it to become slim and agile. Load-shedding alone can make it functional in the internal as well as in the external sphere.

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To achieve better functioning, it may be necessary for India to opt for different and even contrary options in different spheres and for different tasks. While it is essential, indeed imperative to encourage and promote recourse to older institutional forms, linkages, technologies, etc., it may also be essential for India to master modern theories and their products (like institutional forms, technology, etc.), and as far as possible to innovate and improve upon them. While the latter may secure an equal place for India in the world at large, it is only the former which can make India's people and talents come into their own. Once this happens, it would be a far easier job for the indigenous talent and priorities to borrow what they wish from elsewhere, to internalise what suits them within their own frame, and thus eventually arrive at the point, where the contradictions of these diverse ways could be resolved without serious turmoil. When

this has happened, whether it was the indigenous which governed Indian life, or it was the adopted and internalised which did so, would only be of academic value. What would have been achieved is, that the effort would have helped India to renovate itself, and so feel confident about its own strivings and goals.

In the context of a re-shaping (and relinking) of Indian society and polity, the exploration of the past can be of great practical value. Analysis and comprehension of data on our past can tell us how we acted in the past, and in what we succeeded and where we failed. Obviously only knowing about ourselves even in the minutest details, though it would lead to self-knowledge, may however not be enough for our future survival as a free and prosperous society and state. For that, we shall have to know much more about the world itself, and that not merely through the work and interpretations of others, but by that of our own. It is all to the good that scholars from the west, including the Soviet Union, or from Japan, or elsewhere are studying the old institutions and manners of India in great detail. Their studies can certainly give us some indications and starting points. But to be of any value to our society such and other studies will primarily have to be taken up by our own scholars and academics. (The research for these talks as already indicated in the text was begun in 1966. I am grateful to a large number of friends for the advice and support I have received in this endeavour from time to time. The detailed research- yet to be completed- on the circa 1770 Chengalpattu district village data, was begun during 1984-85. This latter research, and the putting of the varied data in the form of the foregoing text has been made possible by the offer of a visiting fellowship by the Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varanasi during 1984-85. I am thankful to the Institute for its interest and support in this work.)

## II

### INDIGENOUS INDIAN TECHNOLOGICAL TALENT AND THE NEED FOR ITS MOBILISATION

(Indigenous Indian Technological Talent and the Need for its Mobilisation was delivered as a popular lecture at the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum, Calcutta on October 4, 1986. The text was also published in the PPST Bulletin from Chennai (No.9. Dec.1986, pp.5-20).)

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Since we regained freedom from foreign political dominance in 1947, India has made substantial headway in many spheres of economic and technological activity. Our agricultural production has more than doubled during this period. The increase in the industrial sphere is perhaps even more impressive. Today we are said today to have the third largest pool of scientific and technological man-power in the world. We can also well claim to have established a very large network of institutions which impart scientific and technological education and training. We have built up an extensive complex of scientific and technological laboratories devoted to industrial research as well as research in agriculture and fields allied to it. This, however, has to be qualified by the fact that we constitute about a fifth or sixth of mankind, and geographically we are as large as the whole of Europe taken together.

Despite this economic and technological headway, as a people we seem to be in rather a despondent mood. True, there are short moments of euphoria when we feel that we are on top of our problems; or that we are on our way to catching up with the powerful in the world. It was also a time of high hope when—around 1947—some of our leading industrialists— if I remember right— even said that we may replace Japan as a great industrial nation and take over its markets. But since about 1960, we seem to have begun to feel that we have somehow gone astray. Even



in comparison to peoples and nations who have been geographically and historically close to us, like China and Korea, and perhaps even Malaysia and Indonesia, we have been left behind in matters of economic and technological growth. And taking another sphere of endeavour, if one is to judge by the results of the present Asiad, or of that held in Delhi in 1982, or our participation in the last Olympic games, our position there does not look too different to that in technology and industry.

It is well known, in fact often exaggerated and deplored, that a substantial proportion of the young scientists and technologists whom we train, especially those from the IIT's, etc., migrate to the USA, or other western industrialised countries. Most of them initially go to these countries for the purpose of advanced research, but only a small proportion of them so far ever return to work in India. It is said that most of these migrants make successful careers in the scientific and technological fields in the countries of their adoption; and that the work many of them do there is of fairly high competence. Yet, some of those who should know seem to be of the view that it is a rare individual from amongst them who is able to be scientifically or technologically creative, or be able to produce anything which may be termed new.<sup>1</sup>

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A great movement was initiated for the promotion in India of western science and technology nearly a century ago. The main centre of this movement was Calcutta itself. As far as my meagre knowledge goes those intimately associated with this movement, in its early phase, included such illustrious names as Mahendra Lal Sircar, Jagdish Chandra Bose, Prafulla Chandra Ray, Gooroodas Banerjee, Ashutosh Mukerjee, Taraknath Palit, C.V. Raman, and they were followed by J.C. Ghosh, Meghnad Saha, J.N. Mukerjee, S.N. Bose, and many others.<sup>2</sup> While reasons of patriotism, devotion to *swadeshi*, etc., played major roles in leading Mahendra Lal Sircar and others to the promotion of the new science and technology, men like Sir Richard Temple, the

British Governor of Bengal around this time, felt that the teaching of science in India would help in curbing the ambition and self-confidence of the educated Indian. Writing to the then British Viceroy Northbrook, Temple observed: 'No doubt the *alumni* of our schools and colleges do become as a class discontented. But this arises partly from our higher education being too much in the direction of law, public administration, and prose literature, where they may possibly imagine, however erroneously, that they may approach to competition with us. But we shall do more and more to direct their thoughts towards practical science, where they must inevitably feel their utter inferiority to us.'<sup>3</sup> Temple wrote this in 1875. In 1876 Mahendra Lal Sircar and his friends established the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science at Calcutta.<sup>4</sup> In 1885 J.C. Bose was appointed junior professor of physics at Calcutta Presidency College,<sup>5</sup> while in 1889 Prafulla Chandra Ray was appointed as assistant professor in chemistry.<sup>6</sup>

While all of them, except men like Governor Temple, agreed about the need and value of modern science and technology to India, the early promoters of it differed considerably with regard to the methodology of its promotion. Mahendra Lal Sircar subscribed to the priority of science over technology<sup>7</sup> and in fact wished that the word 'applied science' had not been invented.<sup>8</sup> Prafulla Chandra Ray, however, thought that 'industry as a rule had preceded science' in the progress of western society.<sup>9</sup> Attracted as he was, along with Jagdish Chandra Bose, to the integration of cultural and economic nationalism, his early efforts were devoted to the promotion of industrial entrepreneurship wherever he could. He also 'began writing a number of primers in chemistry, botany, and geology'<sup>10</sup> towards the same end, while Gooroodas Banerjee 'suggested the use of the mother tongue'<sup>11</sup> in the teaching of science and technology. Curiously during his

early days as he stated in his address to the Khadi Exhibition at Kakinada, in December 1923, Prafulla Chandra Ray believed in Liebig's dictum 'that the index of the civilisation of a country is the amount of soap it consumed and...that the industrial progress of a country was measured by the output of its sulphuric acid.'<sup>12</sup> It may be interesting to mention here that Europeans who knew southern India well around 1700 had great admiration for the quality of clothes-washing by the washermen in southern India, and felt much could be learnt in this respect from them by Europe. There possibly may be a link somewhere between such admiration for south Indian clothes-washing and Liebig's fascination with soap.

In his later period, however, Acharya P.C. Ray felt that the *charkha* represented 'an easy, healthy, natural process of increasing the wealth of the country and smooth way of universalising the incidence of wealth.'<sup>13</sup> Most of his students and younger colleagues, like Meghnad Saha, in one way or another agreed with Acharya Ray's earlier position rather than with his belief in *charkha*. They felt that what India required was heavy industrialisation and big science accompanied by state planning.<sup>14</sup>

The promotion of western science and technology was also widely considered during 1916–18 by the Indian Industrial Commission. Its Indian members were Madan Mohan Malaviya, Dorabji Tata, and Fuzulbhoy Currimbhoy Ebrahim.<sup>15</sup> The Commission examined a very large number of witnesses whose evidence fills five volumes of the Commission's seven volume report.<sup>16</sup> In his minute of dissent to the Report and in his cross-examination of witnesses, Pandit Malaviya questioned the view that it was the West that had provided the great traditions of technology. 'Such a statement,' he remarked, 'denied the long history of Indian achievements in ship-building, smelting, weaving, etc.'<sup>17</sup> According to him, 'the de-industrialisation of India and the history of the industrial revolution in the West were integral

parts of one process, that colonialism preceded and helped create industrialism in Britain.<sup>18</sup> Pandit Malaviya also suggested that it was education which promoted intelligence and thus technology. He dismissed the view, then popular amongst the British in India, that intelligence was related to race and heredity.<sup>19</sup> Many who gave evidence before the Commission, as also Pandit Malaviya, felt that the better model for Indian scientific and technological development was provided by Germany and Japan rather than by Great Britain.<sup>20</sup> One witness, B.N. Basu felt that the scientific and technological backwardness of India was in part a result of English scholasticism which dominated British-directed Indian education. According to him, 'where practical men are wanted we have been given a race of pandits with this difference, that instead of studying the ancient literature of their own country, which might be of some use, they have learnt with considerable assiduity numerous parts like the conjugation and declension of Anglo-Saxon verbs.'<sup>21</sup>

The secretary of the Visvakarma Mahajan Conference Committee, probably from Andhra and quite possibly the only representative of the artisans in India who appeared before the Commission, stated that the artisans who were 'the industrial backbone of the country, were not going to be the beneficiaries of the new policy regarding (the proposed) technical schools.' He pointed out to 'the complete dissociation of the intellectual class in the country from its industries' and felt that 'the selection of students to go to foreign countries for training, from communities other than industrial or artisan classes who possess the initial aptitude for manual labour, which a university graduate of any other class despised as a derogation of his caste dignity or literary merit'<sup>22</sup> had done irreparable harm. An English witness did refer to the beneficial role which caste could have played in technological development and industrialisation. He wondered whether caste groups could serve as functional equivalents to trade unions, and felt that an opportunity had been lost. According to him: 'Had caste been adopted as an educational unit in the first instance the result might have been different. It is in many ways a valuable social organisation of which use might

have been made.' His English upbringing, however, re-asserted itself, and he said that caste was un-British and unnatural. He observed that 'there never was a possibility of a constructive attitude towards it.'<sup>23</sup>

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Patriotic pride, the urge for the integration of economic and cultural life and the memory of ancient industrial grandeur notwithstanding, it seems that by the end of the 19th century little trace had been left in Indian intellectual and scholarly consciousness of the sciences and technologies which had been fairly successfully practised in India till about the end of the 18th century. It is possible that even at this earlier period, i.e. the latter part of the 18th century, the scholarly Indian elite of the time was not consciously aware (though they benefited from their products and the specific knowledge and information they provided) of their existence. They probably took them as part of their landscape, as some amongst tens of thousands of the constituents of the structure of the society which supported their elite life; only to be noticed, if at all, when absent.

Whether the late 18th century Indian elite was consciously aware of the then existing sciences and technologies of India or not, these were taken serious note of by European specialists during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, as and when they were looking for knowledge, information, design, technique, etc., in any particular fields. Examples of such European research, attention, study and borrowing are innumerable. The collection of Indian botanical texts by the Portuguese and the Dutch goes back to the early 16th century. The *Hortus Malabaricus*, in 12 volumes, with illustrations of 750 species of Indian plants was published in Europe during 1678-93. It is said to contain certificates from four Kerala and Konkan Pandits about the authenticity of the information in the 12 volumes.<sup>24</sup> The design and function of Indian agricultural implements, especially the drill plough was as important to late 18th century British agriculture, as was the Indian practice of inoculation against smallpox and its rationale, or as the method and rationale of the artificial manufacture of ice in the Allahabad-Varanasi region had been a few decades earlier. Similar, or perhaps even greater attention

was devoted to an understanding of Indian building materials and techniques, to various chemicals used in Indian industry and other processes and their sources, in Indian steel and its technology, in the prevailing Indian surgery,<sup>25</sup> and even in the method of teaching in schools in India especially in those in the south.<sup>26</sup> The existence of petroleum wells and the use to which the oil was put to was first observed in Burma around 1797. The number of wells, in the area visited, was said to be 520, and their annual oil production about one lakh tons valued at over ten lakh Indian rupees. The oil was used for lighting lamps, for the painting of timber and the bottoms of ships and boats, and also used medicinally as a lotion in cutaneous eruptions, as an embrocation in bruises, and in rheumatic afflictions.<sup>27</sup>

A curious example of the transfer of technology from Pune to London in the 1790s is provided by the Indian practice of plastic surgery. It is perhaps best that I describe it in the words of a founder of modern British plastic surgery, J.C. Carpue, FRS. Carpue wrote in 1816:

It was in this manner that the nasal operation had become forgotten or despised, in at least the west of Europe; when, at the close of the last century, it was once more heard of in England, from a quarter whence mankind will yet, perhaps, derive many lights, as well in science, as in learning and in arts. A periodical publication, for the year 1794, contains the following communication from a correspondent in India, which is accompanied by a portrait of the person mentioned, explanatory of the operation. 'Cowasjee, a Mahratta, of the caste of husbandman, was a bullock-driver with the English army, in the war of 1792, and was made a prisoner by Tippoo, who cut off his nose, and one of his hands. In this state, he joined the Bombay army near

Seringapatam, and is now a pensioner of the Honourable East India Company. For above twelve months, he was wholly without a nose; when he had a new one put on, by a Mahratta surgeon, a Kumar, near Pune. This operation is not uncommon in India, and has been practised from time immemorial. Two of the medical gentlemen, Mr Thomas Cruse and Mr James Findlay, of Bombay, have seen it performed as follows: A thin plate of wax is fitted to the stump of the nose, so as to make a nose of good appearance; it is then flattened, and laid on the forehead. A line is drawn round the wax, which is then of no further use; and the operator then dissects off as much skin as it covered, leaving undivided a small slip between the eyes. This slip preserves the circulation, till an union has taken place between the new and old parts. The cicatrix of the stump of the nose, is next pared off; and, immediately behind this raw part, an incision is made through the skin, which passes round both alae, and goes along the upper lip. The skin is now brought down from the forehead; and, being twisted half round, its edge is inserted into this incision; so that a nose is formed with a double hold, above, and with its alae and septum below, fixed in the incision. A little Terra Japonica is softened with water, and, being spread on slips of cloth, five or six of these are placed over each other, to secure the joining. No other dressing than this cement is used for four days; it is then removed, and cloths, dipped in *ghee* (a kind of butter), are applied. The connecting slip of skin is divided about the twenty-fifth day; when a little more dissecting is necessary to improve the appearance of the new nose. For five or six days after the operation, the patient is made to lie on his back; and, on the tenth day, bits of soft cloth are put into the nostrils, to keep them sufficiently open. This operation is always successful. The artificial nose is secure, and looks nearly as well as the natural one; nor is the scar on the forehead very observable, after a length of time.<sup>28</sup>

On the basis of the above and other information J.C. Carpue started his own experiments. But before starting them he made more enquiries. About these enquiries he wrote:

On undertaking the first of the two cases to be hereafter narrated, I was induced to make such personal inquiries as were within my reach in this country, concerning the Indian method. I did myself the honour to write to Sir Charles Mallet, who had resided many years in India, and who obligingly confirmed to me the report, that this had been a common operation in India, from time immemorial; adding, that it had always been performed by the caste of potters or brick-makers, and that though not invariably, it was usually successful.

Mr James Stuart Hall, a gentleman who was many years in India, assured me, that he had seen the operation performed, and that it was of tedious length. From Dr Barry, of the India service, I learned, that he had also seen the operation; that it occupied an hour and a half, and was performed with an old razor, the edge of which, being continually blunted in dissection, was every moment re-set. Tow was introduced to support the nose, but no attempt to form nostrils, by adding a septum, was made.

I am obligingly informed by Major Heitland, of the India service, that in India, several years ago, in the time of Hyder Ali, Mr Lucas, an English surgeon, was, in several instances, successful in the operation, which he copied from the Hindoo practitioners.<sup>29</sup>

Summing up this information, J.C. Carpue observed:

It will be observed, that the whole of the foregoing accounts are agreed upon these points, that the performance of the operation is confined to a particular caste of Hindoos, and that this caste is said to be the Koomas, or potters, or brick-makers. The combination appear, at first sight, to be singular; but an explanation is not difficult, and may not be unacceptable. Most of the Hindoo castes, though fixed within positive limits, as to professions, trades, or other occupations, are yet allowed a certain range, a certain variety of pursuit, among which the individual is free to make his choice. The castes are known to be divided into sub-castes; and there are degraded castes, making branches of the pure castes, with respect to whom a still greater laxity is allowed: 'The profession of *astrology*, and the task of making almanacs,' says a later writer on India, 'belong to *degraded Brahmins*, and the occupation of teaching military



exercises, and *physic*, as well as the trade of *potters*, weavers, brasiers, fishermen, and workers in shells, belong also to the descendants (meaning the outcastes) of Brahmins.' Thus, astrology, medicine, and *pottery* are among the several pursuits allowed to one and the same caste.

That *astrology* and *medicine* should be thrown into the same lot, excites no surprise...It is hence that our ancient almanacs contained instructions concerning the health of the body; and, at this day, 'Francis Moore', though he calls himself Physician' is plainly an astrologer. The adjuncts of pottery, weaving, etc., in the same caste with the former, appear to evince, that the Indian institutions are less restrictive on the particular genius or disposition of individuals, than may have been commonly supposed.<sup>30</sup>

J.C. Carpue then goes into a discussion of the origin of plastic surgery, its knowledge in ancient times in Asia as also in ancient Greece, the difference between the later Italian and Indian method. He adds:

We have now seen that the nasal operation, and all the physiological *facts* upon which it depends, were known in Europe at least as early as the date of the Christian era; that the *fact* of adhesion was known to Hippocrates, and that where our history fails us, is simply the point beyond which we have no records. We have now, also, before us, the greater part, if not the whole of the information which was possessed by Taliacotius; and, beside satisfying ourselves that this eminent person was not (what he never pretended to be) the inventor of the art, we may venture to judge in what degree he advanced it.

That the art has subsisted from the most ancient period in India, and other southern parts of Asia, and was at no time carried thither from Europe, is probable from further evidence than the simplicity of the Indian method, as compared with the Italian; the ordinary recourse which is had to it in India; its practice by a particular caste, and its junction with religious observances: it is probable, likewise, from the frequent occasions for it, from the favourableness of the climate, from the temperance of the people, and from the plainness of the road by which Nature leads to the invention. The adhesion of divided parts, however, little understood, till lately, in France or England, was one of the

first spectacles presented to mankind. If we fancy that we are entitled to refuse to the Orientals the reputation of science, this makes no alteration in the case; for no depth of science, but involuntary observation, was all that was wanted here.<sup>31</sup>

As we now well know such an operation is described in detail in *Susruta*. Though perhaps less dramatically put, the narratives about the Indian method of inoculation, on the manufacture of ice, on Indian agricultural implements, regarding the technical details and economics of the manufacture of Indian steel, on Indian chemicals and dyes more or less follow a similar strain. The narratives seem to have been responses to urgent and contemporary British or European need; and it may be assumed that India was one amongst several places where such enquiries were conducted. The manner the narratives were analysed, discussed, published for specialists and scholars seem to suggest that what was relevant in them to contemporary British or European requirement was incorporated in the corresponding practice of the borrower, in time internalised and thereafter, perhaps within a period of fifty years, the origin of the incorporated, at least in practice, quite forgotten.

The above does not necessarily imply that post-1800 British and European technology owes a great deal to the information and knowledge which it received from India. From about the 13th century, there was much flow of ideas, knowledge, and technologies to Europe particularly from Asia. All this took time to be absorbed and internalised. By stages, Europe seems to have been able to integrate or graft what it felt important on to its own technological frame, and its stock of knowledge. By about 1820, or 1830 Europe had far surpassed in matters which interested it, all those who had contributed to its scientific and technological growth; and had, therefore, no need to remember details of the sources from which the borrowings had been made.

However the erosion and decline of Indian industry and technology in the late 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries had, as is well recognised today, little to do with factors relating to Indian technological practices and their economic efficiency. In these respects, many of them could have withstood foreign competition (as Indian cotton textiles did for many decades till about 1850). The decline and destruction was politically and fiscally induced by deliberate British policy. The way

this decline happened in the Indian textile industry is well mapped out amongst others by Dr Jitendra Gopal Borpujari in his recent study.<sup>32</sup>

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For some 70-80 years, and more so since 1947, efforts have been made to industrialise India on the western pattern. There has been much debate on how to go about such industrialisation: whether industrialisation, at least initially, grows out of earlier technologies of an area and only later gets linked up with high science; or whether it is high science, which really converts so-called 'primitive' forms of technology into modern industrialisation. We seem to have played around with such ideas and their various permutations and combinations; but the major result so far seems to be that we find it faster and cheaper rather to buy technology from the international market than to invent or innovate it ourselves. It is true we have produced quite a number of industrial items in the past three decades on our own. But if we could, quite some of us may perhaps prefer to replace even most of these by their international equivalents. One of the explanations for such a possible preference may arise from the fact that most of what we have produced in the past 30-40 years is not any new basic technology, but largely adaptations of what prevails elsewhere. Even much more, we seem to be taken up merely with the production of parts for the technology and machines received by us from the modern industrial countries. Such a course is bound to effectively exclude us from any improvisations of our own, even when these occurred to us.

Simultaneous to this industrial development, our people at large have also continued, though less and less as years pass, with some of their age-old but rather worn-out and rusted indigenous technology. The indigenous manufacture of iron and steel has of course gone completely overboard, as also the artificial manufacture of ice by the method used in Allahabad two centuries ago and about which the Royal Society of Great Britain was then so serious as to seek a scientific explanation. Even the making of most agricultural implements is on a decline at the village level; so also is the manufacture of looms, of *charkhas* (of which Mahatma Gandhi got produced twenty lakhs between April-June 1921), of dyes and chemicals, of oil-pressing by the

bullocks-driven *ghani*, of the making of compost manure for agriculture, and even of ploughing by bullocks. Products of modern industry are fast taking the place of the village and small town product. Those who cannot afford even the cheaper though grosser modern industrial product– the much mourned 50% of India's population who are said to be below the widely debated poverty line– have slowly learnt to do without even the little that was thought necessary before. Local building materials are fast disappearing– unless of course some of them are being used in great modern palaces, to give them a touch of Indian authenticity. Yet, while there is a certain glitter in the metropolises, it seems that what we are saddled with today in the way of science, technology and industry though it helps us somehow survive at a very low level, does not lead us anywhere as a people. Even our elite are not too pleased with the situation, and given a reasonable chance, a high proportion of them would migrate to industrially prosperous and functioning areas. One cannot really blame them. At least they show some initiative, though of the wrong kind. At any rate, credit, perhaps, can be given to them that they do not seem to wish to be forever directly riding on the backs of their own people.

We have to start afresh. Not that we immediately give up modern science, technology and industry altogether. We keep what seems to us basically necessary for our security and survival in the present world; and which, after careful deliberation, seems to us, at least for the next decade or two, crucial as basic material, etc., in the creation of the groundwork of an indigenous network of industrial production. We also don't have to give up all products of high-science, or of high-technology. For example, if we were properly ambitious we would work out a plan of providing power from the energy from the sun (in the form of electricity, steam, etc., and not just solar-cookers!) to every habitation in India, say within a generation. And till this goal is reached, all the fuel-gas we have from our various gas deposits, supplemented by what little we can get from the much celebrated gobar-gas plants, should be supplied to the ordinary rural and small town family, at least in the areas where such gas can be reached, for their daily fuel needs. Such a step may also produce a certain acquaintance between modern technology and its gadgetry and the ordinary people of India– just as the bicycle has done. The way the wasteland development programme which planned to create 50,00,000 hectares of fuel wood plantations every year and which was announced with such fanfare has gone haywire, and the leisurely way the departments and agencies of

nonconventional sources of energy work is confirmation enough that most citizens of India will be starved of even domestic fuel unless the fuel that is available today goes directly, for fuel purposes, to the ordinary people irrespective of the consequences of such policy on the rest of the Indian economy and industry.

On the face of it such suggestions may seem rather wild. But it seems that only any serious disruption, or real threat of it which seem to disrupt our own lives and much more our equanimity will, under the circumstances, take us out of our sloth, our *tamas*, and force us to take steps which will also clear the way for our bright and accomplished young scientists and technologists, and lead at least some of them to the much awaited creativity and inventions and innovations relevant to our society.

Though it is only a small beginning, the work of the Bangalore scientists like Prof Vasudev Murty, in inventing a process for the indigenous manufacture of hyper-pure silicon, used in making solar cells as also electronic devices, is greatly to be welcomed. It is more than probable that many more scientists and technologists, despite the general despondency, and quite unknown to others, are similarly exercised in the various other problems of science and technology. If they succeed, what they achieve could be equally path-breaking.

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Our essential task is to bring the innovative and technological skills of our people, those who professed them for millennias and till at least 1800, back to the rebuilding of our primary economy and our industry. We have ignored this so far. Instead, we have tried to create a new economy and industry to which the primary economy has been subordinated. There would be little serious complaint, at least in the short run, if this latter effort had succeeded and created some ferment at the primary levels; or at least seemed to be moving towards success. But the whole effort is bogged down; and even the initiators of it appear to have given up hope. That they now talk of a new electronic revolution, which could deliver prosperity in the 21st century is more or less on the same level as passionate arguments about world peace, ecology, the bio-sphere, the environment, etc. One of the causes of our failure may be that we attempted the creation of new economy and industry largely on poor uncomprehending imitation, and with the help of talent which was drawn from no more than two percent of our people. In retrospect, at least, the

observation of the representative of the Visvakarma Community before the Industrial Commission 1916-18, that keeping the technically competent artisan classes out of the new scientific and technological education has done great harm,<sup>33</sup> seems to have come true.

During the past several years, much work has been done by some of our historians on the role of the subaltern classes in Indian society. So far such studies have been concerned largely with the post-1850 period: when, according to some of great stress for the subaltern classes or according to others of much future hope, depending from which ideological stand one viewed it. It should be most valuable for our understanding of India if the subaltern were also to be studied in the period just before British rule, or just at its beginning. Such studies may also throw much more light on the daily life of the subaltern, his productions, technologies and his crafts, and the manner in which these were organised and interlinked about 200 years ago.

The much celebrated simplicity of Indian technology has led us greatly astray. Simplicity was equated with crudeness, as was done for instance by James Mill. The alleged simplicity was also made into a great abstraction during the freedom battle. We were taught all this in the 19th century and its aftermath, when most of our British masters would have prized ugly and heavy Victorian furniture and treated delicate-seeming British Georgian furniture as at least not very utilitarian. Having accepted such judgements, we did not think of examining the reality which would have told us that the seeming simplicity of Indian technology or theory was a result of high degree of sophistication and exact measurements. The design of the Indian steel furnace (which was in extensive use till about the early 19th century), is a fair representation of this sophistication.

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As an example, I think, we should do whatever we can in the way of resource allocation, supporting structures and laws, subsidies at necessary points, and market support, to bring back to life the old Indian method of smelting iron ore and the manufacture of iron and steel. Such an attempt, however, need not interfere with the great steel plants. Around 1800, a movable furnace of that time could on an average produce about 20 tonnes of fine-grade steel, if worked for some 35–40 weeks in the year.

I had roughly estimated on the basis of available data for various areas that the number of such furnaces around 1800 might have been approximately 10,000. It is quite possible that the number was far larger but that most of them only worked for 10-20 weeks in the year. It is probable that in today's circumstances, these furnaces may be found highly wasteful of both ore and fuel; and to start with, the steel that they will produce may be of relatively poor quality. To some an attempt of this kind may seem a great waste. But to the same people, a loss of a few hundred crores here and there because of hasty decisions, or defective technology, etc., may look like the ordinary hazards of modern economy and industry; while a loss of 10 to 20 or 50 crores on a project of this type seems unpardonable.

How do we enable our ordinary people, and especially those who have some familiarity and instinctive understanding of the industrial and production process, to contribute whatever they can to the national effort? It cannot at all be done by making them into mere labourers where only their muscular power can make any contribution. Admitting a sufficient number of them to institutions like the IITs if such institutions and their courses are so altered that these institutions don't overwhelm them and scope is provided for interchange between men of mere theory and others who judge a technical situation through their experience and instinct, can be another way of making their talents and innovative capacities contribute to a regeneration of Indian technology and industry.

By restoring the old smelting furnaces (say in about a hundred selected localities where good raw material is readily available and where there is still some memory of the old method in those who used to be engaged in it decades ago or had observed it working when young), we quite possibly will help the old technical and innovative skills to come alive. Any superior guidance, etc., by modern experts, or administrative busybodies—till it was actually sought as man to man—will have to be strictly avoided in such an attempt. It is possible that success may not be achieved in every instance, but only in a half or quarter of them. Even such partial success, however, would provide us a starting point: where the successful smelter will be able to look the qualified metallurgist straight in the face and the two can then have a useful technical interchange. The old smelting furnace ultimately may have to be discarded in its old form, or modified in many ways in today's circumstances. But its re-creation in hundreds of localities and the taking of it through the production

process would have taught a variety of lessons not only to our high-science and high-tech men but also to those who had for generations been engaged in this particular technology. It should also restore the confidence of the smelters, as also their sense of dignity; but even more make them examine the process anew in today's situation. That smelting furnaces like these were tried in China in the 1950s is well-known. Why they were initiated, what happened to them afterwards, and what lessons were drawn from their reworking is not known however. Even if our attempt turns out to be on similar lines as that of China, it need cause no mental disturbance. Every civilisation has to do its own learning and in its own way. The knowledge of what others did can only serve as one pointer amongst many.

Similar understanding can be initiated in many other long neglected technologies and industries. It should not be surprising if at least some of them (with minor modifications here and there) prove to be as productive and cost-efficient as the new technologies which we have borrowed from modern world industry.

Another path of understanding the process of innovation and invention involves the diligent and detailed investigation of the past of particular older western technologies and industries. Such a task can of course only be undertaken by highly qualified and research minded Indian scientists and technologists who are fairly familiar with the west as well as the older technologies of India. How bits and pieces and ideas from a variety of cultural backgrounds got joined together over a long period to form the particular modern technology, or what this technology was around 1900 when another major break might have occurred into it, can then be understood. It may tell us much about the nature of the innovative process and about the sort of mind and conditions that foster it.

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Lastly, the National Council of Science Museums, and the Indian state which will ultimately have to finance any such nation-wide plan, should consider the early setting up of technological museums: if not in every taluk, at least in every district of India. While such museums will also display products of modern western science and technology, their main display should be of indigenous artifacts from the respective area, or the region surrounding it. If original objects were somehow unavailable for particular technologies, these could be represented through models, pictures, sketches, plans, etc. Each museum, to the extent



possible, should also have a library. This should include literature on the older practices of the area, and of course be provided with literature and equipped with demonstration facilities regarding how the new could be integrated, wherever that could be done, with older practices, and with the local environment. The museum will of course require a well-oriented young scientist and technologist, who has both abundant interest and patience to explain to those who visit it from within the region, the relevance of the museum and its display. Even if such museums do not greatly help in the regeneration of science and technology directly, they could in time act as a sort of ferment and evoke questions in younger minds on the subject of science and technology. They would also serve as places where the artifacts of India's heritage, pertaining to the given locality could be viewed and appreciated by the people of the area. If no one else, at least students from schools and colleges of the area would be the beneficiaries of such museums.

It should not be necessary, at least initially, in a large number of places, to construct new buildings for such museums. Taking the whole country, there are quite possibly around 10,000 buildings for immediate use: inspection houses, rest houses, circuit houses, etc., not counting similar places built by newer state and semi-state enterprises or academic institutions, and these are largely a part of the Indian heritage' from the days of the British *raj*. As ordinary people have little access to them, the occupancy rate of at least 90% of them would be no more than 5%–10% in any one year. Most such bungalows, etc., have to be sooner or later used for more pressing public purposes or sold over to the people at large for purposes of residence, or work, or to run as hotels, etc. A beginning in this direction can be made by using some of the more suitable amongst them to house such museums of Indian artifacts.

Other buildings which could be used to house museums, art centres, research institutes, etc., are old historical monuments, including some of our large and gracious temples (like the Vaishnav temple at Mannargudi in Thanjavur district), which because of a multiplicity of causes are rarely visited by pilgrims and other visitors. These are still however more or less as good as new. They have plenty of well and aesthetically designed space and should be rather appropriate as repositories of our artifacts and other symbols of our heritage.

Apart from using state-owned bungalows, etc., and the ancient monuments and temples as museums or centres of our art

and heritage, the matter of a proper maintenance and utilisation of these places should be a question of serious national and local concern. Till all available local structures, meant for public purposes, have been put to constant and locally appropriate use, there should be a total halt to the construction of buildings at public expense all over the country.

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There must be a large number of possibly worthier ways, besides those suggested above, to help regenerate our technology and industry; those that arise from our roots or can soon strike root, and thus become innovative and socially relevant. In successfully doing so, we will not in any way be isolating ourselves from the world at large; but rather be readying ourselves to participate more fully and constructively in the life of the world.

Having observed earlier that our young scientists and technologists who go abroad are said by some to be 'just competent', I must add that competence is not to be shunned, ridiculed or put down. It is in fact a very valuable quality in a well functioning situation. Competence, however, has necessarily to be related to its subject, and the subject has to correspond to what is being sought. Our institutions, theories, methodologies, technologies, etc., are today unable to deliver what is sought, in practically every sphere. They even seem to hinder in many cases any such delivery. On the whole, we do not lack competent men and women. What we lack and what we have to look for as well as design are the right processes and instrumentalities. Possibly prolonged enslavement destroys or at least dulls and makes rusty the skills of a people. It also seems to disorient them. Exploring ways for the restoration of the sense of discrimination and of the innovative skills is perhaps the major task which today faces our academics in the sciences as well as in the humanities.

#### Notes

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1. This impression is shared amongst others by many of those who teach and guide research in institutes like the IITs. I am told that such a view was also expressed by Prof M.G.K. Menon at the Indian Science Congress some time ago. Prof G. Sudarshan is said to hold an opposite view.

2. Shiv Visvanathan: *Organising for Science: The Making of an Industrial Laboratory*, OUP, 1985; p.16f.

3. IOL: MSS Eur C 144/17, Richard Temple to Northbrook, 18.2.1875.

4. *Organising for Science*, p.19. The Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science was formally established on 29.7.1876.

5. *ibid.* p.28

6. *ibid.* p.29

7. *ibid.* p.25

8. *ibid.* p.26
9. *ibid.* p.31
10. *ibid.* p.33
11. *ibid.* p.33
12. *ibid.* p.37; also in *Young India*, 27.12.1923, 'The Call of the Charkha'; Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray's address at the Khadi Exhibition, Kakinada, 25.12.1923
13. *ibid.* p.38
14. *ibid.* p.36f
15. *ibid.* p.41
16. *ibid.* p.42
17. *ibid.* p.45
18. *ibid.* p.45
19. *ibid.* pp.48–9
20. *ibid.* p.46f
21. *ibid.* pp.49–50
22. *ibid.* p.57
23. *ibid.* p.53
24. Hortus Malabaricus happens to be one of the few sources cited by Linnaeus, the 'father' of modern European Botany.
25. Dharampal: Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century: some contemporary European accounts, (Vol.I of the *Collected Writings*) gives some details of the many technologies mentioned in this para.
26. Dharampal: The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century, Other India Press, 2000; reference is to the mid-17th century account of Peter Della Valle; also early 19th century references to the borrowing of the Indian monitorial method of teaching children, for teaching in schools in Britain from 1800 onwards.
27. Captain Hiram Cox: Journal of a Residence in the Burmhan Empire and more particularly at the Court of Amarapoorah, London, 1821, pp.33-45; the journal is for the period 8.10.1796-1.11.1797; entry on oil wells is of 1.1.1797.
28. J. C. Carpue, 'An Account of Two Successful Operations for Restoring a Lost Nose from the Integuments of the forehead...to which are prefixed Historical and Physiological Remarks on the Nasal Operation including Descriptions of the Indian and Italian Methods,' London, 1816, pp.36-38
29. *ibid.* pp.39–40
30. *ibid.* pp.42–44
31. *ibid.* pp.48–49
32. Jitendra Gopal Borpujari, *The British Impact on the Indian Cotton Textile Industry 1757–1865*, Cambridge University, Ph.D thesis (1969–70).
33. Organizing for Science, p.57

### III

## THE SELF-AWAKENING OF INDIA

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*\*The Self-Awakening of India: The Context of the Past, the Present and the Future* was the main title of three lectures delivered at the Rashtrothan Parishat, Bangalore, during the latter part of October 1987. The second of these lectures, *Some Aspects of Indian State and Society prior to European Dominance*, has been omitted entirely from this volume, as much of it is also appears in the first and second essays of this volume. Some portions of the first lecture have also been deleted for similar reasons. *The Self-Awakening of India*, therefore, now appears in two parts. These lectures were, with some editing, published in the *PPST Bulletin*, Chennai (No.13-14, March 1988, pp.1-31). They were also published in *Manthan*, Delhi (July, August and Sept 1988). *Manthan* also published them in Hindi. The Rashtrothan Parishat published them in Kannada in 1989 under the title, *Bharata Jagruti* (pp.118).

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### INDIA' S RESPONSE TO THE LOSS OF FREEDOM AND ENSLAVEMENT

I am greatly honoured to be invited by the Rashtrothan Parishat to deliver the present series of lectures on the theme: 'The Self-Awakening of India: The Context of the Past, the Present, and the Future.' It will be presumptuous of me to even think that I could do any justice to such a wide area as indicated by the title. At the most I can skim over the subject, perhaps to a small degree impart to this great gathering which has assembled here today, a few of the facts about the India and Europe of about 200 years ago. These, I may mention, I have gathered in the past 20 years or more, mostly in the archives holding materials on India in Great Britain. I may also give some expression to my own doubts, the questions which arise in my mind as a result of reflecting on these old facts, and in general, share with you my hopes and aspirations about our country and its place in the

world around us. I hope you will bear with me and with my inadequacies in expression as well as in content during the course of these talks and correct me where I may seem to be going astray.

In today's talk- as well as in the concluding talk- I shall be making many references to some of the great men of India's 19th and 20th centuries including Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. I may at times appear somewhat critical of some of them, but that will not be because of any lack of reverence for them. Rather, this critical glance is adopted to help me (and perhaps many of you who may be attending these talks all the evenings), to understand their role better: to gain a better appreciation of their opportunities as well as their constraints. This approach may also be helpful in locating the sources of some of the problems and attitudes which seem to recur again and again in India since about 1800; and, even more so, since 1947, when we parted company from British imperialism, ostensibly to run our affairs in our own way.

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One of the attitudes which in fact has become a sort of sacred belief with most of us, is our total mental and spiritual dependence on the world outside India, especially on the capitalist, social-democratic and Marxist world of the West. The dependence is not only restricted to gifted or technically competent men and financial resources; but even more so, on external theoretical and intellectual formulations in every sphere pertaining to our state, our society and our individual activity. And if I may say so, the way we have willingly, even enthusiastically, bound ourselves to the words and catch-phrases of the West, is a sad commentary on our civilisation. Though I am no scholar in such matters, I do not think that there was any time in our long history when we, as a people, had bound ourselves so completely even to the words of the Vedas, or of the Bhagavad Gita, or of the Upanishads, or to the Manusamhita, or even to the words of the great Gautama Buddha or Adi Sankara or Basaveshwara.

It is not only our politicians, scientists, engineers, philosophers, political-scientists, economists, sociologists, leaders of social movements, or even dissident movements for whom the words of the capitalist, or social-democratic or marxist West are like words from the ancient scriptures; even to the followers of Mahatma Gandhi, the West has become a great beacon. It is not

only that we believe that we have begun to comprehend Gandhiji through Richard Attenborough's film 'Gandhi'. We also seem to require an Eric Schumacher to appreciate the concept of appropriate technology, and a Masanobu Fukuoka to appreciate agriculture as a way of life and to be carried on without chemical fertilisers and with minimum disturbance of the soil. One of the consequences is that the present day Khadi and Village Industries network is walking the streets of the West in search of markets, and the production of sugar from the palm tree, is being accelerated so that it can be spread to the discerning in Europe and the U.S.A.; while it is mill-sugar, mill-flour, milled-rice, cloth made of synthetic fibre, chemical fertilisers in agricultural fields, and even the occasional ploughing by tractors which has become the routine even in the Gandhian ashrams. The prevalence of such a situation in other Indian institutions and the Indian home, even the homes of the elite, needs no elaboration.

In retrospect, the period from about 1919 (or perhaps from 1916 itself when Gandhiji's speech at the inaugural of the Benares Hindu University made the great Maharajas, the ruling elite, and Mrs Annie Besant walk out of the meeting-place as a protest against what he had said) to about 1945, or perhaps even till 1947, may possibly be treated in today's environment as a period of the great illusion. For, during this period of Indian innocence, large sections of the Indian people began to believe that they could at least build a world of their own; a world constructed according to their own concepts and ideas; and that perhaps they may then even be able to help the rest of the world to return to sanity. Even sceptics like Jawaharlal Nehru at certain moments seem to have fallen under such an illusion. And it is possible that many in the West, especially of the more reflective and imaginative type, also at times felt that India may have a relevant message, and may perhaps serve as a world model.

A similar belief about the possibility of an altogether new beginning, in continuity with the 1919 to 1945 period, seemed to have opened up, though only during a brief few days, at the end of March 1977, after the defeat of Shrimati Indira Gandhi, and the victory of the Janata combine under the inspiration of Shri Jayaprakash Narayan. But the habits and the assumptions of the past, built over several generations (during 1800 to 1919, and again during 1947 to 1977) asserted themselves and India reverted to its unthinking imitative role. This role benefits not even half percent of the Indian people, in European idiom, the officer class of India. It maintains their privileges, but is certainly

ruinous to the social as well as private lives of at least 80% of India's people. The initiative which seems to have reverted to the majority of India's people, during 1919 to 1945 when as early as 1928, 1929, 1930 the people of India are said to have become virtually free, was again largely snatched away from them after 1947, and what remained was allowed to erode in the flow of time.

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It is possible that an indigenous initiative (even in borrowing, appropriating, internalising, and thus transforming the borrowed to fit the Indian frame), has not been sustained in India in recent history. It is true that much damage was done to India by the aggression of people professing Islam— especially during the period A.D. 1100 to A.D. 1700. It certainly split Indian state and society apart in most of Northern India and the shock waves of it were felt in distant areas. Still, by the beginning of the 18th century, it is not the aggressor professing Islam who exercised effective political power in India, but such power was exercised by the Marathas over large areas of India and by the various Hindu Rajas in large parts of Karnataka, the Tamil and Malayalam areas, in coastal Andhra, in Orissa, in large tracts of Madhya Pradesh and in parts of Bengal. The Marathas as well as the Rajas failed, however, to consolidate their power. They were unable to reforge adequate links between state and society, and thus speedily lost to the Western onslaught. But it is not only in the 18th century that such a failure occurred. Even Vijayanagara, inspired and advised by Acharya Vidyaranya, and Shivaji, blessed and advised by Samarth Ramadas, do not seem to have done too well. Even going further back to the days of the Kauravas and Pandavas, to the great battle waged between them, the sum total result of the goading of the Pandavas to battle by the great Sri Krishna ultimately led to the total collapse of Indian civilisation, perhaps for millennia. Pillay Lokacharya, a 14th century Tamil author has stated that after the public disgrace suffered by Draupadi, Sri Krishna had decided to destroy the Pandavas, but desisted from doing so when he noticed Draupadi's *mangalsutra*. Yet the way Sri Krishna went about things did result not only in the destruction of the Kauravas, but in the destruction of the Pandavas too.

Incidentally, even more than Sri Krishna, it is Draupadi who seems to be the central character of the Mahabharata, a Draupadi who is believed to have passed through fire every time she stopped living with one Pandava brother to live with one of

the others. Her *pativrata* state (as is well-known, she is one of the five great Hindu *pativratas*), enabled her to pass through fire unscathed and come out without any blemish, or spot, pure as a virgin. Many of the so-called acts of post-1700 individual 'sati' (the word seems to have been used in the sense of a widow cremating herself with the body of her dead husband by the British in the late 18th and the early 19th century) perhaps are sort of reversion to the passing through fire of Draupadi and an enactment of what she is supposed to have done but in a wholly different context. While the acclaim of such 'sati' incidents by the unenlightened of the country-side and small towns and their condemnation by the moderners has relevance of their own, it will be appropriate that scholarly India tries to locate the possible roots of this practice, tries to comprehend the supposed passing through fire of Sita, Draupadi and others, and interpret their meaning and psychological consequences in the context of today. It may be recalled that practically every locality in India has a 'Devi' shrine, or temple; and every such 'Devi' is treated as a 'sati' in the original sense of the word by all those who are devoted to these shrines.

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By 1800, though many areas were still directly unaffected by British power, the mind and intellect of India seems to have bowed down to British power and accepted its superiority. That the British were devilishly crafty and clever had been noted in India from much earlier. Alivardikhan of Bengal expressed such a view in the 1750s; and Ranjit Singh, after being shown a political map of India, is said to have observed that the whole of the map will become red. Red was the colour of the areas under British rule. Warren Hastings had seen this decline of Indian confidence and intellect by 1780, if not earlier. And by 1790, William Jones, the British judge at Calcutta and known as the founder of Indology, had begun to claim that he knew the *sastras* better than even the great Pandits of Varanasi. On the decision of the Varanasi Pandits that the utmost punishment for a Brahmin was a black mark on the forehead and exile from his home region, William Jones stated that the *sastras* prescribed that the mark on the forehead was to be made by hot iron. Incidentally marking by hot iron was a British judicial practice till the mid-18th century. And if branding by hot iron was right and legitimate in Britain, it had to be right and legitimate in India too. Following such logic, as the British tenant cultivator had no



right over the land he cultivated and could be ejected at the will of the British landlord, it followed that the Indian peasant, who from time immemorial had inalienable hereditary possession of the land under his cultivation, could also similarly be ejected from his land at the will of the British-created landlord, or at the whim of the British Indian state. The Indian peasant, according to British rationale, could enjoy no higher rights than his counterpart in Britain.

The erosion of self-confidence and the defeat of the intellect, and the splitting of the elite from its own people (who alone could have given it any sort of spiritual or intellectual sustenance), naturally led to the imitation and adoption of British ideas and preferences. If William Wilberforce, the greatest Englishman of the 19th century and known as 'Father of the Victorians' thought that the Indians could only be leading ignorant and wretched lives 'without the blessings of Christian light and moral improvements', it had to be treated as true. Thus a completely new imagery developed about India. This imagery was given powerful literary garb by men like James Mill, one of the chief executives in the British Governance of India and the author of the voluminous *History of British India*. The black Englishman of Macaulay was already on the scene, and speedily being duplicated, much before Macaulay had anything to do with India. Some years before Macaulay's arrival in India, the British Governor General Bentinck expressed satisfaction that prosperous and leading Indians were giving up the feeding of Brahmins and beggars and instead had taken 'to the ostentatious entertainment of Europeans'. Not that all resistance to the British had ceased but the resistance of the elite was no longer against British ways and preferences but rather against the British habit of not allowing the Indians to have any share in the exercise of power. The Indian elite, of the 19th and the 20th century, by and large, merely desired that the British would function as the Mughals had done earlier on when men like Raja Man Singh, or Raja Todarmal were treated like Mughal nobles and governors and were given important roles in the maintenance of imperial Mughal rule over the people of northern and western India. This attitude of the Indian elite, even of many of those who called themselves 'sipahis' of Mahatma Gandhi continued more or less uninterruptedly till the time when Britain decided, or was persuaded, to transfer power to Indian hands.

It is in such a context that, as time passed, the Indian elite began to look at India through British eyes. Indians began to be

seen as wretched and ignorant the way they had appeared to William Wilberforce, or to James Mill, or to Macaulay, or to Karl Marx. To Karl Marx, the commencement of Indian misery lay 'in an epoch even more remote than the Christian creation of the world'. He stated that in spite of 'whatever may have been the crimes of England' in India, England was the unconscious tool of History' in bringing about what Marx so anxiously looked forward to: India's Westernisation. Even Indian scriptures, the *smritis*, the text on law, the scholarly works had to pass through the intellectual and spiritual sieves of Europe. What ever received approbation or approval had to be accompanied with suitably selected commentaries and newer interpretations. It was not only the ostentatious entertainment of Europeans which henceforth became the aspiration of the Indian elite, but the readings of the approved and acclaimed Indian texts; and even more so, an uncritical attachment to the philosophies, theories and literature of Great Britain became the new opium of the Indian elite. That this is no exaggeration is evident from continued Indian fascination not only with Plato and Aristotle, or the Roman historians, but even with Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, Bishop Berkeley, John Stuart Mill, or men like Bertrand Russell.

Naturally, all this had to result in movements like the Brahmo Samaj, and its various other versions in different parts of India; the long lasting fascination of the Indian elite with theosophy, a new variant of the ancient Masonic orders of Western Europe; and with the various ideologies which have come out of Europe in the past century and a half. Even when we wished to be patriotic, or wished to hark back to the past, the medium and the guide had to be the discipline of Indology or Orientalism, or some foreign traveller from the West or the East, who had happened to live in or pass through India since the time of the Greek adventurer Alexander.

In such a situation, the Indian elite's response to the loss of freedom began to be couched in a Western idiom. Hence the Westernised pronouncements of patriots like Ram Mohan Roy (Monstuart Elphinstone regretted that Ram Mohan Roy was presenting himself as too much of a *firangi*) of Keshav Chandra Sen, of the illustrious Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, of Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar, or of the Indologist Rajendralal Mitra. To each one of them, the European and British intervention in India seemed a divine boon. It is possible that in comparison to what they had learnt about the oppressions of the Muslim rulers, mostly either through hearsay, or through European

compiled accounts, the British rule looked like the rule of angels: tranquility and order prevailed and the men of property felt secure from one generation to another.

Such men perhaps had also begun to believe in the theory of the common origin of the Indo-European peoples; and in their own way, even before Frederic William Max Mueller, had begun to look forward to the day when these long parted cousins could join hands in some shared common enterprise. Explaining his works, Max Mueller had mentioned to Gladstone, many times prime minister of Great Britain, that what he was trying to do was to bring together some 1800 years after Jesus of Nazareth, those who had got separated around 1800 years before Jesus' birth.

It was not only those given to social reform or to the spread of education, or dedicated to what is called an Indian renaissance (based ironically on Western and British guidelines) who became the promoters of European knowledge (sacred or profane) in India and dependent on Western goodwill. Those attracted by Western science and technology (not of the time of nuclear power, or of flights to the moon, etc., but of a time when steam power ruled and children of 10 or less worked long hours in British industry and electricity and the internal combustion engine had yet to make an appearance) also began to think of promoting and extending Western science and technology in India. The British, however, seem to have looked at this promotion differently. The Governor of Bengal, Richard Temple, felt that the diversion to science from law, public administration, prose, literature, etc., required to be welcomed, as in the field of practical science the Indians 'must feel their utter inferiority to us.'

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It is in such an age that Vivekananda and his *guru-bhais* received their nurture and their education. They were all students of Calcutta colleges— a far greater accomplishment and privilege in those days than now. Their close contact with Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a turning point in the life of each of them and perhaps even more so in the life of Vivekananda than of the others.

Though a product of the same 19th century Bengal Bhadrak environment, Vivekananda was in many respects very different to the older and more wellknown men of the Bengal renaissance.

We see intense patriotism in every facet of Vivekananda's life and works. He also had a deep grounding in the *sastras*. He also seems to have been much superior in intellectual rigour, in sensitivity to India's problems, and with a natural empathy, with the poor, the down-trodden, and the oppressed in India.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa passed away on 15 August 1886. Four years later, on 26th May 1890, Vivekananda wrote a long letter to Sri Pramadadas Mitra, an elder, wealthy and respected devotee of Sri Ramakrishna who had been living in Varanasi. In it he said:

For various reasons, the body of Bhagavan Ramakrishna had to be consigned to fire. There is no doubt that this act was very blameable. The remains of his ashes are now preserved, and if they be now properly enshrined somewhere on the banks of the Ganga, I presume we shall be able in some measure to expiate the sin lying on our heads. These sacred remains, his seat, and his picture are every day worshipped in our Math in proper forms and it is known to you that a brother disciple of mine, of Brahmin parentage, is occupied day and night with the task. The expenses of the worship used also to be borne by the two great souls mentioned above...

What greater regret can there be than this that no memorial could yet be raised in this land of Bengal in the very neighbourhood of the place where he lived his life of Sadhana (spiritual struggle)– he by whose birth the race of Bengali's has been sanctified, the land of Bengal has become hallowed, he who came on earth to save the Indians from the spell of the worldly glamour of Western culture and who therefore chose most of his all-renouncing disciples from university men?...

The two gentlemen mentioned above had a strong desire to have some land purchased on the banks of the Ganga and see the sacred remains enshrined on it, with the disciples living there together; and Suresh Babu had offered a sum of Rs.1,000 for the purpose, promising to give more, but for some inscrutable purpose of God he left this world last night! And the news of Balaram Babu's death is already known to you...

It is impossible with a sum of Rs.1,000 to secure land and raise a temple near Calcutta. Some such land would at least cost about five to seven thousands...

You remain now the only friend and patron of Shri. Ramakrishna's disciples. In the North-Western Province, (i.e., Uttar Pradesh) great indeed is your fame, your position and your circle of acquaintance. I request you to consider, if you feel like it, the propriety of your getting the affair through by raising subscriptions from well-to-do pious men known to you in your province. If you deem it proper to have some shelter erected on the banks of the Ganga in Bengal for Bhagavan Ramakrishna's sacred remains and for his disciples, I shall with your leave report myself to you, and I have not the slightest qualm to beg from door to door for this noble cause, for the sake of my Lord and his children. Please give this proposal your best thoughts with prayers to Vishvanatha. To my mind, if all these sincere, educated, youthful Sanyasins of good birth fail to live up to the ideals of Shri Ramakrishna owing to want of an abode and help, then alas for our country...

If you ask, 'You are a Sanyasin, so why do you trouble over these desires?'- I would then reply, I am Ramakrishna's servant, and I am willing even to steal and rob, if by doing so I can perpetuate his name in the land of his birth and Sadhana (spiritual practice) and help even a little his disciples to practise his great ideals. I know you to be my closest in kinship, and I lay my mind bare to you. I have returned to Calcutta for this reason...

If you argue that it is better to have the plan carried out in some place like Kashi, my point is, as I have told you, it would be the greatest pity if the memorial shrine could not be raised in the land of his birth and Sadhana! The condition of Bengal is pitiable. The people here cannot even dream what renunciation truly means- luxury and sensuality have been so much eating into the vitals of the race.

It seems that Sri Pramadas Mitra did not send an encouraging reply. This seems to have caused profound unhappiness to Vivekananda. The issue was indeed painful. No doubt that by then Bengal had been rendered impoverished and destitute for a considerable time. But the fact that no resources could be raised for erecting a memorial for a person, whom many influential persons such as Keshav Chandra Sen, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Isan Chandra Mukhopadhyaya, Balaram Bose, Shambhunath Mallick, Man Mohan Mallick and many others, used to frequent, is clearly an instance not of material impoverishment but of mental and spiritual impoverishment of society.

It may perhaps be claimed that in reality Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa in his own life time was not all that famous a person in Bengal, and his following, except for a dozen or a score of young men, was hardly worth counting; But it is more reasonable to grant that the extent of our mental and spiritual impoverishment was such that no substantial resources could then really be raised even for Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's memorial.

This response obviously shook Vivekananda. To know the cause of such a state and to know his country better, he set about travelling through India. From then on he was on the move continuously. Wherever he went, he received love and respect. But he did not receive, perhaps he did not even seek, any substantial financial help. Then he reached Kanyakumari and meditated on the now celebrated Vivekananda Rock. After some weeks he dreamed that Sri Ramakrishna was beckoning him from amidst the ocean. This became the signal for his foreign travel.

Actually the World Congress of Religions at Chicago was not the reason why Swami Vivekananda set forth abroad. The reason was very different, much larger and serious. He wanted to acquaint himself with the functioning of other societies. He saw the prosperity of Europe and America, their power and organisation. He saw their vigour and was very impressed. His numerous letters give detailed and poetic description of his impression. These letters reveal his intense love for India, his understanding of India and of the world, and his sorrow at India's material and spiritual impoverishment. He wrote to Alasinga Perumal on 6th March 1895: 'Do not for a moment think the "Yankees" are practical in religion. In that the Hindu alone is practical, the Yankee in money-making, so that as soon as I depart, the whole thing will disappear. Therefore I want to have a solid ground under my feet before I depart. Every work should be made thorough' and added, 'Work on, my brave boys. We shall see the light some day.'

In the above we can see the profound anguish and sensitivity of Vivekananda as also his love for India. From his own personal experiences, he arrived at the conclusion that India's regeneration is possible only when we can muster outside help both in money and men (and women) for the cause. It is thus that the initial growth of the Ramakrishna Mission took place with foreign financial resources.

While Vivekananda had deeply immersed himself in Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, he was also able to see the

practicality of things– what was to be discussed and in which forum and how. So in the West he propagated Sri Ramakrishna's teachings via rational formulations. As he clearly stated in a letter to a fellow disciple:

There is no gain in hastening my return from this country. In the first place, a little sound made here will resound there a great deal. Then, the people of this country are immensely rich and are bold enough to pay. While the people of our country have neither money nor the least bit of boldness.

Earlier, on 29th September 1894, he wrote to Alasinga Perumal:

Our field is India, and the value of foreign appreciation is in rousing India up. That is all...We must have a strong base from which to spread...Do not for a moment quail. Everything will come all right. It is will that moves the world.

You need not be sorry my son, on account of the young men becoming Christians. What else can they be under the existing social bondages, especially in Madras? Liberty is the first condition of growth. Your ancestors gave every liberty to the soul, and religion grew. They put the body under every bondage and society did not grow. The opposite is the case in the West– every liberty to society, none to religion. Now are falling off the shackles from the feet of Eastern society as from those of Western religion.

Each again will have its type; the religious or introspective in India, the scientific or out-seeing in the West. The West wants every bit of spirituality through social improvement. The East wants every bit of social power through spirituality. Thus it was that the modern reformers saw no way to reform but by first crushing out the religion of India. They tried and they failed. Why? Because few of them ever studied their own religion, and not one ever underwent the training necessary to understand the Mother of all religions. I claim that no destruction of religion is necessary to improve the Hindu society, and that this state of society exists not on account of religion, but because religion has not been applied to society as it should have been. This I am ready to prove from our old books, every word of it. This is what I teach, and this is what we must struggle all our lives to carry out. But it will take time, a long time to study. Have patience and work. Save yourself by yourself.

In his letter of 6th April 1897 to the scholarly editor of 'Bharati', Shrimati Sarala Ghosal, he wrote:

It has been for the good of India that religious preaching in the West has been and will be done. It has ever been my conviction that we shall not be able to rise unless the Western people come to our help. In this country, no appreciation of merit can yet be found, no financial strength, and what is most lamentable of all, there is not a bit, of practicality...I have experienced even in my insignificant life that good motives, sincerity, and infinite love can conquer the world. One single soul possessed of these virtues can destroy the dark designs of millions of hypocrites and brutes...I only want to show that our well-being is impossible without men and money coming from the West.

In this way, Swami Vivekananda brought money and inspired men and women to come from abroad. Miss Margaret Noble, or Bhagini Nivedita, was one of those. We find that Bhagini Nivedita later helped the eminent scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose in editing his works; she also helped and translated some of the works of Brajendranath Seal. The conclusion from all this is that our bhadrakal had totally lost the capacity to identify the capacities and talents of this society and take them forward. No healthy society in the world would dream of achieving functionality and regenerating its creativity with foreign help.

Vivekananda had a great deal of confidence in India's men and women. However, even he could not escape from being seriously affected by whatever image and model, that the newly educated class had already built, of our society: the age-long deprivation, wretchedness and ignorance of our ordinary people.

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This image of India was not its own traditional self-image; nor had it any relation with historical facts. However, such an image was deliberately built up during the 19th century by the efforts and encouragement of the British; of theoreticians of the West; and through the policies and institutions initiated by the British Indian State. The newly emergent elite in Bengal, as also many others, were instrumental in taking this image forward. For instance, Ram Mohan Roy was opposed tooth and nail to the idea that modern learning and science be learnt through the



medium of Sanskrit and other Indian languages. He somehow had been convinced that these Indian languages could be the vehicle only of ancient codes and speculations on the world beyond; and that Western knowledge could only be learnt through languages of the West. This was indeed a peculiar position. The Westerners themselves obtained knowledge of India and the East in their own languages; but India was to learn the knowledge of the West only through the language of the West. Surely, behind such a view, was a feeling of deep contempt for the Indian languages, the Indian intellect and the Indian people. Of course this is not to imply that people like Ram Mohan Roy had any hatred for the Indian people, or lacked patriotism. Quite possibly they had been lured by the power of the West, and felt that India's salvation lay in becoming like the West. Only their understanding of the West lacked any depth.

Around 1880, Keshav Chandra Sen declared in England:

If you look at India today you will no doubt find widespread idolatry, a system of caste such as cannot be witnessed elsewhere, social and domestic institutions of an injurious character, and prejudices, error, superstition and ignorance prevailing to a most appalling extent.

Around 1900, Rabindranath Tagore wrote:

Our country having lost its links with the inmost truths of its being, struggled under a crushing load of unreason, in abject slavery to circumstances. In social usage, in politics, in the realm of religion and art, we had entered the zone of uncreative habit, a decadent tradition, and ceased to exercise our humanity.

The promotion and extension of an intellectual climate with a peculiar combination of self-pity, self-condemnation and at the same time decrying the self-image of India in the fulfillment of European goals thus became, perhaps inadvertently, the job of men like Rabindranath Tagore. Such promotion ultimately led to the growth and duplication of Westernised personalities like that of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

Due to their faith in theories of the progressive evolution of consciousness, persons like Jawaharlal Nehru, saw the highest stage of thought in the Western thinkers and the highest stage of society in Western society. Hence, it was that the education organised by the British was, for Jawaharlal Nehru, the only possible route to knowledge and virtue. He, therefore, could argue that there can be neither virtue nor knowledge amongst our

villagers amongst whom the new education system had not spread. So he conceived that a major function of the state, with him at the helm, and run by Western educated Indians (though their Westernisation may have belonged to Europe's 19th century), was to liberate the crores of Indians from a state of ignorance and moral degeneration; and convert them into the sort of people cherished by William Wilberforce or Karl Marx.

While our newly emergent elite responded to the loss of freedom by seeking much deeper enslavement as the sole means of liberation, the larger Indian society reacted in an opposite way: trying to keep its cultural symbols and ideals as its beacon, while repeatedly organising itself. The 1857 resistance to British rule was one effort of this sort. Between 1880 and 1894, there was a major cow-protection movement in India, especially in the northern and central regions. A widespread net work of cow-protection sabhas were established in which Hindus, Muslims as well as Christians, the wealthy as well as the poor, men as well as women, young and old, all were actively involved. The movement was described by the British Viceroy as dangerous as the events of 1857-1858. The British Queen was of the opinion that the movement was aimed against the British, and not against the Muslims. The larger Indian society had been relentlessly striving to express itself using forms and symbols which were linked to its own civilisational spirit and consciousness. In these efforts, one does not see any trace of a feeling of contempt for, or dejection with Indian institutions, the Indian way of life, or Indian ideas.

In Mahatma Gandhi, there was no trace of any contempt or dejection for things Indian. So the whole of India arose as one man under his leadership. The views of Mahatma Gandhi on India were fundamentally different from those of the modern educated Indians. Gandhiji's view was that the larger Indian society had great merit; and in spite of there being several evil tendencies and distortions, it had great internal strength and capacity. If ordinary people could be provided with necessary and adequate resources for organising themselves and giving expression to their own priorities, they can then once again build a great civilisation- as they had been doing for thousands of years. He agreed that there may still be some quarrels and disturbances periodically, some ups and downs, some internal conflicts and animosities, and some amount of injustice- but all this would be considered improper (*adharma*) as violating accepted norms and will by the people themselves be severely condemned and

restrained. It seemed to him therefore necessary that the larger Indian society should again be put in possession of adequate resources, which it had at least partially retained even during Islamic rule, but of which it was totally deprived of during British rule. Gandhiji had full confidence in the capacity of the Indian people and India's resources, and based on this perspective as well as his own unparalleled organisational skill, he was able to mobilise a nation-wide movement.

We thus see that during the time of British rule, there had been two different responses to the loss of freedom and enslavement of our society. One was the response of the larger Indian society of which Gandhiji was the exemplary leader. The other response was from the powerful and elite classes who, in spite of the call, exhortations, and charisma of Swami Vivekananda were getting more and more estranged from the wider Indian society and who became the carriers of a prolonged habit of total surrender and subservience to most conquerors. It is clear that the clash of the larger Indian society which sought freedom (*swaraj*) was not with this elite; it was with the conquering Western civilisation.

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## II

### INDIAN SELF-IMAGE, FUTURE PROSPECTS AND EXPLORATION OF POSSIBILITIES

We have dealt elsewhere in detail with certain aspects of Indian life and society around two hundred years ago, about the time when India began to be systematically conquered by Great Britain. The data indicate that in terms of social functioning, infrastructural arrangements, and the quality of ordinary life, India did not seem to be doing too badly during the period. And perhaps the life of the ordinary citizen, i.e. of about 80% of the Indian people, was in many ways both as regards their consumption and their habitats was superior then, than it has been during the last century and a half. An eminent economist has recently estimated that the wages of an agricultural labourer in Chengalpattu around 1795 was around Rs.7.50 per day while the wages of a similar labourer in 1975 was only Rs.2.50, both wages being calculated at 1975 prices. Also, the data indicate better supra-local arrangements. If the indication of this data were followed through by further research, it may be found that in a social cultural sense, our society had better organisational linkages than it has had since then. The data perhaps also suggests that militarily in comparison to the West, this was a weak society; and that, therefore, it did not have any strong urges towards systematic organised innovation, or any particular fascination with the concept of progress.

Though most of our major historical personalities of the 19th century and even of the early 20th seem to have had little inkling of such being the structure of our society, Mahatma Gandhi did seem to have some acquaintance with its general functioning. Much of it is indicated in *Hind Swaraj* though it is true that the picture which *Hind Swaraj* provides is rather too idealised and utopian. But then *Hind Swaraj* was essentially a polemical document and was aimed at contrasting the civilization of India with the civilization of the modern West.

However, when it came to concretising the basic frame of this earlier Indian model, Gandhiji did try to convey it through various means. One of the earliest, and perhaps the most major, way of concretising the earlier Indian structural arrangement was in the constitution of the Indian National Congress. The Congress was given a popular base, and its units were organised

on the basis of locality, linguistic region, and the country as a whole. When asked in 1931, in London, how a free India would be organised, Gandhiji had said that this had already been indicated in the 1920 constitution of the Congress. In January 1930, Gandhiji spelled out, in the independence pledge, the great damage done to India by British rule. The pledge stated that India had been ruined by the British not only politically and economically, but also culturally and spiritually. A year later, in March 1931, the Congress adopted the resolution on the national objectives of the freedom movement, spelling out what India would do when she became free.

By 1938, freedom seemed to be not too distant. The more western-minded leaders of India— political, academic, industrial— began to contemplate planning for the future. One of the results of this was the National Planning Committee of the National Congress, appointed by then Congress President Subash Chandra Bose, and presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru. The main committee had 15-20 members, including academics and leaders of Indian industry. It constituted about 30 sub-committees, which dealt with a variety of subjects. Over 200 persons, a few of them still prominent in today's Indian public life, were associated with the work of the national planning committee. The reports of the main committee, as also of the sub-committees, were published around 1947, consisting of some 30-35 volumes. Today, we can clearly see that the main stress in these reports is on economics; the direction, western-modern; the approach, largely mechanical and cliché-ridden; and on the whole, the product is largely shoddy. We must, however, also remember that most of the work was done at a rather difficult period, with the president and many of the members of the committee being in prison most of the time during 1940-1945.

During some particular deliberations of the Cottage Industries sub-committee of the main body, held at Wardha, around September 1939, Gandhiji is said to have consented to a programme of modern industrialisation, provided that the promotion and extension of cottage industry went hand in hand with modern industrial development; that 'India was definitely not to depend on foreign loans for development'; that all money, private as well as public, was mobilised for this purpose; that 'a certain standard of living had to be defined as the objective'; and that both the modern industrial plan as well as the plan of cottage industry 'approximated to each other within a comparable measure of time.'

Earlier on, in 1934, while initiating the village industries movement, he had written: 'If the villagers had enough to eat and clothe themselves with, there would be no cause for home-grinding or home-husking, assuming that the question of health was not of any importance, or if it was, there was no difference between home-ground flour and mill-ground, or home-husked rice and mill-husked.' Still earlier, in 1925, he told someone from the Punjab, that 'in the present state of India, anything like a universal introduction of electric power in our villages, is an utterly impracticable proposition', but he had added, 'that time may come.' Incidentally, during 1922-23, but at the time when he was in prison, *Young India*, Gandhiji's weekly, had envisaged a militia of one crore of men when India was wholly free. There can be little doubt that this had been written in accordance with Gandhiji's general ideas on the practical and the feasible.

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It is natural that the question, of the organisation, structures, institution, and economy of India when it regained its freedom and initiative must have been discussed in various forums, by various people, from the early years of the present century. How extensive and deep such discussions were, and what were the various values and concepts on which the future structures were to be erected, can only be known through an intensive research into the thought and experience of this period as well as into the thought and experience of the 19th century which preceded it. Like an untold number of other crucial tasks, this task also has yet to be initiated.

In 1945, the Congress Working Committee (i.e. the chief executive body of the Congress, though perhaps not its brain trust or think-tank) seems to have deliberated on the shape of things in the free India. Though no records of the discussions seem to be available yet, it seems that it was somewhat heated and perhaps even acrimonious. An idea of it comes through a letter of Gandhiji to Jawaharlal Nehru. In his letter of October 2nd, 1945, Gandhiji said: 'I take first the sharp difference of opinion that has arisen between us. If such a difference really exists, people should also know about it, for the work of Swaraj will suffer if they are kept in the dark.' Gandhiji wanted a public discussion on this point, perhaps not only in the All India Congress Committee (the general body of the Congress), but also in the country at large.

Such a discussion did not suit Jawaharlal Nehru and perhaps many others who had cast their lot with western modernism and with the British structures and institutions which had existed and had been running India for nearly two centuries. He therefore wrote to Gandhiji: 'How far it is desirable for the Congress to consider these fundamental questions, involving varying philosophies of life it is for you to judge. I would imagine that a body like the Congress should not lose itself in arguments on such matters which can only produce great confusion in people's minds resulting in inability to act in the present'; he added, as a sort of warning: 'This may also result in creating barriers between the Congress and others in the country.' In his normal equivocal manner, Nehru tried to retract this by adding that, 'ultimately of course this and other questions will have to be decided by representatives of free India.'

From 1946 to 1949, the representatives of free India did meet in a Constituent Assembly. But practically on every point they were faced with a *fait accompli*. Various expert committees of course had been set up to help draft the constitution. But most members of these were occupied otherwise. Therefore, the draft of the constitution was a mish-mash of the existing British frame-work of Indian governance, and of bits and pieces picked up and joined to it from the countries of Europe and the United States of America. Heated debates took place on various aspects of the draft prepared by the Law Minister and the Constitutional Adviser, both mentally westernised to an extreme degree. But nothing much could be altered as regards the basic framework, because doing so would have delayed the adoption of a new constitution beyond a previously decided deadline for its completion.

The constraint of the date was in fact brought to the notice of the President of the Constituent Assembly by the Constitutional Adviser when a heated debate took place on the basic unit of the new polity— whether it should be a locality or a habitat (as was the historical Indian practice), or it should be the adult individual as obtained in the Western world. With such a sacred constraint— much like the still current constraint of the astrologically forecast auspicious moment for this and that— no basic alteration could be made in the draft. Additions, etc., of course, were made; but these only added to the bulk of the Articles and the paper on which these were printed; making the Constitution fool-proof: i.e., completely irrelevant with regard to any major transformation in the Indian polity by constitutional

means. Inadvertently, the exercise made the Indian political system even more frozen and unworkable than it already was during British Rule.

The assurance of Jawaharlal Nehru that 'ultimately of course this and other questions will have to be decided by representatives of free India' turned out to be a mere eye-wash. Perhaps it was so intended. But whatever the intention, the consequences were the take-over of India by the westernised elite, and actually an elite whose familiarity of the West was merely limited to the 19th century West— for which Nature was an enemy, rationalism its god, and never-ending exploitation of physical resources the supreme goal. Further, even this acquaintance was largely superficial and couched in the rhetoric and clichés of the 19th century. The result: the political and administrative institutions of India and its basic scientific and technological concepts and knowledge, or its over-riding philosophical, political and economic ideas seldom moved beyond the European ideas of the early 20th century. These would be wholly incomprehensible today to most of the present day young men and women of Britain, from whose immediate ancestors these ideas were derived.

The results in most fields: wholly disastrous. I may add here that the Education Ministry of the Government of India did, in fact, a great service to India— the only service which it perhaps has ever done— when it produced the 1985 document, 'Challenge of Education'. This reviews the state of Indian education. I personally have little doubt, and I think many of you will agree with me, that if such reviews were done for other departments of government also— whether at the national or state levels— the findings will be similar to those of the education review; and governmental functioning even in Karnataka will be found nearly as dismal as in Delhi, or in most of the other states— with the exception of my own state of Uttar Pradesh, which will as usual occupy the bottom place.

It is only because of the ingenuity, the relative perseverance, and the robustness of our ordinary people, many of whom somehow make do without adequate shelter, or clothing, or even water, that we still survive as a people and as a civilisation. We (educated Indians) do not seem to much like whatever they do: the festivals and the fire-walking that they celebrate; the occasional unclad trance-dancing they resort to, despite all the obstacles we (the elite) put in their way, and the various other things which unknown to us are intimate parts of their lives. All these show, however, that they still are grounded in the soil of



India; and can be expected to see it emerge into a more worthwhile future notwithstanding our own alienation, indifference, and high-handedness.

But it is not only those who are directly tied to the Indian state system— the number of such persons adds up to about three crores, though only less than two lakhs of them have any say in decision-making or in actual control of others— the many lakhs who work in the social and cultural field in non-governmental capacities seem to have done little better. Many such persons are my friends; in fact I am no different from them. In a larger sense, we have become peripheral to the needs of Indian civilisation and society; unwittingly we have become the instruments of the erosion of Indian values and institutions. In fact, we have become even more tied than those serving the state to alien ideas and practices of all types. Though we may perform many tasks more economically and even with greater compassion, the psychological, mental and material chasm between us and our people is no less wide than it was say before 1920, or as described by Swami Vivekananda nearly a century ago.

The surrounding climate has so blunted our senses that even as patriotic and sacred and well run a place as the Vivekananda Kendra is unable to escape the effect of this alien environment. Situated in Tamilnadu within a mile of the famous rock and the ancient temple of Kanyakumari, we find in this centre of patriotism, the language of discourse— instead of being Tamil or Hindi— has become English; the verses on the walls of the meditation hall are in English; the captions to the exhibits on Vivekananda are in English alone, and even the medium of instruction for the little children in the excellent Kendra school is English. It is understandable why Hindi cannot be the sole language in these matters at the Kendra. But it is incomprehensible, at least to me— I know I am rather short-sighted in these matters— why Tamil could not have been adopted instead of English, or at least given first preference; and English or Hindi used to supplement Tamil. If this can happen at Vivekananda Kendra, it is little wonder that even villages or small towns which lie on the side of motor roads are proudly displaying that these villages possess one or more English-medium schools.

Personally, I have nothing against English, even to its becoming the *lingua-franca* of India if such is the considered national decision. Nor have I in a similar situation anything against the total westernisation of India in the western idiom of the present; not of course in the idiom of 19th century West; or in the

idiom of Plato or Aristotle. But do we have the vigour, perseverance and capacity to devote ourselves deliberately and persistently to transform India into a functioning Western state and society? So far there are no such signs. We do not even actually aspire to do so, not even those who daily moan about the rise of superstition and fundamentalism in India, and about the decline of the scientific temper, rationality, and the Indian brand of secularism. Their disorientation and alienation has become such or the dazzle of the West is so attractive, that quite possibly if pushed a little harder most of this gentry will start queuing at United States consulates and similar other foreign sanctuaries, to represent that Westernised Indians have become victims of political discrimination and that they should be given refuge. If there were opportunities many of them may ask for some similar facilities from the USSR, or from the Arab Emirates, or from the other softer areas of the Arab World. One can only hope that their own efforts as well as time will cure them and bring them back to a state of Indianness. It is not that many of them lack talent or conviction. For their own good and for the good of India, it would be better if their talent and conviction were expressed in an Indian context, and not in a supposedly empty void.

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To gain some perspective and to understand our dilemma, we need to look at other countries. What happened in some of them when they were faced with somewhat similar issues? In search of answers, we can examine 19th century North America: where violence, stark individualism, cut-throat competition for increasingly acquired or discovered resources, and indifference to those who lost the race must have been rampant. But then white North America commanded vast resources, especially after it had virtually eliminated the indigenous peoples- who for the whole of the Americas are currently estimated at 90 to 112 millions at the time of Columbus (A.D. 1492)- a larger number than the total population of Europe at that time.

We can also look at 19th century Great Britain, whose physical resources were vastly poorer, but then Britain dominated most of the world in the 19th century. The other country we can look at, admired by many of us for nearly a century, even by Swami Vivekananda when he had a brief halt there in his first trip to the USA in 1893. That country is Japan.

Following the conversion of half a million of its people to Christianity by the Jesuits in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, Japan closed its frontiers to people from Europe for over two centuries. It is only around 1860 that it reopened itself to the Western world. In the intervening 200 years, it is claimed that Japan kept a very limited contact with the Dutch (which served as a sort of photographic camera aperture, through which Japan could concentratedly take note of what interested it and yet not be distracted by being exposed to what did not interest it).

Soon after Japan resumed links with the West around 1860, it sent some of its young men to the countries of the West. One of them, Maeda Masana, who went to France in 1869, felt very depressed for many months. Seeing Paris's splendour, he felt that Japan would never be able to match it. But soon after the Franco-German War, France seemed to be in shambles and had to rebuild itself again. While the happening itself must have made him sad, somehow his spirits picked up, and from then on Masana could write: 'I felt confidence in our ability to achieve what the West achieved.'

He returned to Japan in 1878, and became one of the chief architects of *Kogyo Iken*: Japan's ten-year plan, completed in 1884 in thirty volumes. Discussing the various constituents which were required to make such a plan functional, the document stated:

Which requirement should be considered as most important in the present efforts of the government in building Japanese industries. It can be neither capital nor laws and regulations, because both are dead things in themselves and totally ineffective. The spirit/willingness sets both capital and regulations in motion...If we assign to these three factors with respect to their effectiveness, spirit/willingness should be assigned five parts, laws and regulations four, and capital no more than one part.

With this spirit and willingness, Japan made rapid strides in science and technology and emerged as a powerful nation. It may be worthwhile to recapitulate the impressions Japan made less than 40 years after the launching of the ten-year plan, on an eminent American inventor and engineer, Elmer Sperry in 1922. The following sums up what Sperry thought:

Sperry left Japan in November with strong impressions of the country's rapid strides in technology. At a time when many Americans thought of Japan as imitative and second rate, Sperry's keen and experienced eye saw the unmistakable signs of technological excellence and maturity. Later, he carried this message to the worldwide engineering fraternity, which was also ill-informed about Japanese technology. Sperry had been especially impressed by two large dockyards, one of which he judged to be four times larger than any in America. He admired the systematic layout and operation of the yard, where they take in Swedish pig-iron at one end of the place (only it happens to be the middle) and put out a 33,000 ton battleship at the other end. He observed that America had only two model ship basins for scientific experiments but that Japan had four. In Japan he also saw superior machine tools which were, he knew, the essence of precision manufacture and represented a heavy capital investment. He judged a Japanese-built, horizontal milling machine and a forging press to be larger than any in America. In a decade when the construction of high-voltage electrical transmission networks, or grids, was a sign of advanced technology, Sperry found the Japanese construction of the finest kind, better than that he had seen in America.

He also heard that the Japanese had three times more high tension transmission lines per capita than the United States. The Japanese were no longer dependent upon the import of complex materials and machines such as generators, turbines and armor plate.

What spirit/willingness can do is even more apparent when we see today's Japan. This seems to be a Universal law. It had been recognised in India also. According to our traditional wisdom also, the spirit is the deciding factor in the fulfillment of a goal, and not the tools. The goals are of course determined by the basic character of a civilisation. The emergence of European dominance must have also arisen from this factor of spirit/willingness. When Europe started its outward journey, it was not particularly advanced in education, science, technology, agriculture, etc., in comparison to other societies. But it was able in time to dominate the whole world, in keeping with its basic character, due to its spirit and will-power. It developed its institutions to fulfill this goal, and could consolidate the necessary resources later.

A similar spirit and will-power seemed to be present when Mahatma Gandhi started to harness the energies of our society. At that time, our self-image was at its lowest ebb; all our resources had been confiscated, resulting in widespread deprivation and helplessness. He created the necessary organisational framework, so that society could move towards the goals of *swaraj* and self-governance.

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Some scholars have suggested that Ram Mohan Roy, with his enthusiasm for westernisation– what Elphinstone called his *Firangee-ness*– was, in fact, coining a strategy of countering the dominance of the West. As far as he was concerned, it may well be so, and the idea needs deeper examination. But as events unfolded, what he may have intended got wholly ignored. Those who drew inspiration from him or his written words were led to leave their own idols in order to worship the varied idols of the West. Even such worship, done with understanding, could conceivably have been to the good of India, and thus of humanity. But it lacked understanding: caught in the softer phraseology and idiom of the West, it failed to get an inkling of the West's hard core, which had lasted for over two thousand years, and had acquired great sophistication during that period.

Coming as he did from late 19th century Bengal and nurtured and educated in urban Bengal's environment, it was natural that Vivekananda was often unable to link the strength and generosity of the ordinary people with their potential capacities. Not that he did not meet with great generosity in different parts of India, even from amongst the poorest Indian. Many such incidents in Rajasthan, in South India, etc., are graphically described in the various biographies written on him. Fired with a sense of great mission, and perhaps aware from an early age that he was not to live long, he naturally was in a great hurry. And so his conclusion that in India 'no appreciation of merit can yet be found, no financial strength and what is most lamentable of all, not a bit of practicality.' This led logically to the belief that 'our well-being is impossible without men and money coming from the West.' If he had lived longer, say as long as Gandhiji lived, he perhaps might have come to realise that it is not only the educated and the prosperous to whom one has to address oneself. Given a certain sense of communion and an ability to communicate, in words or even in silence, with the poor and down-trodden, it was possible to generate courage, strength,

practicality as well as resources from the deprived and down-trodden as well. Such communication with the deprived and the down-trodden as a consequence would have brought many of the educated and the prosperous to become participants in the new *Yagna*.

It was left to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi to take up this new task. Coming as he did from the rugged and more enterprising people of Kathiawar, his links with the relatively uncorrupted past of his people was obviously stronger. Grounded in this past, at a more confident and youthful age, he could see through the life of the West more clearly and with fewer blinkers. If he had decided to continue living in Britain, or taken to a legal practice in Bombay, it is quite possible that even his judgement of the West would have got blurred as time passed. But life in white-dominated South Africa made his previous impressions of the West sharper, and his earlier conclusions confirmed.

It is possible that this acquaintance with the West in England and then in South Africa also made him understand the real nature of the working of western authoritarianism, in one garb or another. This understanding helped him to appreciate the plight and subjugation of the ordinary Western man of the late 19th century and early 20th century. Such reflections, as well as his long close contact with the ordinary and poor Indians settled in South Africa, helped him to forge the close links he had (from about 1916 onwards) with the deprived and down-trodden in practically every nook and corner of this vast land of Bharatvarsha.

The British rulers, from around 1909, or at least from 1918- when Gilbert Murray's article on Gandhiji appeared in the Hibbert journal- had realised that this man had understood what made the West tick. Such understanding implied that, given his organisational interests and skills, he not only had the potential of a great Indian following, but also an international appeal. His being acclaimed as the new Christ from New York in 1920, or 1921, and the warm and applauding reception he had from the unemployed men and women workers of Lancashire's textile industry, in 1931, seem to well illustrate this international appeal.

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Despite the fact that Franklin D. Roosevelt, in 1942, had wanted India to stay in the Western sphere of influence, or Clement Attlee, again in 1942, had thought that in spite of any exploitation, etc., which Britain might have practised in India, the British on the whole could be proud of their moral mission in India, and despite the admiration of many Indians, including Jawaharlal Nehru, for British institutions and civilisation, it was still possible till about May 1946 for India to have opted for a wholly different path. During the Indo-British negotiations, of April-June 1946, the British at the highest level had come out with a plan of wholly evacuating what they called 'Hindu India', i.e., India south of the Vindhya, Rajasthan, most of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, etc. Leaving this 'Hindu India' to its own devices, they contemplated moving British personnel and authority to the Muslim dominated areas of the Punjab, Sindh, etc., in the west, and to Muslim areas of Bengal in the east.

But the plans became unnecessary because Indian nationalism became exhausted, and crumbled. The slightly amended British offer of eventual peaceful transfer was accepted instead. Neither Indian nationalism, nor even the British Viceroy in India, possibly had any inkling of the emergency British plan which was prepared by the British Chiefs of Staff Committee for the British Prime Minister and the British Cabinet Committee on India.

After the June 1946 compromise (or rather, surrender) by the Congress, it was more or less smooth sailing in Indo-British relationship. Even then Indian ideas and long term objectives could, to an extent, have been salvaged if the British, through Louis Mountbatten or at his suggestion, had not decided to rush the transfer of power. The plan seems to have been to take the Indians unawares: more or less in the same way as Gandhiji had taken the British unawares during 1919; and thereafter, to sweep them off their feet and leave them no time for reflection. Though earlier beaten by Gandhiji, the British knew the Indians well. They were well acquainted with Indian slowness in matters at those times when each moment counted; their inexperience of statecraft; their habit of opting for painless solutions; and their never refusing whatever was offered to them— even if the gift was of no earthly use to them ever. Incidentally, that Louis Mountbatten was the man to sort out the Indian situation, was mentioned to the British Government by Lady Willingdon, with 15 years of Indian experience, as early as 1943. My own impression is that the role of Louis Mountbatten, the last British

pro-consul in India, is comparable to the role of Robert Clive, the first British pro-consul here. Both applied similar strategies. Both saw to it that the Indians had no time to deliberate or reflect on what needed to be done, either in the 1750s or in the late 1940s.

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How then do we get out of the present mess? How do we salvage whatever can be salvaged from our past? How do we undo the neglect and deliberate damage of the past 200 years? What is the conceptual framework and value system on which our long-term future has to be grounded? A century ago, such a task would naturally have been easier (as a similar task must have been for Japan). Even in the 1940's, when a large section of our people were mobilised for a promising future, the task would have been less difficult. Today, with our extensive dispiritedness, and far greater alienation and dis-orientation, the task is no longer so simple. Today it requires a far greater ingenuity alongwith prolonged perseverance.

Still, India today has certain advantages. First, British oppression as well as the struggle against it are matters of history; and harping on them is no longer the preoccupation of most Indians. Second, the experience of the past 40 years and the compulsion to look after our own affairs, however badly they may have been looked after till now, has made us understand state-craft better, has relatively brought us down to earth, and to an extent made us more familiar with the ways of the world at large. In the meanwhile, we have also produced and trained a fairly large number of young men and women in the various disciplines and professions. Their competence is comparable to those in other lands. A proportion of them are also questioning the usefulness of what they do with regard to India's present as well as future. They are raising basic issues about the applicability of the fundamental premises of the theories and practices of their know-how and its relevance to India's needs.

On the other hand, self-confidence, and the sense of national and personal dignity has yet to emerge in India. There is no doubt much personal ambition amongst a large number, and also the capacity and tenacity to individually make good in the Western sense. There are others, and their number is not too small, whose dedication is to serve the nation, the deprived, or some cause or the other despite personal discomfort. Yet what all of us seem to lack is an overview, and a sense of discrimination. Even personal ambition, not to mention devotion to the



nation, the deprived etc., could have served far larger social as well as personal ends if we had achieved a sense of direction in terms of our complex totality and in relation to what could be feasible given our situation and the present-day world context.

Three years ago we did begin to talk of salvaging our heritage by taking steps like the cleaning of the Ganga, or of helping 80% or more of our people in terms of fuel and fodder by undertaking a plan of annually bringing 50 lakh hectares of waste land under fuel and fodder trees, or of starting educational institutions of excellence at least one in each district of India. But like other Indian older resolves, like the creation of neighbourhood schools in every habitat of India, or the provision of clean drinking water to each and every family, or the eradication of deprivation and poverty, the new resolves seem to have met a similar fate.

It is possible that the present Prime Minister who publicly promised the fast implementation of the three programmes really meant to carry out these plans. But instead, our rivers are drying up and being converted into sewage; our forests are not only greatly denuded but the new ones are being mainly planted to produce wood, bamboos and pulp for industries like paper, etc. or even to supply foreign markets. There is little sign either of the schools of excellence (where even the children of the deprived were to be admitted) or any talk whatsoever of the neighbourhood schools.

In two things only, have we had phenomenal rates of growth: first, in the number of TV sets possessed by the elite, and not so elite, Indian families; second, in the amount of noise through the blaring of microphones and loudspeakers in every nook and corner of India; the noise made by rickety motor transport or their terrible horns, the noise created at all hours of day and night by the aircrafts, or the indiscriminate multiplication of more and more noisy fire-crackers.

All this has resulted from unthinking planning, indifference or inability of governmental authority to provide proper direction in such matters. But it can be that what has happened is the result of deliberate decision as well as of neglect so that the vocal as well as not so vocal people can be dulled into a state of somnolence, or into utter helplessness, and thus allow a non-functioning crumbling state to keep postponing the necessary surgery to itself, a surgery which it has been in need of not only since 1947, but even during the latter part of British rule.

We the educated and the privileged are major culprits in allowing the continuation of such a state of affairs. The prosperous areas of the world are equally guilty: by patting our leaders and governments, and by annually offering aid of thousands of crores for this and that so that while the elite can have a relatively good time, they do not interact or establish any links with their people, and, India and its regions continue in a state of stagnancy and whatever new they produce is mostly not according to Indian choice and preference but for purposes which the aid-givers basically determine.

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Earlier on this evening I had mentioned major challenges. I shall elaborate on them here.

Firstly, we have been split into two societies which except that they live on the same land have little else in common. The split is not recent, in northern India it may date back to the days of Mughal dominance. But it is far more pronounced today. The two societies seem to live in almost separate worlds and seem to share almost nothing in common. We are not aiming at a society of a small number of citizens dominating a far larger number of slaves as in ancient Greece, or of serfs as in pre-modern Europe, or of whatever such subjugated persons may be called in countries of today's South America, we have to take steps to bridge this gap fast. The only way in which the task of bridging can be begun effectively is to have the two societies share the same common facilities in the field of school education, health services, water and energy supply, sanitation, and cultural activities and sports. This may initially imply a lowering of standards, or a decline in sophistication. Well, that has to be tolerated.

The present standards and sophistication of which we are so proud and cling to are just a surface phenomenon standing on a foundation of sand, without any roots or vitality. When the two societies have come nearer, have achieved communication and a meaningful dialogue, it is only then that standards of our choice can be created and sophistication will have a chance to be rooted in the Indian milieu. Sharing the standards of Mr Ronald Reagan, or the President of Harvard University or of Mr Mikhail Gorbachev or of the French and Scandinavian elite, or even of the relatively depressed British elite can only bring ruin to India.

The same applies to the Indian ruling class craze, it is not really a new craze, even in the 1920s and 1930s the elite Indians used to go to Vienna etc. for eye operations and the like to transport themselves at the slightest pretext to the medical centres of the USA or the USSR, or some other medically advanced land. It is a disgraceful act not only for those who indulge in it, but also for the Indian medical system. No harm will come to India, or even to such persons if they decided to live with their various ailments, as is done by the majority of India's citizens.

Though one has to be careful in the expenditure of public resources even to an extent in the spending of resources of one's own, the point that this practice of rushing abroad for medical or any such treatment must have a stop is to serve much larger Indian norms, and to prove one's commitment to things Indian. That even a peasant leader like the new Chief Minister of Haryana, lacks this sense is indeed sad.

The comment of our Prime Minister that even if one crore rupees have been spent on his recently concluded ten day international trip 'the benefits from the trip are well beyond its cost, many hundred folds perhaps' is indeed comic. In the context of the pattern of other state expenditures, it does not matter very much that one crore is spent on his trip. But the assurance that this expense has to result in a many hundred fold multiplication is symptomatic of the decay and disorientation of the mind of the Indian ruling elite. That the qualification required of an Indian Prime Minister, or of a Chief Minister, is his begging capacity, should in fact disqualify any such persons from such elective offices.

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The primary cause of the increasing distance in Indian society between the elite (around some two lakh families and certainly not more than 0.5% of India's population) and the rest of the Indian people is the dependence, sought and welcomed by us, on foreign resources and foreign models in practically every field. All this has to be abandoned the sooner the better. This dependence has not only made the elite and the institutions they control wholly irresponsible and unaccountable, but much more it has begun to determine and shape the use of Indian internal resources themselves.

In 1780 Warren Hastings had said that the British military training and arms, given through one treaty or another, to an Indian Rajya would only make that Rajya and its army weaker

and much less mobile and not a bit stronger as was feared by his commander-in-chief. In the then Indian context it was a very sound judgement, and as the erosion in the circumstances and morale of India has mainly increased since then, this logic has even more validity today than it had at that time. The main culprit in this matter is the post-1947 Indian State and those who have been managing it at the highest level.

Those who are not directly associated with the state and pretend to distance themselves from it are, however, in a moral sense equally guilty. The voluntary bodies of practically all hues, the various dissident movements whether inspired by liberation theology, or some other current world fashion or by Western feminism, intellectuals of all kinds including those who now and then hop over abroad to collect funds and sympathy for this and that Indian calamity, real or imaginary, and even our countless religious sanyasins who glow amidst the admiration of their Western devotees are no less guilty in this matter. In fact their guilt is far more serious, as their claim to stand for morality and principles and yet joining in this game of dependence, has given legitimacy to such acts of the elite and governing structure.

The vitiated atmosphere this dependence has produced has affected even the serious efforts of those who feel committed to indigenous excellence. Even our illustrious *Sthapatis* seem to have become its prey. Instead of paying attention to the question that all new structures which are now being built in India, especially India's vastly increasing temples and other places of culture and learning, are basically founded on Indian concepts of design, beauty and the use of Indian materials, their obsession with mere excellence has made them abandon or forget this primary task. In fact they seem all too eager in getting involved in advising and guiding the building of Indian type of temples, etc., in the localities of the Western World. It is true that such outside association brings them and many others who in one way or the other are devoted to indigeneness, greater applause, even greater appreciation within India, than their work in India itself. But they have to realise that such applause and appreciation cuts the very roots of what they claim to stand for. The excellence they create is thus reduced to just museum-pieces or curiosities while the vast landscape of India gets enshrouded with ugliness and structures which not even conduce to physical comfort and convenience.

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Many steps have to be taken to enable us to pass over from the disoriented present into a future when the disorientation has disappeared and society as such has achieved a certain coherence. The steps to bridge this interim period have to be in the political, social as well as the technological fields.

While a small section of our people have been operating according to the modern western idiom in most public functioning the majority still function, to the extent that circumstances allow them, according to their old idiom, technological skills and social norms. As the westernised control most of the resources, the skills and tools of the majority are in a ramshackle and blunted state.

Yet we know that within the present arrangement neither the westernised nor the majority have the opportunity or the possibility of doing anything which can take us out of the present stalemate. The two unwittingly seem to be engaged in a game where one cancels out what the other attempts. The best will be to separate the two in some ingenious manner where the talents of both have the opportunity to find unobstructed expression and some of what they do has the possibility of opening new avenues in various spheres.

The best will be that centralised authority in Delhi as well as in the states of India withdraws most of its functioning from the localities, allows the localities to organise their life, as they will, within a broad civilisational frame, and which enables the centralised authority to shed away most of its unnecessary load and enables it to perform the tasks which it alone can perform. This problem of course needs much reflection and working out and the solutions of it may vary from area to area.

The other is to somehow enable the talents of the ordinary men and women to help in the building of the New India. Today our professionals are drawn from hardly 2% of our population. Steps need to be taken when this base of professional recruitment could be broadened at least 30-40 times, and in due course to 100% of India's people. It is only then that we will acquire the necessary innovative skills not only in matters of science and technology, in health care, in sanitary arrangements, in more efficient and worthwhile use of resources, but also in the field of social and political organisation. An India in which all of its citizens, men as well as women, are unable to participate in the running of its public and social life will always be a weak and unhappy India and a prey to alien power or ideology.

The creation of a new India implies the end to such an unhappy state, and I presume that, despite our varied differences, that is what we all aspire for.

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All that has been done in India in the last 40 years need comprehensive reviews. The review of education by the Government of India can in fact serve as a model for all reviews which are undertaken. The reviews should relate both to internal areas of activity as well as of our relations with the world at large.

In the internal sphere the reviews should deal with all aspects of agriculture, irrigation plans (including big dams, etc.), the field of animal husbandry, horticulture, forests, (including the controversial social forestry), the production of various types of energy and the uses to which such energy is put, the problem of soil erosion and its causes and the steps that have been taken regarding it, the major causes of water scarcity over vast areas of India and the increasing drought conditions, the state of our textiles, steel and other consumer goods, and processed food product industries (produced according to indigenous technology as well as according to the modern Western), our medicare and health services, the sanitation system, the municipal services of our cities, towns and rural habitats, the design, aesthetics, and utility of our houses and public buildings, the state and usefulness of our public transport (road, rail or air) and the state of our physical, and cultural environment.

All new programmes, especially in terms of new construction or purchase of expensive equipment, need to be suspended till such reviews are complete and the nation has considered them and arrived at specific conclusions with regard to each review. Organisation and working of the law and order machinery, the judicial system from the Tehsil court to the Supreme Court, and of our defense systems have also to be reviewed similarly. That a state system which employs some three crore people, excluding the lakhs of those treated as casual labour, serves such little purpose, and is no earthly use to the vast majority of Indians, should shake us out of our lethargy and complacency.

Similar review has to be undertaken of our relations with the world at large, of our relative indifference to people in countries with whom we have long and historically shared closer civilizational and economic links, and how best we can get re-oriented in our relations with other people and areas both nearer

to us, as well as distant. Blind imitation, and the sort of links we have had till now, have rather separated us from the community of nations instead of taking us nearer them. And our influence on them has been minimal.

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We must also apply our minds to the longer term problems of the restructuring of the future India— say an India which would have completely come into its own by the year 2020, and would by then be based on deep and sound foundations. For that we have to acquire a thorough understanding of our past, whether it is reflected through myths or through historically verifiable facts and equally acquire an adequate comprehension, from an Indian perspective, of other civilisations of the world. We have not only to adequately comprehend the modern world, i.e. the world of the past 300-400 years, but even more we have to have an understanding of its sources by getting to the roots of what Plato, Aristotle, Moses, Confucius, Lao-tse meant, or the assumptions of the Hebrew civilisation which forms the basis of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and of the more ancient civilizations and people of Africa and the Americas. It is perhaps the ancient world view of the people of Africa and the Americas, and of those of East and South East Asia which is more akin to our own and has an immediate relevance to the problems of the violent world created since about the time of Columbus and Vasco da Gama.

Such an effort would provide us appropriate values (which to some degree may be somewhat different to the ancient values of India), theories, frameworks, etc., and help us structure a more lasting polity, and its various appurtenances, like aesthetics, science and technology, production methods and new economic arrangements.

For this, besides spirit/willingness, and intellect we need various other tools. For knowing our past alone we need to gather all our inscriptional and epigraphical, manuscript and other material on our heritage in suitable places of scholarship and decipher, classify and take steps to make all such materials available for study and reflection. A high Delhi authority estimates our stock of manuscripts at one crore to thirty crores. The manuscripts which are so far known, and are scattered over the world, are said to be listed in over 500 catalogues. We do not yet even know the total number so listed and are awaiting the arrival of appropriate computers when the number of manuscripts

listed in these catalogues will be known. It is understood however that this number will be somewhere between 5-10 lakhs.

It is quite probable that when we actually look at each of these listed manuscripts perhaps half of them may no longer be in any state that any one could decipher anything substantial from them. That we have such manuscript wealth, even that it may number 30 crores, has mentioned for many many years. And that with all the resources and talent Delhi has, it does not even yet know the number or condition of the insignificantly small proportion which has been listed in the catalogues is indicative of either indifference or of Delhi's utter uselessness to India and India's current or civilisational needs.

But despite such indifference, neglect and waste we have to begin doing something now. This task cannot be performed by Delhi alone. It has to become the responsibility of duly constituted qualified, well endowed, and appropriate institutions in the various linguistic and cultural regions of India, one institution for each region. These institutions should serve as depositories of all manuscript wealth of the region, or of copies or microfilms of what is not obtainable in the original. In the same places we must also create centres of inscriptional and epigraphical material, as well as libraries which contain every printed and published item of the particular region, and the more important material in Sanskrit, or any other Indian or foreign language material regarding India's past and civilization. Such libraries should also have a selection of the more serious material on the world at large, particularly that which helps us to understand how other areas and civilizations tick. A country as vast as India does certainly require 10-20 such places like the British Library, or the Bodleian in Oxford, or the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, or the Library of Congress in the USA, or similar repositories in Japan, China, USSR, Germany, or Rome.

Besides epigraphical, manuscript, and printed sources we need to pay attention to our ancient artifacts, the multiple tools and designs of our civilization. For this we need museums of such artifacts in every district of India which can also serve as places which help in acquainting the people of the locality, including the school and other students, with their heritage, and how we functioned in the past. The museums will also have to have suitable charts to explain matters, and display samples of the productions of these artifacts. Besides, of course we need to recognise and strengthen our existing regional and national museums, discard a large part of the 17th, 18th, 19th century



European knick-knacks which clutter some of them, and if need be create a few special well planned museums pertaining to the artifacts of other civilizations.

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Education in India has to be structured a-new. What we have inherited from the British needs to be scrapped, at least as a system, altogether. Education during the first 6-8 years must be the concern of the neighbourhood schools, except for such few children who have to be given well-defined special education for one professional specialisation or the other in residential institutions. The content of what is taught at every level has to have a review and wholly new text books, relevant to each and every linguistic or cultural area, must replace the text books which are used today.

Most education, at least till we have fully come into our own, should terminate by the age of 16 or 18, after which it is only vocational or professional training which must be the rule. The present universities or colleges, in which the failure rate at B.A. and B.Sc. level is 50% and even many of those who pass are said to do so through questionable means, have really no imaginable role in today's India. It is not that the academics in them or their other supporting staff, have to be made unemployed. They can all be absorbed in other more useful tasks in various fields of Indian endeavour.

The current medical system must also be reorganised similarly. If the state wishes to have a major role in looking after the medical needs of its citizens we have to go for something like the post 1945 British National Health Service Plan. All medical practitioners must be absorbed in such a plan, and the expense of both treatment and medicine must be wholly borne by the State. The grandiose of course must go, and in a reasonable period of one or two decades, Indian medical practice must more and more rely on indigenous theory, methods and medicinal raw materials. Kidney replacement, or by-pass heart surgery are not the urgent need of India, and for most of such ailments there must be old Indian cures in the Siddha, the Ayurvedic, or the folk systems, which only need to be resurrected through appropriate research in ancient methods.

Our water supply systems, the sanitation systems, the plumbing in houses, the other western gadgetry, are, in the context of our resources, as well as our physical environment, a vast waste.

The same is true even of the few more esthetically and lavishly built five-star type of buildings. We certainly do not require them, and most of the foreigners who visit us have no use for them either. If there are a few foreigners, like heads of foreign states, etc., they could have been accommodated in places like the Viceregal palace (now called as Rashtrapati Bhavan), the innumerable governors' houses, etc.

One of these Governors' houses built at Nainital in the Himalayas occupies over 200 acres of scarce and precious Himalayan land, and the house itself, built in the style of a major British manor, about 100 years ago, has around 300 rooms counting the large bathrooms and the separate covered and partitioned verandahs. In the last 40 years, its annual occupation does not seem to have averaged more than 2-3 weeks. The sooner such buildings, including the five-star types, and the circuit houses, etc., get demolished or are put to some more plebeian uses, even for tying cattle, or using them as weaving sheds, etc., the better for our social health. It is distasteful that we are planning to construct yet another such building as a National Centre for Arts, in the name of Shrimati Indira Gandhi. If the arts did require a place in Delhi, the British Viceroy's house was the obvious place for them.

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The regaining of freedom, as we well know, has given rise to many dormant issues and conflicts in our society. It has also brought forth the manifestation of a variety of individual and social observances which we had assumed were gone forever. That we were wrong in such assumptions should now be clear. That freedom, or the relaxation of long imposed control, leads to the gradual relaxation and flowering of the body as well as the mind, has been long known to the wise, not only in India, but also elsewhere. The assertion of Welsh and Scottish cultural nationalism in Britain, of the French language culture in Canada, the assertions of the various linguistic and cultural regions even in the USSR, and the more recent assertion of the residual indigenous Americans and Blacks in the USA should have made us understand that the relaxation in control and oppression result in the re-manifestation of suppressed emotions and practices. As the suppression was far greater and prolonged in northern India, such reassertion has also been more pronounced there.

One manifestation of this reassertion has been the demand for the restoration of the honour and sanctity of the ancient sacred places, and the rebuilding of temples and other structures destroyed or decayed during the period of foreign dominance. Unless freedom is to be snatched away again there is no stoppage of such reassertion. The only thing that could be tried is that it happens in as reasonable and painless a manner as possible and that most of those who have somehow become worshippers of the status-quo are helped to appreciate the social necessity of the restoration of such honour and sense of sanctity.

It is possible that percolating of the sense of freedom amongst the peasantry and other rural folk may also in time lead to the rejection of most of the hideous and oppressive structures built by the British. Well, there is no way of ignoring such demands, and the India Gates, etc., may be the first casualty when such demands arise. The need is that we the elite give up our rigid and frozen postures, achieve some appreciation of social urges, and get prepared for change. The change, of which we have been such loud vocal worshippers, when it comes will have its own logic and not be governed by our preconceived notions of it.

## IV

### INDIA'S POLITY, ITS CHARACTERISTICS AND CURRENT PROBLEMS

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*\*India's Polity, its Characteristics and Current Problems was written in early 1992 for a conference at Lisbon in April 1992. It was published in 1996 from Lisbon in a book titled: The Origins of the Modern State in Europe, 13th to 18th Century: The Heritage of the Pre-industrial European State (pp. 137–163). This project on the 'State in Europe' was sponsored by the European Science Foundation.*

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The *Mahabharatam*, a work of around 100,000 verses is the most ancient and major text on Indian polity. The *Mahabharatam*, besides serving as a chronicle of Indian memory and self-consciousness, also deals with the manner of the creation of the universe, of the division of the movement of the universe into specified periods, called the *yugas*, of the qualities of each of these *yugas*, and provides a detailed narrative of the *Dwapara*, the third of the four *yugas*, and gives an account of the great battle which occurs at the end of the *Dwapara*.

Geographically, the India of the *Mahabharatam* was more or less similar in extent to what is today identified as the Indian subcontinent. The *Mahabharatam* lists some one hundred major regions referred to as *janapadas* in it— around 38 in the north west; 20 in the centre, the area of the river Ganga; 10 in the east; 12 in the mountainous central area; 12 in the south; and 10 in the centre west.<sup>1</sup> It also suggests that each region was governed by some specific, identifiable, extended kinship community. Further, besides Sanskrit, various regions together, or separately, seem to have had a language or dialect of their own. Sanskrit seems to have been used on a pan-Indian scale, and even at the domestic cultural and social level in numerous homes in all parts of India.

The *Mahabharatam*, as also several other Indian texts mention that at some early stage there was little differentiation between beings, that man was in a state of bliss, and was devoid of passions. This state changed in time, passions arose, and then disorder, and men were then advised to have a king to govern them.<sup>2</sup> Around the same time they were given a *Veda*, and then agriculture, and then crafts. This changed state led to much greater differentiation and to the formation of the four *varnas* (classes), and subsequently, it may be assumed, to the formation of numerous communities based on conduct, occupation, and extended kinship. This movement in due time created the science of *Ayurveda* i.e. the science of medicine, and led to the sciences of *Jyotisha* (astronomy), *Silpa* (architecture), and to the arts of manufacture of things in general. Later the one *Veda* was divided into four, and subsequently into many more parts.

While the *Mahabharatam* advises men to have a king, the king is bound not only by *dharmā*, custom and morality, but also is to govern with the assistance of a council of ministers. The number of ministers suggested is 37 and of these 4 were to be from the *Brahmanas*, 8 from the *Kshatriyas*, 21 from the *Vaisyas* (the peasant and trading communities of the age when the *Mahabharatam* was composed), 3 from the *Sudras* (the craftsmen of the time), and one, who was versed in every field of knowledge from the *Suta* (charioteer) community.<sup>3</sup> This representation possibly reflected the proportion or their weight or both in the polity of that time.

A concept which arises from the idea of the need of a king is that of *chakravartya*. A *chakravartin* is a sort of a superking to whom all others, in any major part of India or in the whole of it, pay homage and treat as their superior. The *chakravartin*, however, like the king, is not to interfere with the internal polity of any region and is expected to leave the governance of any region to its own people (the idea of *chakravartya* and its relation to other kings comes through much of Indian literature including the *Raghuvamsa* of Kalidasa, as also in some of the c. 1800 European writings on India).

While the *Mahabharatam* provides the basic ideas and texts on polity there are many other works, though of somewhat later date, which exclusively deal with polity or the science of political

economy. The more outstanding of these is the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya of around 300 B.C. (There is much disagreement between indigenous Indian and western scholarship on the question of dating Indian events. According to the late P.V. Kane, the author of *The History of the Dharmasastras*, western scholars do not like any Indian dates to be considered prior to the dates of similar events in Europe. The Indians, and also the Chinese, for instance place Gautama Buddha sometime around the 18th century B.C., while European scholarship on India, which still dominates Indian scholarly circles, places the Buddha in the 6th century B.C. A similar disagreement exists on the dating of Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, and in fact on the dating of every single ancient Indian event and text.) The *Arthashastra* is a detailed work and its main theme, in contrast to the *Mahabharatam*, is to centralise all authority, and to bring the innumerable autonomous or sovereign regions, under the control of a superking. Thus for the *Arthashastra*, the idea of *Chakravartya* assumes a wholly different meaning. It is said and believed in India that the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya is relevant only in a period of great crisis, whereas the *Mahabharatam* is for all times. The dharmic status of the *Arthashastra* never seems to have been high in India.

It must be said that neither the *Mahabharatam* nor the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, describe the actual reality on the ground in much detail. Detailed descriptions of the reality to an extent come through ancient Indian high literature, and much more so through inscriptions some of which go back at least to around 200 B.C. A more well known inscription dates back to the early 10th century A.D., and pertains to Uttaramerur, a prosperous town-cum-village, and a centre of learning, near the city of Madras in southern India where these inscriptions can still be seen. Uttaramerur had a *mahasabha* (council) of 42 members, and these constituted five committees. Each member had to meet rigorous qualifications, and was to be free of specified disabilities. The age of members was between 37 and 70 and they held such membership through a balloting device. Besides these *sabhas* and committees, 'there were in existence many other groups and corporations of a social, religious or economic character, each interested in looking after some definite local institution or function.'<sup>4</sup>

Later material seems to suggest that the concept of the community based on extended kinship and/or on shared locality, region, etc., is of very early origin in India and it will be correct to say that elements of this concept continue to be very powerful even in the India of today. While the number of extended kinship communities in individual regions, and even in some individual localities was perhaps fairly large (from about 10-50 in any region), the epic and other literary and historical evidence suggests that in a political and public sense, most individual regions were largely dominated by a specific community. Ordinarily any such dominant community in any region would broadly have been from amongst the peasantry. It is possible, and so suggested by ancient classical Indian literature, that the king ordinarily came from those who were broadly termed the *Kshatriyas*. Even when such practice actually obtained, the direction and objectives of kingly rule in ancient and later times seems to have been, as is also inferred from the *Mahabharatam* referred to above, in accordance with and dependent on the dominant community.

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Not much detailed work however has been done so far from the standpoint of these localities as well as communities. Their perspectives could have offered some graphic accounts of the Indian polity as it obtained through the centuries, with elements that are still to be found in most Indian localities and amongst most of India's kinship communities. While major indigenous Indian sources on the ground reality of India have yet to be located and explored, some fairly detailed material on such reality is available for certain areas for the latter part of the 18th century. One such area comprises a whole district- one of some 400 districts of India- around the City of Madras and is known as Chengalpattu. Besides making a survey, all the available local data for each of the two thousand and more localities of this district regarding land, population, institutional structures and arrangements, agricultural production etc., was collated by the British on the basis of local records and fresh enquiries during 1767-1774.

The district of Chengalpattu comprised of approximately 2200 localities around 1770.<sup>5</sup> A majority of the localities also had one or several sub-habitats situated at some distance from the main habitat. These localities were largely villages, where the main economic activity was agriculture and animal husbandry. But quite a number had very little agriculture. Some of these latter were towns and places of great learning and many of pilgrimage, while others were centres of weaving, fishing, oil manufacture, stone work and other crafts. The twin towns constituting Kanchipuram were an ancient centre of learning; and had been a centre of politics, administration, industry and commerce in Southern India till at least the 7th century A.D. Even in 1770, Kanchipuram was a major religious centre, as it is today as well. It was surrounded by numerous separate villages or townships of weavers, stone carvers, and of people engaged in various other crafts.

While around 2200 localities are listed in this 1770 survey, the main data available pertains to only 1910 localities. Amongst these, 1554 had human habitation, and 356 had no habitation at all around 1770. These 1554 localities had 62,529 houses, in addition to temples, shrines, centres of scholarship, resting places for travellers and the like. The number of temples and shrines in the district was around 3000 to 4000; some of their structures dated back to the 7th century A.D.

These 1910 localities together had a land area of 779,132 *kanis*, or about 400,000 hectares (a *kani* being slightly more than 0.5 hectare). Out of this total, 182,172 *kanis* was under irrigated cultivation; and 88,069 *kanis* under cultivation which solely depended upon rain. 130,790 *kanis* of land (around 17% of the total), was occupied by woods; and 14,055 *kanis* by orchards, groves, gardens, etc. Another 100,806 *kanis* was occupied by reservoirs of water for irrigation (known as *eri*, *maduvu*, *thangal* in Tamil); and 24,088 *kanis* was used for human habitats. The size of the land for a house and backyard ranged from a low of 0.06 *kanis* to a high of 1.75 *kanis*. Most houses were



in the range of 0.2 *kanis* (i.e., about 1000 square meters). 4190 *kanis* were used as salt pans for making salt from sea water. 109.289 *kanis* of land though cultivable was not being cultivated around this time, and the rest 121.072 *kanis* was either under hills, and rain water rivers, or was treated as waste. The total area of this district where these 1910 localities were situated was perhaps 50% more than the 779.132 *kanis* mentioned above, as many of the localities till then would not have taken note of any land which lay between the boundary of one locality and that of another one more or less adjoining it.

The average land area of a locality comes out as 408 *kanis* (210 hectares). But 82 localities had less than 20 *kanis* of land, 143 had between 20–50 *kanis* each, and 248 between 50–100 *kanis* each. The agriculturally important localities seem to have been between 100–200 *kanis* (445 localities), 200–500 *kanis* (623 localities) and 500–1,000 *kanis* (262 localities). There were 124 localities which were between 1000–5000 *kanis* each, and two localities above 5000 *kanis* each.

Though the average number of houses for each of the 1554 inhabited localities is 40–41, there is very large variation in the number of houses within any given locality. 153 localities had no more than 5 houses each; 199 had 6–10 houses each; 324 had 11–20 houses each; and 242 had 21–30 houses each. Only 296 localities had between 31–50 houses; 118 between 51–70 houses; 96 between 71–100 houses; and 83 between 101–200 houses. 28 localities, many of these towns, had between 201–500 houses, and just 5 were above 500 houses each. These latter were Chinna Kanchipuram with 801 houses, Periya Kanchipuram with 593 houses, Pudupakkam with 726 houses, Pillaipalayam with 608 houses, and Uttaramerur, with its 10th century inscriptions on its polity, with 691 houses. This gradation in the size of localities by houses, or population, as it obtained in Chengalpattu seems to be no different from such gradation of localities there 200 years later today. Further, such gradation is not unique to Chengalpattu. It obtains in similar fashion in most regions of India.

The 225 localities with less than 50 *kanis* of land had little agriculture and a large number of them were industrial centres; many of them were also centres of banking, trade and commerce. Many localities, some 50–100 amongst the 1554, were pilgrimage centres also.

The number of households engaged in industrial and allied pursuits, or in banking, commerce and trade was around 15,000,

nearly 23% of the total households of the district of Chengalpattu. In addition, around 40,000 households must have been spinning cotton yarn to provide yarn for the cloth which was woven by the weaver houses of the district.

Weavers living in 233 localities were the single largest industrial group with 4031 households. In 55 of these localities, they constituted 30% and more of the total houses, and in 34 they formed the majority. Some places had very large concentrations of weavers, especially in the neighbourhood of Kanchipuram. One place had 198 weaver houses out of a total of 290 houses. Five other localities, with a weaver majority, had 106 out of 129, 114 out of 191, 87 out of 116, 69 out of 133, and 62 out of 108 houses. Around 80 places had more than 10 weavers in each. There were also many localities in which the fishermen, the woodcutters, those working in stone, potters, and vegetable oil manufacturers together constituted 30% and more of the total houses of such localities. Even those concerned with banking, commerce, trade and shopkeeping together constituted 30% and more in 47 localities and in 11 of them they were more than 50%.

Such preponderance of a particular extended kinship group, or of an occupation group in 1770 Chengalpattu is even more marked in the case of groups mainly engaged in agriculture and in the case of the Brahmins. In around 1225 of the 1544 inhabited localities, one group or the other (and in a few two) constituted 30% or more of the total houses. And in around 460 localities out of these, one or the other specific group constituted the majority. The total houses for the main groups, the number of localities in which each group resided, and the number in which some of them formed 30% or more, or were the majority, are given in the annex at Table I. The total number of cattle in Chengalpattu is also given in the annex at Table II.

The total annual agricultural production for years 1762 to 1766 can be estimated on the basis of available data for 1458 of these localities. The amount of total production is estimated to be around 1,479,646 *kalams*, one *kalam* being roughly equal to 125 kilograms. This means an annual grain production of 184,955 tons. A fairly large proportion of the irrigated land, though the soil of Chengalpattu was only of medium fertility, gave high agricultural yields. In many localities the yield from paddy lands seem to have been of the order of 4–6 tons per hectare, i.e. equal to the yield of paddy in present day Japan.

Around 27% of this produce was put apart, at four different stages (from before threshing of the crop to after the final

measurement of it), for the expenses of the locality and outside institutions with whom the localities were associated, as well as for payment to individuals who were part of the agricultural and community infrastructure. Many of these institutions and persons had also the land tax from certain lands assigned to them. The total amount of land so assigned in 1770 Chengalpattu was around 44.057 *kanis* of irrigated land and 22.684 *kanis* of rainfed land. It may also be inferred here that the rest of the economy, industry, commerce, shopkeeping, etc., (which might perhaps have accounted for about one-third to one half of the economic activity of the district) had made similar contributions to most such groups, institutions and functions. Table III in the annex gives the major allocation from the total agricultural produce for each category of institution or function in these 1.458 localities.

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The 1770 data establishes the existence not only of a high level of agricultural productivity, but also of diverse industrial activities and services in the society of Chengalpattu at that time. There are indications of a careful tending of the physical space and natural resources of the region as well. An elaborately worked out system of sharing of the produce of the region also seems to have ensured a fairly equitable distribution of economic and cultural prosperity among the various communities and occupational groups that inhabited the region. What concerns us here, however, are the details of the political arrangements through which the polity of Chengalpattu functioned in the late eighteenth century.

The polity seems to have operated on the basis of complex interactions between distinct and separate groups. Such distinctness at times is expressed in the separateness of their living space within a locality; in certain places separateness of the religious shrine to which a group was especially attached to (even when several such shrines may have been dedicated to the same gods); in separateness of their drinking water sources, smaller and larger tanks; and with regard to several other aspects. As an instance, there were localities of 100 to 200 houses in which there were as many as 10–12 temples or shrines of Ganesa, the god symbolising auspiciousness.

Thirupporur, one of the numerous temple towns near Madras, offers an interesting illustration of the principle of

distinctness that formed the basis of organisation of the Chengalpattu polity. With its Kandaswami temple, Thirupporur was as major a centre of pilgrimage for people of the 18th century as it is even today. Substantial agricultural produce allocations were received by it for its expenses and maintenance from over 250 localities of Chengalpattu. This temple town had over 20 *mathams*, each of which was related to a specific community or to a group of localities. A *matham* is a place of worship, which also arranges for the stay of the pilgrims, and for the performance of tasks associated with pilgrimage. *Mathams* were also places where spiritual and higher learning were imparted. They almost certainly had a savant or a scholar looking after them.

The large numbers of *mathams*, each linked to a specific community or a group of localities, indicate that while the various groups participating in the Chengalpattu polity all came to worship at the same temple of Kandaswami at Thirupporur, yet each such group preferred to stay separately and be culturally interlinked with a *distinct matham*.

The people and localities of 1770 Chengalpattu, however, seem to have concerned themselves with many more things than the distinctiveness of groups, their living spaces, shrines, water sources, etc. While at one level, separate requirements were attended to, at another level the groups seem to have got together to operate in the public domain of a locality or group of localities. The detailed budgetary allocations made for numerous functions, including irrigation, administration, learning and scholarship, police and militia are illustrative of this joint concern. These functions and institutions, however, were often looked after by specific and exclusive groups. The data mention almost a hundred groups, functionaries, and institutions that had a share in the budgetary allocations of one locality or the other. And most localities made such allocations for scores of functionaries and institutions. The arrangements described above, the separateness of groups and communities and their interlinking as well as the interlinking of localities were not unique to Chengalpattu, and seem to have obtained in most other regions and localities of India till around A.D. 1800.

One infers from such data that India's polity was constituted in a manner peculiar to India or to areas around it. The building blocks of this polity evidently are not individuals but distinct and exclusive groups, who at one point emphasise their separateness almost to the point of sovereignty. Having established their separateness, such groups within every locality come

together to form the local polity. The polity then functions through elaborate systems of sharing of resources and responsibilities. It may be mentioned that, in spite of the attitudes of sovereign exclusiveness which these groups seem to exhibit, the nature of the groupings and the occupational specialisation ensured that none of them could have made the polity or the economy functional standing alone. Functioning in any locality or larger region required the coming together of several such groups— at least, seven or eight of them. Working out the arrangements of interaction between such exclusive sovereign groups and between locality and adjoining localities then becomes the major aspect of political functioning.

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The polity described above was perhaps relatively weak at the time of the above compilation of Chengalpattu data. Possibly the linkages between the localities themselves had become considerably eroded by this time. The factors which still kept them linked in some manner seem to have been the permeating Indian *dharmic* view of life: the great gods and their majestic temples; the infrastructure both local as well as regional which in various ways linked them to their institutions and persons who performed the numerous functions which were needed by them all; the scholarly institutions whom they honoured in their various ways; and their militias which in southern India were commanded by persons known as *palayakkarans*. These links had weakened during the centuries. Such weakening was far more pronounced in northern, western and parts of eastern India large areas of which had been over-run since about 1200 by invaders professing Islam. These invasions had led to prolonged plunder and social chaos. Much more so, they had led to the breakdown of links between localities, between localities and a region, and between regions. As a result, the idea of *Chakravartya* protecting and supporting Indian civilization had largely been lost.

Such a situation had its impact on southern India too. Not only parts of southern India had to face one or the other alien Islamic invasion especially in the 14th and 17th centuries, but the possibility of their becoming more frequent reduced the Indian sense of balance and contentedness, and led to a sense of insecurity and impending danger. Such a mental state also caused varying symptoms of psychological and political emergency. Thus, even in the south, the links between localities and regions lost much of their virtue and strength. But by about

1690, the Islamic rule of Delhi, and thus of its *subedars*, governors and *nabobs* in the several regions, began to collapse, largely because of the play of time, and possibly also because of the historical burden of conquest and oppression such rule had got saddled with along with its inability to integrate itself with the Indian culture. And so from about 1690, perhaps somewhat earlier in Maharashtra, in most regions of India there was an assertion of the indigenous which had all the possibility of throwing away the 500 year old alien Islamic oppression and bringing forth a new resurgence of the indigenous. However in these five hundred years India had got so involved within itself that it had lost track of world events, lost touch even with its neighbours and did not realise that to be successful it had to move and rebuild itself at a much faster pace. Its indigenous rulers and scholars and the regional communities, despite the havoc caused by the Portuguese and other Europeans in parts of India in the early 16th century, seem to have been unable to derive any lessons from this experience. The result was that when India started to experience the full force of European conquest and expansion from around 1750, its rulers and people found themselves largely unprepared.

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It is not, however, as if the British and earlier the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese, had an easy time in India. From the beginning, there was constant armed as well as unarmed resistance to their conquering mission, dominance, and rule. The first 110 years, from 1748– when the extended British conquest began in the region around Madras– to 1858, were like a long drawn hundred years war between the people of India and Britain (the latter supported by the military men from several Germanic countries). The climate of India was not hospitable to European men. In order to overcome that, the British began to establish military stations, garrisons and towns in the Himalayas and other high mountains of India.

Unarmed resistance was resorted to not only by the Indian peasantry, but also by city and town people in most parts of India<sup>6</sup> till they were wholly exhausted (especially in southern and

eastern India), by about 1840. Then came the great battle of 1857–1858 between India and Britain, by the end of which India had conclusively lost.

But even their conclusive victory had to be paid for by the British. From 1780 to 1857, the British had believed that if they had one European soldier to 4 or at the most 6 Indian soldiers, all officered by Europeans, they would be militarily safe in India. 1857–1858 changed this view altogether. From 1858 till about 1910, Britain decided to have one British soldier to every two Indian soldiers in the British Indian armies. While the actual number of Indians in the army was drastically reduced in 1858, it still meant that a British force of around 100,000 soldiers had to be constantly kept in India for the next 50 years and more. It may be of interest to mention here that in 1946, the British again felt that they could only maintain their control of India with an overwhelming display of military power as neither any major sector of the Indian people nor the Indian military personnel could be depended upon. But at this time they found that after their losses in the 1939–45 war, they no longer commanded the number of personnel which was required. A different solution was, however, soon found as the Indian National Congress— a somewhat exhausted and ageing leadership— agreed to a compromise on the question of Indian independence, and the manner of the transfer of power to Indian hands.<sup>7</sup>

After the British terror of 1857–58, for the next 10–15 years the Indians seem to have been wholly quiet, trying to heal their extensive and deep wounds. By slow degrees, however, unrest began to emerge again. One of its major manifestations was in the 1880s and early 1890s, in the shape of the anti-cow killing movement which stirred up high emotion and created an uncontrollable ferment, especially in northern, central and western India. The then British Viceroy thought that its intensity, extent and explosive power was as high as that of the events of 1857–1858.<sup>8</sup> Queen Victoria advised the Viceroy that he must realise that this movement was aimed at them, and not at the Muslims.<sup>9</sup>

Most Indian Muslims felt so too and Indian Muslims in various places met and came to the conclusion that as the Hindus did not like the killing of cows, the Muslims by themselves should decide to abandon such killing.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, from 1894 onwards, the movement got diverted to clashes between Muslims and Hindus. Thereafter, it ceased to be a major threat to British power.

But the British– at least in India– had always played with several cards, apparently each of them opposed to the others. In 1942, at the time the British were engaged in the armed suppression of the Quit India movement, a leader of the scheduled castes submitted a memorandum to the British and offered his support to them. The British Secretary of State for India had then written to the British Viceroy, that till then the British had one card, i.e. the Muslim card against Indian nationalism; but now, after this memorandum, they had a second card in the scheduled castes.<sup>11</sup>

The old game of acquiring such cards began to be played around the 1870s in a new way. Scholarship came to the aid of authority and began to create new images for the Indian Muslims, for the Sikhs, and also for some of the Hindu *jatis*. Great Christian sympathy began to be displayed, especially for the *pariars* of the Tamil areas, and other untouchable groups of Hindu society in various parts of India. In fact groups which had been historically opposed to one another like the *pariars* and the



*chakkiliars* of the Tamil areas began to be clubbed together initially under the title *pariars*, and later under the more extended term the scheduled castes. (The *pariars* in south India had belonged to what were known as the *Valangai*- right hand- castes and were their guardsmen; while the *chakkiliars* had belonged to the opposite *Idangai*- left hand- castes group, and had been the guardsmen for them). The process in due time led to the inclusion of many *jatis* in the 'untouchable' category. Till at least the mid-nineteenth century, these had not been treated or labelled as such by Indian society.

Another British card was to placate the increasing number of westernised Indians: to divert their discontent and their sense of discrimination into safer channels. The purpose was to detach all possible such groups from the larger indigenous Indian polity and thus to reduce the possibility of another 1857-1858. It was then felt that one such safe channel could be a conservative-cum-moderate political platform where the grievances of the vocal westernised could be aired more publicly and thus reduce the chances of their aligning themselves with their own people. This led to the formation of the Indian National Congress under the patronage of liberal Englishmen and loyal and prosperous Indian subjects. This new card seems to have worked effectively for quite sometime and did help separate most of the westernised Indians from their own people. Most of the former only wished to be treated as English gentry.

However, the innocuous Indian National Congress of the 1880s became a great movement of the Indian people for the achievement of their freedom from 1920 onwards. Its new constitution drafted, explained and introduced by Mahatma Gandhi provided for the enrolment of every Indian, who believed in its new objective, as its member; the individual members in a locality constituting the Congress committee at the village, town, or city level; and these latter in their turn constituting Congress committees at the provincial and national levels.<sup>12</sup> Within two years of this historical transformation, the Indian Congress had 5,000,000 members, and its annual budget had multiplied a hundredfold from around Rs.30,000 till 1920 to over Rs.3,000,000 from 1922 onwards. The 1920 constitution of the

Congress had also provided for the constitution of provinces based on commonality of language. It had demarcated India into 21 provinces based on this principle.

The 1920 constitution also gave the National Congress and India a new objective: the attainment of '*Swarajya* (complete independence) by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means.'<sup>13</sup> For the attainment of this objective, various nationwide non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements were launched under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi from 1920 to 1942. Finally in 1946, an agreement was arrived at between Britain and India to facilitate the early achievement of freedom by India. The process was not easy, however. It implied that the Indian freedom movement abandon or dilute many of its earlier aims. The result was that freedom got converted largely into a transfer of power, and India also got partitioned into two sovereign nation states.

As the free India needed a new constitutional structure, a Constituent Assembly was created in the later part of 1946 by means of indirect elections by the provinces and what were known as Indian states to frame a Constitution for the free India. This Constitution was completed in November 1949, and came into operation on January 26, 1950.

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Since 1930 the people of India had been pledging and dedicating themselves on each January 26 to the achievement of complete independence. The pledge drafted by Mahatma Gandhi had stated:

We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom, but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe therefore that India must sever the British connection and attain *Purna Swaraj* or complete independence.<sup>14</sup>

The period 1946–1949, during which the Constitution was being made, was a very demanding and exacting time for the people of India as well as for their government. The British move and decision to split India had led to fairly widespread bloodshed, and a movement between the split parts, largely in the north, of some 15 million people, who had to trek hundreds of miles from one part to the other. In the process, mostly during 1947, perhaps one million persons lost their lives. Like newly established Pakistan, India was saddled with the problem of transporting, sheltering, feeding and settling the millions who had been uprooted by the partition decision. In such a state, the making of the Constitution excited little public debate and interest. It seems to have been treated by India's main leaders, especially after Mahatma Gandhi's death, as something which could be left to lawyers and to those with legal expertise and administrative experience.

Yet, in certain matters, the discussions in the Constituent Assembly gave rise to much misgiving and deep concern. One of these matters related to the place of the locality— villages, towns, cities in the new polity.<sup>15</sup> As mentioned above, the 1920 constitution of the Indian Congress was based on the principle that individual members in a locality will join together to form the Congress committee of the locality; the localities in a region will together form the regional committee; the regional committees in a province will form the provincial committee; and all these together will constitute the national Congress.

At the very beginning of the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly, around January 1947, a member had reminded the Assembly of the ideas which had been generated in the previous 25 years (to an extent embodied in the Independence pledge of January 1930) and had quoted Mahatma Gandhi as saying: 'The centre of power now is in New Delhi, or in Calcutta and Bombay, in the big cities. I would have it distributed among the seven hundred thousand villages of India.' According to him, Mahatma Gandhi had also said that 'there will then be voluntary cooperation

between these seven hundred thousand units', and that such 'cooperation will produce real freedom and a new order'.<sup>16</sup>

The making of the Constitution was entrusted to a senior Indian member of the British officer corps who was appointed as the Constitutional Adviser. A committee of seven members was formed, six of whom had been leading legal and administrative luminaries under the British administration. The committee was constituted on August 29, 1947. It was given the task of scrutinising the draft which emerged from the Adviser's labour.<sup>17</sup> This drafting and scrutiny evidently took a whole year. When the draft of the Constitution was placed before the Constituent Assembly, there was no mention in it of villages, towns, cities or even of districts. The Law Minister who placed it before the Assembly was in fact proud that no such mention had been made in the draft. In his speech, he observed:

'Another criticism against the Draft Constitution is that no part of it represents the ancient polity of India. It is said that the new Constitution could have been drafted on the entire ancient Hindu model of a State and that instead of incorporating Western theories the new Constitution should have been raised and built upon village panchayats and district panchayats.'

And he added: 'The love of the intellectual Indian for the village community is of course infinite if not pathetic.' Quoting an early 19th century British authority he felt that no one could feel any pride in them. Then he added:

That they have survived through all vicissitudes may be a fact. But mere survival has no value. The question is on what plane they have survived. Surely on a low, on a selfish level. I hold that these village republics have been the ruination of India... What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness and communalism? I am glad that the Draft Constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit.<sup>18</sup>

The Law Minister's observations produced great anger and much anguish. Of the 32 members who spoke in the Constituent Assembly at this stage, only three came to his defence. The others, including several past, contemporary and future prime

ministers of Indian provinces, felt greatly hurt and betrayed. A member felt that the 'Constitution as a whole, instead of being evolved from our life and reared from the bottom upwards is being imported from outside and built from above downwards.'<sup>19</sup> Another member said that 'in the whole Draft Constitution we see no trace of Congress outlook, no trace of Gandhian social and political outlook. I feel the whole Constitution lacks in Congress ideal and Congress ideology.' Answering the point that 'the villages have been the ruination of India,' he said, 'our villages have been starved; our villages have been strangled deliberately by the foreign governments; and the townspeople have played a willing tool in this ignoble task.'<sup>20</sup> A very senior and prominent member from the south, prime minister of the Madras Presidency around 1947–1948 stated:

I was hoping, having seen the Preamble that everything would follow in regular course and bring out a Constitution that will give food and cloth to the millions of our people and also give education and protection to all the people of the land. But to the utter disappointment of myself and some of us who think with me, this Draft Constitution has drifted from point to point until at last it has become very difficult for us to understand where we are, where the country is, where the people are, what is it that they are going to derive out of this Constitution when it is put on the statute book.<sup>21</sup>

Most members who spoke found the Draft Constitution 'totally foreign'.<sup>22</sup> A member even implied that when most of India was fighting for freedom, the Law Minister and his colleagues 'were applying grease on the backs of the British'.<sup>23</sup>

These discussions, however, got side-tracked. A modification was brought in to calm the anger and anguish of the members, and it was decided that another article should be inserted in the Constitution stating that, The state should take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function

as units of self-government.<sup>24</sup> This, though welcome, produced little joy. Many members felt unhappy with the Constitution to the last. But in the process some had realised that such an unsatisfactory state was the result of lack of vigilance on their part.<sup>25</sup> It was said that the work of constitution making was left to those who were not 'in sympathy with the freedom movement', that therefore 'they naturally brought their outlook and knowledge of things into the Constitution making'; and that this was 'not the kind of psychology or the knowledge' that the country needed. The same member further observed that, 'we wanted the music of *Veena* and *Sitar*, but here we have the music of an English band', and this was because our Constitution makers were educated that way.<sup>26</sup> Another member wondered that if 'the Constitutional Adviser could go to Ireland, Switzerland or America to find out how the people of those countries are running their governmental systems, could you not find a single person in this country who was well read in the political lore of this country who could have told you that this country has also something to contribute; that there was political philosophy in this country which had permeated the entire being of the people of this country and which could be used beneficially in preparing a Constitution, for India.'<sup>27</sup> Another member felt that after adopting the Constitution 'the picture from the villager's point of view is dull and dead. I cannot give any argument to convince the villager that from 26th January 1950 his lot will be better.'<sup>28</sup> According to another it appeared that 'under this constitution, there will be two classes, a new ruling class at the helm of affairs and at the bottom there will be the common man exercising a vote once in five years.'<sup>29</sup> Finally, many had to be satisfied with the feeling that the constitution they had adopted was 'only a stop-gap arrangement',<sup>30</sup> and another said that in due time they 'will have to change this constitution.'<sup>31</sup>

The adoption of the article on *Panchayats* led to new statutory legislations to devolve some authority and resources on villages, sub-districts, and districts. However, several such attempts at decentralisation had already been adopted by the British since about 1884. The major British experiment in decentralisation of authority and resources to district bodies and bodies at the sub-district and locality level had been conducted during the 1920's. At that time, these bodies were permitted to make their own rules, create their own procedure, and could hire, direct and dispense with the persons who worked for them, including high technical personnel. The resources put at their disposal within a province, or the larger British presidencies (Bengal, Bombay and Madras) was also substantial. In the Madras Presidency, it amounted to around 25% of the presidency budget.

But within a few years the experiment had come to a dead end. The reason was that the centralised system established by the British in India could not tolerate any departure from the line laid down by central authority. The experiment collapsed by 1930.

There were, however, other attempts in many provinces at decentralisation between 1937 and 1949, and again during 1950–1956, and from 1957 to around 1966. These latter attempts were much less ambitious than the one in the 1920s. In them far less authority and resources were provided to the decentralised bodies. Even then they again reached similar dead ends. Whenever any such bodies began to function at all, their manner of handling tasks and their worldview began to seem intolerable to the directing central authority. The consequence was that each time they were reduced to low level, low-functional branches or offices of the directing authorities at provincial or state capitals.<sup>32</sup>

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Within ten years of the adoption of the Constitution, disquiet about it had grown apace. The process of direct elections, etc. at every level seem to have led to widespread factionalism in most parts of India, and further disrupted localities and regional

societies. A major expression to it was given by Jayaprakash Narayan in his *A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity*, published and circulated privately in 1959.<sup>33</sup> In it, Narayan, a prominent freedom fighter and later an eminent Indian leader and statesman, spelled out the nature of the disruption which was occurring. He suggested recourse to a several-tiered polity from the base upwards in which direct elections were to take place only for the level of the locality, the other tiers being elected by the elected institutions at the locality and other levels.

Three years later, he commented on the afore-mentioned debate in the Constituent Assembly. As these comments seem to reflect the Indian approach and view on the subject, some part of what he wrote is reproduced here:

As I look at it, there are two entirely different concepts of society involved here. Even though not clearly expressed, this is implicit throughout Gandhiji's discussion on the subject. One concept is that put forward by Dr. Ambedkar, and accepted as the basis of the Constitution, namely, the atomised and inorganic view of society. It is this view that governs political theory and practice in the West today. The most important reason for that is that Western society itself has become, as a result of a certain form of industrialisation and economic order, an atomised mass society. Political democracy is reduced to counting of heads. It is further natural in these circumstances for political parties, built around competing power-groups, to be formed, leading to the establishment, not of government by people, but of government by party: in other words, by one or another power-group.

The other is the organic or communitarian view. This view treats of man not as a particle of sand in an inorganic heap, but as a living cell in a larger organic entity. It is natural that in this view the emphasis should be laid more on responsibility than on right, just as in the inorganic view it is natural that it should be the opposite. When the individual lives in community with others, his rights flow from his responsibilities. It cannot be otherwise. That is why, in Gandhiji's sociological thought, the emphasis is always laid upon responsibility.<sup>34</sup>



It may be useful to recollect here Mahatma Gandhi's thinking on this subject, as he expressed it in 1931 in London at a British invited conference on India. He stated:

We must remember that we have 700.000 villages. I believe that the 700.000 includes the Princes' India also. I speak subject to correction. We have perhaps 500.000 or a little more in popular India. We may have these 500.000 units. Each unit would elect its own representative, and these representatives would be the electorate that would elect, if you will, representatives to the Central or the Federal legislature. I have simply given you an outline of the scheme. It can be filled in if it commends itself to your attention. If we are going to have adult suffrage, I am afraid that we shall have to fall back upon a scheme somewhat after the style that I have suggested to you. Wherever it has been working, I can only give you my evidence that it has worked with excellent results, and there has been no difficulty in establishing contact through these representatives with the humblest villager.<sup>35</sup>

When he said 'that it has worked with excellent results,' what Gandhiji had most in view was the 1920 constitution of the Indian National Congress and the working of the Congress under the provisions of that constitution.

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Some of those close to Mahatma Gandhi, wondering at the transformation wrought in India since 1917 from a state of fearfulness to fearlessness and from despair to hope,<sup>36</sup> used to ask him what was it that he did to bring about such transformation. His reply was that he really did nothing more than articulate the feelings, ideas and preferences of Indian society and India's people, which they themselves had been unable for decades to so articulate. Earlier on, it might have seemed that he was being unduly modest; while in retrospect, it appears that this is in

fact was what had happened. The shock and manner of the British conquest and the prolonged terror which accompanied it had not only disrupted Indian society, its localities, the interrelationships between its numerous localities as well as extended kinship groups; but worse yet, made them dumb. The greatest social contribution that Gandhiji seems to have made was to restore his society's voice, and by his example, helped to make it and its varied constituents fearless and articulate. In a way, what the members of the Constituent Assembly were trying to express, or what Jayaprakash Narayan felt regarding the basis of Indian polity was an inheritance they had derived from Mahatma Gandhi. But in another sense, the concern they felt seems to have been of very ancient origin, and was integral to the world view of Indian civilization; and to the way this civilization approached life, and thought that such life should be organised and constituted.

With the weakening of the locality structure and the interrelationships amongst localities which made them whole and functional, the interrelationship of the various extended kinship groups came under heavy pressure as well. Further, with the breakdown of Indian political and administrative institutions, men from the more scholarly and more literate groups allowed themselves to be coopted into the system created by the British. Though their cooptation till the early 20th century was mainly to fill the subordinate positions in the governing and coercive apparatus, later they became the immediate instruments of terrorising their own people. Within a few decades, they and the communities they came from, became not only objects of awe but also of relative hatred. Such a situation seems to have prevailed in practically all parts of India by the 1860s.

However, events, like those of 1857–1858, and the passing of time changed many equations. By the 1870s, the British, as mentioned earlier, began to establish new alliances. The disruption and injustice which had been heaped upon Indian society, the way most of its people had been pauperised and degraded by British rule and law, also became more apparent to many more people. Even the Maharaja of the Southern Indian state of Mysore seems to have felt the horror of the inequity which had arisen around him, and which had deprived most groups in the Mysore state, of honour, dignity and well being by the 1880s. His solution was that the personnel of the government, to begin with at the more subordinate levels, instead of being recruited only from one or two communities should from then on be taken from

all major communities in proportion to their number in the population of Mysore.<sup>37</sup>

This solution, albeit within the framework of the British system, began to be adopted in most parts of southern India from the early years of the 20th century. A major share of recruitment to employment under government, or government-controlled institutions, at more subordinate levels, began to be made on the basis of the numerical strength of the respective communities in the total population of a region, or province. While little could be done through this method to relink communities, or even to wholly atomise them to create mass society, such steps did offer individual benefits to some of those who had been totally excluded from public affairs during the first century of British rule.

The Constitution of free India also gave attention to this matter of social inequity and provided for its correction by including two articles on it in the Constitution. These articles—16(4) and 46—provide for reservation in education and public employment for the weaker sections, backward classes and the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

A few years later, these articles of the Constitution led to the appointment of a Backward Classes Commission at the pan-India-level. Thereafter similar Commissions were appointed in several states of India; and by 1980, the idea of some proportionate representation based on caste or community in recruitment to governmental employment, had become quite respectable and legitimate in most parts of India and in practically all sectors of public employment.

But just as decentralisation of administration to district and sub-district and locality levels did not succeed in rejuvenating localities, this device of recruitment to public employment on the basis of the relative numerical strength of the community

also did not rejuvenate communities; or in any sense lead to the restoration of intercommunity cooperation and friendliness. By the very nature of the British-given structures and framework, both were, from the start, doomed to failure.

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The British conquest of India, and the imposition of British law, institutions, concepts, theories, etc., (no doubt largely of late 18th-early 19th century British origin, and thoroughly antiquated by about 1900), should have, according to European experience and theory, wholly atomised Indian society by the beginning of the 20th century, or at least by the time the British quit India in 1947. However that did not happen to any appreciable extent. But this was not for any lack of trying. All possible efforts, physical and intellectual, were made to smash or completely subordinate Indian society. In addition, varied efforts were also made to ally and incorporate it within the European world view so that it could be governed and administered with a minimum of expense and violence. Three such efforts were through the advocacy and promotion of Christianity, westernisation and indology.

The christianisation of India was approved and advocated by the British House of Commons as early as 1813. Westernisation of India became a major programme by the 1830s. Indology, and the theory of ancient kinship between Indian and European languages, and by implication between Indians and Europeans has continued to be hawked in the corridors of academia as well as in international politics, since about the 1780s. One of the ideas originating from indological theory was even shared by Roosevelt, the President of the United States of America when he advised the British in August 1942 that 'we should try to think of some arrangement by which India found its place in the European and American, i.e. western orbit rather than the Asiatic.' He partly justified this advice on the view that 'racially the mass of the Indians were really the cousins of us Westerners.'<sup>38</sup>

While these efforts led to further pauperisation, disorientation and depression, they failed to generate any major atomisation of India's communities and extended kinship groups. Even

those who have converted to Christianity from about 1800 (similarly to those who converted to Islam from about 1200 A.D.) did not get individualised or reduced to nuclear families: their attachment to extended kinship seems to be of the same order as obtaining amongst the larger Hindu society.

If Indian Society had got atomised like that of Western Europe, it perhaps could have followed in the West European or the North American path. Atomisation, for mere survival, if for no other reason, according to the Western model, would have generated drive, the kind of motivation, which Americans are supposed to acquire in their early childhood, and enterprise and inventiveness at least amongst a section of the Indian people. The compulsions of the drive and enterprise then could have provided new structures and institutions to the Indian people. But this has not happened. The reason may be that European assumptions and experience, on the basis of which Indian political and public institutions have been structured, does not necessarily have any universal validity. That things happened in a certain manner in Europe need not imply that this sequence gets repeated everywhere else too. That European civilization happens to be dominant in the world for the last 400–500 years, and has been able to put its stamp on a worldwide scale in itself has little uniqueness.

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The European historical experience and thus the European ideas of the State seem to be alien to India. It may be that there are certain other areas of the world, perhaps like Japan where it is said that feudalism of the European kind did prevail at some stage, which have had similar historical experience and institutions as Europe is known to have had. But India does not seem to be one of such areas. Here State formation of the European type does not seem to have taken place, despite the centralisation theories of the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, and texts of that type. Kingship here, it seems, did not lead to the formation of a State. The king seems to have remained as a constituent of society; and, more often than not, was no more than an elevated member of the numerically dominant extended kinship community. It is for such a reason that there were no hard and fast boundaries, except what the Himalayas, the great rivers, and the oceans provided. Localities, regions, *janapadas* seem to have gradually merged into one another. They ordinarily had no

distinct fixed boundaries which marked where one *janapada* ended and another began.

It may be mentioned here that India, unlike Europe and post-Columbus America, is not an area of immigrants. Though India has experienced numerous foreign invasions, mostly minor but some major, India really is not a conquered civilization (as Europe perhaps is, and as post-Columbus America became soon after 1492, and much more during the 19th century). The Indian people, therefore, established very different arrangements to run their social, economic, cultural and religious life. It is not that there were no fights, battles, or wars between locality and locality, region and region, or one extended kinship group and another extended kinship group. There obviously also was movement of groups from one region to another, or over long distances: some groups from southern India going and settling in the Himalayas; or many Brahmins from Kanyakubja in Uttar Pradesh going over 700 years ago and settling in the region of the temple of Jagannath at Puri on the shore of the Bay of Bengal. (Kanyakubja was a major ancient centre of learning and also the capital of the celebrated king Harsha of the 7th century A.D.) It is mentioned in the 18th century data on the district of Chengalpattu that sometime in the 17th century a warrior leader, or perhaps a small king, or banker, from Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh was journeying with his family deity to the temple of Rameshwaram at the southern tip of India with an armed guard of around 200. When he reached the area of Chengalpattu after a journey of one thousand miles and more, he came across some plundering group which had for sometime been harassing the people of the region. At the request of the people of Chengalpattu he is said to have vanquished this group. But thereafter the people of the Chengalpattu region would not let this man from Uttar Pradesh leave. They wanted him to settle in their region and be one of them. He ultimately agreed. He and his descendants thereafter were incorporated in the local structure as *palayakkarans* i.e., militia commanders or small kings.

Numerous similar instances can be found in Indian literature or chronicles, or amongst the innumerable inscriptions which are found in most regions of India.

Despite such migrations, it seems that most of India's present people as well as their political heads, kings, *palayakkarans*, etc., have lived in the same localities or in their neighbourhoods, i.e. within the same *janapadas*, where their ancestors had resided from fairly ancient times, and many

perhaps from the time of the great Gautama Buddha. It is possible that over time many or some of them changed their faiths; became Buddhists, Jains, or Saivites, Vaishnavities, tantriks, snake worshippers, etc.; or at later times, even Muslims or Christians. But such a change does not seem to have affected their institutions in any appreciable degree. So there remained a spiritual, cultural and civilizational continuity. It is such continuity that, on the one hand, amazed men like Voltaire; and, on the other, gave rise to the impression of Indian stagnancy, or of India being the home of various conquerors from the West, from the days of the adventurer Alexander, and perhaps from earlier on. It may be added here that Alexander hardly moved any major distance into India from the eastern bank of the river Indus. But the historical texts of modern times, and perhaps of Greek antiquity too, seem to treat him as a conqueror of India. Most conquests of India which historical texts take into consideration seem to be of the same genre as the crossing of the Indus by Alexander.

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Notwithstanding her social and cultural continuities, India and its people and its polity are in a state of stalemate today. The seeds of such a stalemate may possibly have been sown much before the intrusion of Islam in Sindh in the seventh century A.D. But the extension and deepening of this state of affairs is of fairly recent origin, no older than 100–150 years. The major cause seems to be the mental confusion that has taken over Indian minds, leading to a loss of self-image, and loss of identity with the larger yet still highly diverse Indian society.

Such mental confusion and alienation, leading to a loss of self-image and identity, began to affect the prosperous and the scholarly Indian elite most. Even many of those who have had little personal contact with European Civilization and its artifacts began to lose their civilizational moorings as time passed. The British saw this happening as early as 1830.<sup>39</sup> By the 1890s, the decline had reached a stage when the great Swami Vivekananda felt convinced, 'that we shall not be able to rise unless the

Western people come to our help. In this country no appreciation of merit can yet be found, no financial strength, and what is most lamentable of all, there is not a bit of practicality.<sup>40</sup>

In the next 30 years, the Indian elite seemed to have surrendered to the West, completely. This is how one of them, an up and coming leader of the Indian National Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru saw it in 1928. In a letter to Mahatma Gandhi he wrote:

You have stated it somewhere that India has nothing to learn from the West and that she had reached a pinnacle of wisdom in the past. I certainly disagree with this viewpoint...I think that western or rather industrial civilization is bound to conquer India, may be with many changes and adaptations, but none the less, in the main, based on industrialism. You have criticised strongly the many obvious defects of industrialism and hardly paid any attention to its merits. Everybody knows these defects and the utopias and social theories are meant to remove them. It is the opinion of most thinkers in the West that these defects are not due to industrialism as such but to the capitalist system which is based on exploitation of others.<sup>41</sup>

17 years later, in 1945, he seemed even more convinced of his views and said:

I do not understand why a village should necessarily embody truth and non-violence. A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow-minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent.<sup>42</sup>

Given such loss of self-image and identity, accompanied by the increasing alienation of the elite from the people and the reality of India, the split in Indian society became even deeper and wider.

Moreover, by the time of the making of India's constitution in 1947-49, the anglicised or westernised Indian had come to occupy seats of power and decision-making in the institutional



frame of the British-created Indian state. Therefore any return to the earlier Indian norms became far more difficult. Finding it difficult to establish the primacy of the locality, indigenous Indian sentiment took to emphasising instead the place of the *jati*, or the extended kinship group. That the locality and extended kinship groups are complementary and cannot be functional separately, was improperly recognised. Further, it has yet to be fully realised that it was the primacy enjoyed by the localities which made them relate one with the other to form the larger Indian polity and thus, Indian civilization itself.

During 1947, at the time of the departure of British power, someone had asked Mahatma Gandhi what was to be expected from the regaining of freedom. He had then written that, 'we would need at least half that much time to cleanse our body-politic of the virus that has infiltrated every cell and pore of our being during our subjection', after '150 years of slavery'. The full letter, dated July 6, 1947, originally in Gujarati, read:

You are gravely mistaken in assuming that as soon as *swaraj* comes prosperity will flood the country. If, before assuming that, you had used your imagination a bit to see that after 150 years of slavery, we would need at least half that much time to cleanse our body-politic of the virus that has infiltrated every cell and pore of our being during our subjection, you would not have found it necessary to ask me. I am sure you will understand what I mean, namely, that far greater sacrifices will be needed after the attainment of self-government to establish good government and raise the people than we required for the attainment of freedom by means of *satyagraha*.<sup>43</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi of course defined and understood such things from the point of *swarajya*, i.e., self-rule, not only in localities and communities but also in individuals too. This kind of definition of life seems to be central to the Indian view of life and society and man's artifacts. It therefore seems that many of the problems which India's polity faces are due to lack of proper definition and perspective and not so much only because of past plunder or physical suffering caused by Islam or Europe. An analysis of the basic Indian concepts and institutions like locality and extended kinship groups, and *janapadas*, kings, and council of ministers, etc., could perhaps help India in finding a solution to the problems of its polity and society.

#### Notes

1. *Mahabharatam*: Sabhaparvam: Chapter 14, verses 5-6; also Bhagwaddatt: *Bharat Ka Itihas* (in Hindi), 1944, pp.146-149.
2. *Mahabharatam*: Santiparvam: Chapter 67, verse 12; Chapter 59, verses 13-28; also earlier and subsequent chapters.
3. *Mahabharatam*: Santiparvam: Chapter 85: verses 7-11.
4. An account and English translation of these Uttaramerur inscriptions is given in T.V. Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*,

University of Madras, 1955, pp.344–353; also K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, University of Madras, 1935, (1984), pp.487, 495–496; Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society, in Medieval South India*, Oxford (OUP), 1980, pp.146–147. The Society of Uttaramerur and its institutions and election procedure are also referred to in J.P. Narayan, *Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity*, 1959, pp.25–27.

5. The information in this and the following section, is based on material written in English, pertaining to a survey of around 2,200 localities in the district of Chengalpattu during the period 1767–1774. This material is held in the Tamil Nadu State Archives in Madras. Many more details relating to a number of these localities are still available on palm leaf manuscripts, now kept at the Tamil University at Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu. A detailed analysis of this data is presently being done by the *PPST Foundation*, and the *Centre for Policy Studies*, Madras.

6. Some account of such unarmed resistance, especially regarding widespread resistance against the imposition of a tax on houses in the Varanasi region in 1810–1811, is provided in Dharampal, *Civil Disobedience in Indian Tradition: With some early Nineteenth Century Documents*, (Vol.II of the *Collected Writings*).

7. There is much material on this in *India: The Transfer of Power*, vols. VII and VIII, May–July 1946 (HMSO, London): documents 297, 407, 442, 455, 509, 510 and 527 (Vol. VII), and documents 7 and 8 (Vol. VIII) directly pertain to this matter.

8. The India Office Library and Records (IOLR) in London has much material on this agitation in the papers of the British Viceroys Lord Lansdowne as well as Lord Elgin, and far more in the series L/P & J.

9. IOLR: Letter from Queen Victoria to the Viceroy Lansdowne, 1893.

10. IOLR: L/P & J/J & P 254/1894: Note on the Agitation against Cow-killing by D.F. McCracken, Offg. Gen. Supdt., Thagi and Dacoity Dept., 9.8.1893.

11. *India: The Transfer of Power*, Vol III, No. 280 (16.12.1942) (HMSO, London). The expression one card and the second card is in the original file (in IOLR) on the Secretary of State's draft on this subject. The draft also carries a marginal comment by the Secretary of State's deputy, the under Secretary of State for India, stating that the second card, i.e. the card of the scheduled castes was weak as it had already been cut by Gandhi. A few months later the Secretary of State seems to have had some after-thought. Writing to the British Viceroy in India he then said: 'The fundamental weakness of the scheduled castes is that they are neither one thing nor the other,' and added: 'If they had the courage to turn Christian or Muslim *en bloc* it would be much easier to legislate for them. But so long as they remain a part of the Hindu system, with no separate religion or basis of organisation as such, and continue to regard themselves as Hindus, it does look as if their only chance of betterment lay, not on the political side, but on gradually winning their way socially in the Hindu Community.' This was on February 2, 1943 (*India: The Transfer of Power*).

12. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* Vol. XIX, pp.190–198, text of the constitution of the Indian National Congress adopted at Nagpur, December 1920. The information following in this para is taken from the University of Oxford doctoral dissertation (of around

- 1960) on the Indian National Congress 1920–1923 by Gopal Krishna.
13. Ibid, p.190.
14. CWMG, Vol.XLII, pp.384–385, January 10, 1930.
15. Proceedings of the Constituent Assembly of India during December 1946-January 1947, August 29, 1947, November 4–9, 1948, November 22, 1948, and November 17–26, 1949. These Proceedings are also reproduced in Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD) (compiled and edited by Dharampal), *Panchayat Raj as the Basis of Indian Polity: An exploration into the Proceedings of the Constituent Assembly*, Delhi, 1962 (included in Vol.4 of the *Collected Writings*).
16. Ibid., pp.20–21: Speech of M.R. Masani (Bombay).
17. Ibid., p.23: resolution appointing Scrutiny Committee.
18. Ibid., pp.2–25: speech of Law Minister B.R. Ambedkar (Bombay).
19. Ibid., p.25: speech of Damodar Swarup Seth (UP).
20. Ibid., pp.29–30: speech of Arun Chandra Guha (West Bengal).
21. Ibid., pp.30–32: speech of T. Prakasam (Madras).
22. Ibid., p.37: speech of Dakshyani Velayudhan (Madras); also pp.72–74: Kamalapati Tripathi (UP); also others.
23. Ibid., p.40: speech of Mahavir Tyagi (UP).
24. Ibid., p.44: addition of Article 31A regarding state to take steps to organise village panchayats.
25. Ibid., p.46: speech of T. Prakasam (Madras).
26. Ibid., p.55–56: speech of K. Hanumanthaiya (Mysore).
27. Ibid., p.60: speech of Raghu Vira (C.P. Berar).
28. Ibid., p.77: speech of Mahavir Tyagi (UP).
29. Ibid., p.66: speech of Loknath Misra (Orissa).
30. Ibid., p.60–61: speech of Arun Chandra Guha (West Bengal).
31. Ibid., p.75: speech of Basanta Kumar Das (West Bengal).
32. The observations in this paragraph are dealt with in greater detail in Dharampal, *The Madras Panchayat System: A General Assessment*, (Vol.IV of the present collection). The book is based on a study made and completed during 1964 and 1965 on behalf of the All India Panchayat Parishad.
33. Jayaprakash Narayan, *A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity* (draft for private circulation), Kashi (Akhil Bharatiya Sarva Seva Sangha), 1959.
34. See Vol.IV of the *Collected Writings*. p.10-11.
35. CWMG, Vol.XLVIII, pp.26–38, speech at Federal Structure Committee, September 17, 1931.
36. According to the American author Louis Fischer, the transformation in India within 10 years of 1917 was such that though still subject to British rule, Indians by and large had begun to feel free by 1928, 1929, and 1930– the year when Gandhiji had launched the *satyagraha* against the tax on salt.
37. It is possible, however, that for some complex political reasons such a solution originated from the British Political Resident in Mysore. Residents had begun to be appointed to all such territories which had been brought under British protection (i.e., indirect

authority) but still were formally said to be ruled by Indian Maharajas, rajas, *nabobs*, and in the case of Hyderabad, by the Nizam. The process had been initiated around 1770 in Avadh, and the rule of the so-called 'Indian states' was in complete control of the political Residents from 1799 to 1947. The solution suggested by the Maharaja of Mysore is also referred to in the *Report of the Second Karnataka Backward Classes Commission*, Vol. I, 1986, pp.11–16.

38. *India: The Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, No. 424, Sir R. Campbell, Washington D.C. to Sir A. Cadogan, 5, August 1942 reporting on the conversation he has had with F.D. Roosevelt, the President of the United States of America.

39. The British Governor-General of India, William Bentinck, was very pleased around 1830 with such a development and welcomed the news that many prosperous Indians were moving away from Indian ways and were giving up the feeding of the poor, *sanyasis*, *brahmins*, etc., and were instead spending their wealth in the 'ostentatious entertainment of Europeans'.

40. *The complete works of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta (Advaita Ashram), 1989. Vol. V, pp.126–127: Swami Vivekananda to Saraladevi Ghoshal, 6.4.1897. This view was expressed by Swami Vivekananda several times during the later part of his life.

41. CWMG, Vol. XXXV, p.457, J. Nehru to Mahatma Gandhi, Jan. 12, 1928.

42. J. Nehru, *Selected works*, Vol. XIV, pp.554–557, J. Nehru to Mahatma Gandhi, October 4, 1945.

43. CWMG, Vol. LXXXVIII, pp.86–7.

ANNEX: CHENGALPATTU (1767–1774)\*

(\*This annexure did not appear with the printed version of the European Science Conference paper. )

The data from the Chengalpattu Survey 1767 -1774, either in English in some 20 registers or in Tamil on around 50,000 surviving palm-leaves, may be treated as an approximation to the then ground reality. The survey not only had certain defined purposes but was also governed by the outlook and understanding of those who directed or conducted it. For instance, an obvious understatement pertains to the number engaged in salt manufacture, which is given as 39, while the district of Chengalpattu had a coastline of over 100 kilometers, and salt pans covering an area of over 2,000 hectares.

It is possible that the survey recorded only those who were engaged in the supervision of salt manufacture and not the number of actual manufacturers. Various other industrial professions engaged in building houses, temples and other public places, or those who assisted the manufacture of cloth in various other ways, like dyeing, etc, or were engaged in the manufacture of chemicals, or taught in schools, or professed medicine, etc. also seem to have by and large escaped the notice of this survey. Yet, that it covered as much ground as it actually did is indicative of the practice of extensive record-keeping by the pre-British south Indian society and of their awareness of themselves, as also of the industry and perseverance of those engaged in the survey.

An effort has been made in Tables I, II, III to give some statistical idea of the society of Chengalpattu at this time, its dwindled cattle and sheep and goat population, and the allocation of the agricultural produce to various institutions and functions (like temples, mathams, irrigation, police, militia, accounting, etc.) and to various persons like artificers, barbers, washermen, potters, panisevans, kanakpillais, etc. It may however be added that these allocations were not the only income which these institutions or persons had. Most of them must have also received remuneration for their work from persons in the non-agricultural sector, as also individual personal payments (or in the case of temples, etc, offerings, donations and so on) for such work. Many both institutions as well as individuals also had land manyams. All families invariably also had a house site [Gramanattam] each one to itself wherever it lived.

Table 1  
DETAILS OF NUMBER OF HOUSES OF PEOPLE FROM  
VARIOUS OCCUPATIONS AND JATIS IN CHENGALPATTU  
C.1770

	No. of Houses	No. of Houses In which residing	No. of Houses in which present	
			at 50% or more	at 30% or more
TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS:	62,529	1,544		
PEASANTRY AND CATTLE-KEEPING: 33,963				
Vellalas	7,411	—	53	182
Pallys	9,693	1,112	172	423
Pariars	11,052	1,108	82	344
Reddys	1,417	256	7	30
Kammawars	1,005	185	12	32
Cow-keepers	2,573	796	14	51
Shanars	812	256	10	25
INDUSTRIES & CRAFTS: 8,234				
Weavers	4,011	218	34	55
Fishermen	590	79	9	15
Shroffs (Banking)	422	344	—	—
Cotton-refiners	85	73	—	—
Carpenters	536	414	—	—
Iron-smiths	394	313	—	—
Artificers	45	18	—	—
Braziers	36	17	—	—
Gold & Silver-smiths	209	113	9	38
Vegetable Oil manufacturers	637	270	—	—
Potmakers	389	309	—	—
Wood cutters	596	182	—	—
Salt manufacturers	39	—	—	—
Shoemakers	78	27	—	—
Stone cutters	89	21	—	—
Other Industrial work (approx.)	500	—	—	—

	No. of Houses	No. of Houses In which residing	No. of Houses in which present at 50% or more	at 30% or more
MERCHANT AND TRADERS : 4,312				
Chettis	2,051	725	11	47
Other traders (Komatis, Cavaris)	1,839	–	–	–
ESSENTIAL SERVICES: 1,685				
Barbers	664	506	–	–
Washermen	862	719	–	–
Medical men	159	131	–	–
SCHOLARS, HIGHER LEARNING, RITUAL PERFORMANCES AND CULTURE: 8,064				
Brahmins	6,646	–	34	154
Pandarams	1,054	373	2	10
Devadasis	622	152	2	2
Valluvans	137	91	–	–
Wochuns	173	153	–	–
Musicians	27	25	–	–
Kootadi (Stage performers)	25	22	–	–
LOCALITY ADMINISTRATION, ACCOUNTS, ETC.: 1,974				
Kanakkuppillai (Registry/ Record keeping/ Accoun- tancy)	1,660	714	2	2
Panisevans	314	213	1	1
Taliars (Police)	707	298		
Militia System	1,479		11	39
Muslims:	733			
Moormen	671	154	7	8
Fakirs	62	39		
REMAINING OTHER HOUSEHOLDS: 748				

Table 2  
TOTAL NUMBER OF DOMESTIC CATTLE\*

Cows	94,685
Buffaloes	5,417
Goats	14,931
Sheep	14,970
Bullocks	59,550

\*The period from 1748 to 1770 was a period of war, plunder, and butchering of men as well as cattle by the British and by those who contested them in large parts of south India, and much more in areas around Madras. It is therefore possible that the number of cattle recorded in this survey was much less at the time of enumeration than what it might have been 20 years earlier.

Table 3  
AMOUNT OF ESTIMATED TOTAL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE,  
ALLOCATED TO VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND FUNCTIONS IN  
CHENGALPATTU

	In kalams*	In tonnes	No. of Individual recipients	No. of Localities contributing***
TOTAL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION	14,79,644	1,84,955	–	(1,458)
TOTAL ALLOCATIONS	3,94,950	49,369	–	(1,458)
<i>For institutions and occupations within each locality</i>	2,64,824	33,103	–	(1,458)
Local Kovils (Temples, Shrines)	13,882	1,735	–	(1,409)
Pandarams/Devadasis /Astrologers	18,503	2,313	–	(1,440)
Cultivators' Servants	87,504	10,938	–	(1,363)
Irrigation Fund	19,806	2,467	–	(1,047)
Artificers (Carpenters Ironsmiths)	19,470	2,435	975	(1,453)



	In kalams*	In tonnes	No. of Individual recipients	No. of Localities contributing***
Potters	2,749	344	389	(709)
Barbers	6,169	771	644	(1,439)
Washermen	6,058	757	862	(1,436)
Corn measurers	11,561	1,445	—	(1,303)
Shroffs	9,332	1,166	422	(1,201)
Kanakakupillais	31,624	3,953	1,660	(1,456)
Panisevans	3,110	389	314	(762)
Tottys	1,371	171	—	(272)
Chief Inhabitants	31,197	3,899	—	(1,332)
Various Others	2,488	32	—	
<i>For Outside institutions and persons</i>	1,30,126	16,266	—	(1,458)
Great Kovils/Mathams (Places of higher learning)**/Scholars	25,321	3,165	—	(1,280)
Administration	53,572	6,697	707	(1,347)
Palayakkarns (Militia)	45,936	5,742	1,479	(1,457)
Fakirs/Mosques/ Darghas	2,518	351	—	(506)
Various Others	2,779	345		

\*One *kalam* is equal to 125 kilograms.

\*\*One such institution, the great Vishnu Temple in Chinna Kanchipuram, had grain allocations from the total agricultural produce from 1,265 localities. Nine others received such allocations from over 200 to 450 localities, and seven were receiving such allocations from 118 to 184 localities. Many of such scholarly centres, temples, great scholars, etc. in various regions of India would have also received similar contributions from localities in the adjoining districts, and some perhaps from very distant areas going up to the Himalayas. The great Jagannath temple at Puri and its allied institutions were receiving contributions from all over India, even from places which are now in Pakistan. Similarly, the famous temple at Tirupati, in the region adjoining Chengalpattu, received regular contributions and gifts sent, till around 1810 A.D., amongst others from the Marathas as well as from the king of Nepal.

\*\*\*The number in parenthesis gives the number of localities which made contributions to the particular category of institutions or functions.

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## V

### BHARATIYA CHITTA, MANAS AND KALA

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On January 9, 1915, Gandhiji returned to India from his sojourn in South Africa. On his way back, he visited Britain for a short while. After that homecoming, he went abroad only once: in 1931, when he had to go to Britain to attend the round table conference. During that journey, he managed to make brief halts in France, Switzerland, and Italy. The Americans wanted him to extend his visit to the United States of America, too. But Gandhiji could not go to America, either then or later.

The journey to Britain in 1931 constituted the whole of Gandhiji's foreign travels after 1915— excepting, of course, his short visits to neighbouring Sri Lanka and Burma. Gandhiji, in fact, felt no need to frequently leave the shores of India. On the contrary, he was of the firm opinion that the struggle for the freedom of India had to be waged mainly in India. The world outside, according to him, could be of little help in this.

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The people of India had begun to repose great faith in Gandhiji even before his arrival in 1915, and several national dailies took editorial note of his homecoming. The phrases used and the expectations expressed in these editorial comments suggest that in India, he was already being seen as an *avatara*, as a manifestation of the divine.

The city of Bombay accorded an unprecedented welcome to Gandhiji and Kasturba. Numerous receptions were hosted in their honour. And the high elite of Bombay turned out enthusiastically to attend these receptions. Even members of the British Governor's Council of the Bombay Presidency and judges of the Bombay High Court participated in some of them.

Within three days of their arrival, however, Gandhiji and Kasturba began to feel somewhat out of place in the high society of Bombay. Already on January 12 Gandhiji was giving public expression to his feeling of unease. On that day, at a reception attended by more than 600 guests and presided over by Sir Ferozeshah Mehta, Gandhiji observed:

He did not know that the right word would come to him to express the feelings that had stirred within him that afternoon. He had felt that he would be more at home in his own motherland than he used to be in South Africa among his own country men. But during the three days that they had passed in Bombay, they had felt— and the thought he was voicing was the feelings of his wife, too—that they were much more at home among those indentured Indians who were the truest heroes of India. They felt that they were indeed in strange company here in Bombay. (*Collected Works*, Vol.13, pp. 5–6).

Soon afterwards, Gandhiji's life-style began to change radically. His participation in the festivities of high society declined, and he started moving more and more among the ordinary people of India. The latter saw such transparent divinity in him that by the end of January he was being addressed as 'Mahatma' in his native Saurashtra. Just three months later, people in as far a place as Gurukul Kangari near Haridwar, more than a thousand miles from Bombay, were also addressing him as 'Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi'.

The arrival of Mahatma Gandhi gave rise to an immediate awakening of the Indian people. They probably felt that the gods had responded to their sufferings and had sent someone from amongst them to lessen their burdens. And, this feeling of

having been taken under the protection of the gods, through the divine presence of Mahatma Gandhi, remained with them for the next thirty or more years. Many Indians might have never seen him. A large number of them might have sharply disagreed with his ways. Some might have doubted, till as late as 1945-46, the viability of his methods in achieving the goal of freedom. Yet practically all Indians perceived the presence of the divine in him; and that was probably the source of the self-confidence and the courage that India displayed in such large measure during his days.

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Indians have a long-standing belief that the divine incarnates in various forms to lessen the burdens of the earth. This happens oft and again. There are times when the complexity of the world becomes too much to bear; when the sense of right and wrong gets clouded; and when the natural balance of life, the *dharma*, is lost. At such times, according to the Indian beliefs, the divine incarnates on the earth, to help restore the balance and the *dharma*, and to make life flow smoothly once again.

Indians have held this belief in the repeated incarnations of the divine for a very long time, at least since the time of compilation of the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. The *Mahabharata* is in fact the story of one such divine intervention. By the end of the *Dvapara yuga*, the *dharma* had got so emaciated that the earth, unable to bear the burdens of the *adharma* life on her, went to Vishnu and prayed for his intervention. On the advice of Vishnu, the *devas* worked out an elaborate strategy. Many of them took birth in various forms. Vishnu himself was born as Srikrishna. And, Srikrishna along with the other *devas*, fought the great war of *Mahabharata* to rid the earth of her burdens.

Buddhist epics like the *Lalita Vistara* similarly present the story of the birth of Gautama Buddha as another instance of the process of divine incarnation for the restoration of *dharma*. And Jaina epics tell similar stories about the incarnations of the divine as the *Tirthankaras*.

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To solve the problems of life on this earth, and to restore the balance, the divine incarnates, again and again, at different times

in different forms. This is the promise that Srikrishna explicitly makes in the *Srimad Bhagavadgita*. And, the people of India seem to have always believed in this promise of divine compassion. It is therefore not surprising that when Mahatma Gandhi arrived in India in 1915 many Indians suddenly began to see him as another *avatara* of Vishnu.

The state of India at that time would have seemed to many as being beyond redress through mere human efforts, and the misery of India unbearable. The time, according to the Indian beliefs, was thus ripe for another divine intervention. And it is true, that with the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi, the state of hopelessness and mute acceptance of misery was relieved almost at once. India was set free in her mind. The passive acceptance of slavery as the fate of India disappeared overnight, as it were. That sudden transformation of India was indeed a miracle, and it had seemed like a divine feat to many outside India too.

But though Mahatma Gandhi awakened the Indian mind from its state of stupor, he was not able to put this awakening on a permanent footing. He was not able to establish a new equilibrium and a secure basis for a re-awakened Indian civilisation. The search for such a secure basis for the resurgence of Indian civilisation in the modern times would have probably required fresh initiatives and a fresh struggle to be waged following the elimination of political enslavement. Unfortunately, Mahatma Gandhi did not remain with us long enough to lead us in this effort, and it consequently never took off.

It seems that the spirit which Gandhiji had awakened in the people of India was exhausted with the achievement of Independence. Or, perhaps, those who came to power in independent India had no use for the spirit and determination of an awakened people, and they found such awakening to be a great nuisance. As a result, the people began to revert to their earlier state of stupor, and the leaders of India, now put in control of the State machinery created by the British, began to indulge in a slave-like imitation of their British predecessors.

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The self-awakening of India is bound to remain similarly elusive and transient till we find a secure basis for a confident expression of Indian civilisation within the modern world and the modern epoch. We must establish a conceptual framework that makes Indian ways and aspirations seem viable in the present,

so that we do not feel compelled or tempted to indulge in demeaning imitations of the modern world, and the people of India do not have to suffer the humiliation of seeing their ways and their seekings being despised in their own country. And, this secure basis for the Indian civilisation, this framework for the Indian self-awakening and self-assertion, has to be sought mainly within the *chitta* and *kala* of India.

Gandhiji had a natural insight into the mind of the Indian people, and their sense of time and destiny. We shall probably have to undertake an elaborate intellectual exercise to gain some comprehension of the Indian *chitta* and Indian *kala*. But we can hardly proceed without that comprehension. Because, before beginning even to talk about the future of India we must know what the people of this country want to make of her. How do they understand the present times? What is the future that they aspire for? What are their priorities? What are their seekings and desires? And, in any case, who are these people on whose behalf and on the strength of whose efforts and resources we wish to plan for a new India? How do they perceive themselves? And, what is their perception of the modern world? What is their perception of the universe? Do they believe in God? If yes, what is their conception of God? And, if they do not believe in God, what do they believe in? Is it *kala* that they trust? Or, is it destiny? Or, is it something else altogether?

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We, the educated elite of India, are wary of any attempt to understand the Indian mind. Many of us had felt uneasy even about Gandhiji's efforts to delve into the *chitta* and *kala* of the people of India (and voice what he perceived to be their innermost thoughts and feelings). We are somehow afraid of those inner thoughts of the people of India. We want to proceed with the myth that there is nothing at all in the Indian mind, that it is a clean slate on which we have to write a new story that we ourselves have painstakingly learnt from the West.

But we are also probably aware that the Indian mind is not such a clean slate. In reality it is imbued with ideas on practically all subjects. Those ideas are not new. They belong to long-standing traditions, some of which may be as old as the *Rig Veda*. Some other aspects of these traditions may have emerged with Gautama Buddha, or with Mahavira, or with some other leader of Indian thought of another Indian epoch. But from

whatever source and at whatever epoch the various ideas that dominate the minds of the Indian people may have arisen, those ideas are indeed etched very deep. Deep within, we, the elite of India, are also acutely conscious of this highly elaborate structure of the Indian mind. We, however, want to deny this history of Indian consciousness, close our eyes to the long acquired attributes of the Indian mind, and wish to reconstruct a new world for ourselves in accordance with what we perceive to be the modern consciousness.

Therefore, all efforts to understand the *chitta* and *kala* of India seem meaningless to us. The study of the history of the eighteenth and nineteenth century India, which I undertook in the nineteen sixties and the seventies, was in a way an exploration into the Indian *chitta* and *kala*, and to many educated Indians that exploration too had seemed a futile exercise. That study, of course, was not the most effective way of learning about the Indian mind. It did help in forming a picture of the physical organisations and technologies through which Indians prefer to manage the ordinary routines of daily life. It also provided some grasp of the relationships between various constituents of society and polity within the Indian context. But it was not enough to provide an insight into the inner attitudes and attributes of the Indian mind. The mind of a civilisation can probably never be grasped through a study of its physical attributes alone.

However, many who came to know of this work were disturbed even by this limited study of the Indian ways. When I began to look into the eighteenth and nineteenth century documents relating to the Indian society in 1965-66, a close friend in Delhi wanted to know why I had started digging up the dead. He suggested, with great solicitude, that I should spend my time more usefully in some other pursuit.

Later, many others said that what I had discovered about the state of Indian society in the eighteenth century might have been true then. Indian society of that time might have practiced highly developed agriculture, produced excellent steel, discovered the process of inoculation against smallpox and the art of plastic surgery. That society might have also evolved highly competent structures of locality-centered social and political organisation. All this, they said, was fine. It felt good to talk and hear about such things. This knowledge may also help, they conceded, in awakening a feeling of self-respect and self-confidence amongst the Indian people. But all such arts, techniques and organisational skills of the Indian civilisation, they were



convinced, were of hardly any relevance in the present context. What could be gained by delving into this irrelevant past of India and learning about her lost genius?

I was asked this question repeatedly then, and many keep asking the same question now. Some time ago, I had an opportunity to meet the then Prime Minister of India, Sri Chandra Sekhar. He, too, wanted to know why I was so caught up with the eighteenth century. We should be thinking, he felt, of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, since the India of the eighteenth century was anyway long past and dead. My close friends express the same sentiment even more strongly. It seems that all of us are so immersed in the thoughts of the twenty-first century that we have no patience left for even a preliminary study of our own *chitta* and *kala*.

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But, whose twentieth and twenty-first centuries are we so anxious about? The epoch represented by these terms has little to do with our *chitta* and *kala*. The people of India, in any case, have little connection with the twentieth or the twenty-first century. If Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is to be believed, they are perhaps still living in the seventeenth or the eighteenth century. Pandit Nehru often used to say this about his fellow Indians, and he was very worried that the Indians obstinately continue to persist within the eighteenth century and refuse to acknowledge the arrival of the twentieth.

The people of India, in fact, may not be living even in the eighteenth century of the West. They may still be reckoning time in terms of their *pauranic* conceptions. They may be living in one of the *pauranic yugas*, and looking at the present from the perspective of that *yuga*. It is possible, for we know next to nothing about the *chitta* and *kala* of the Indian people, that they are living in what they call the *Kali yuga*, and are waiting for the arrival of an *avatara purusha* to free them from the bondage of *Kali*. After all, they did perceive in Mahatma Gandhi an *avatara purusha* who had arrived amongst them even during this twentieth century of the West. Perhaps they are now waiting for the arrival of another *avatara*, and are busy thinking about that future *avatara* and preparing for his arrival. If so, the twentieth century of the West can have little meaning for them.

In any case, the twentieth century is not the century of India. It is the century of the West. To some extent, the Japanese

may take this to be their century too. But basically it represents the epoch of Europe and America. Since we cannot completely sever our ties with Europe, America and Japan, we perhaps have to understand this century which is theirs. But this attempt at understanding their epoch does not mean that we start deluding ourselves of being among its active participants. In fact our understanding of the twentieth century, for it to be of any use to us or to the West, shall have to be from the perspective of our own *kala*. If according to the reckoning of the people of India the present is the *kala* of the *Kali yuga*, then we shall have to look at the present of the West through the categories of *Kali yuga*. One understands others only from one's own perspective. Attempts to live and think like the others, to transport oneself into the *chitta* and *kala* of others, leads merely to delusion.

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It is possible that some amongst us believe that they have rid themselves completely of the constraints of their Indian consciousness and the Indian sense of time. They are convinced that, having transcended their Indian identity, they have fully integrated themselves with Western modernity, or perhaps with some kind of ideal humanity. If there happen to be any such transcendent Indians, then for them it is indeed possible to understand the Indian *Kali yuga* from the perspective of Western modernity. Such Indians can perhaps meaningfully meditate on the ways of forcing the Indian present into the mould of the twentieth century.

But such transcendence is not granted to ordinary human beings. Even extraordinary souls find it impossible to fully transcend the limits of their own time and consciousness, their *chitta* and *kala*, and enter into the *kala* of another people. A man like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, for instance, found it difficult to perform this feat successfully. Even he was not able to rid himself completely of his innate Indian-ness. He was not able to go beyond the strange irrationality, the irreducible nonsense, which as Mahatma Gandhi observed in his address to the Christian missionaries in 1916 at Madras, pervades India. India, Gandhiji said then, is a country of 'nonsense'. Pandit Nehru could not fully erase that 'nonsense' from his mind. What he could not do in this regard, other Indians have even less chance of accomplishing.

The elite of India have indeed adopted the external forms of the modern West. They may have also imbibed some of the

Western attitudes and attributes. But it seems unlikely that at the level of the *chitta* they would have been able to distance themselves much from the Indian ways. Given the long history of our contacts with the Western civilisation, it is probable that some fifty thousand Indians might have in fact fully de-Indianised themselves. But these fifty thousand or even a somewhat larger number matter little in a country of eighty-five crores.

The few Indians, who have transcended the boundaries of Indian *chitta* and *kala*, may also wish to quit the physical boundaries of India. But when India begins to live according to her own ways, in consonance with the *chitta* and *kala* of the vast majority of her people, then many of such lost sons and daughters of India will in all probability return to their innate Indian-ness. Those who cannot shall find a living elsewhere. Having become part of an international consciousness, they can probably live almost anywhere in the world. They may go to Japan. Or, to Germany, if Germany wants them. Or, perhaps to Russia, if they find a pleasurable place there. To America, they keep going even now. Some four lakhs of Indians have settled in the United States of America. And, many of them are engineers, doctors, philosophers, scientists, scholars and other members of the literati.

Their desertion of India is no major tragedy. The problem of India is not of those who have transcended their Indian-ness and have left the shores of India. The problem is of the overwhelming majority who are living in India within the constraints of Indian *chitta* and *kala*. If India is to be built with their efforts and cooperation, then we must try to have an insight into their mind and their sense of time, and understand the modern times from their perspective. Knowing ourselves, and our *chitta* and *kala*, it shall also be possible to work out modes of healthy and equal interaction with the twentieth century of the West. But the questions regarding interactions with others can be addressed only after having achieved some level of clarity about ourselves.

## II

There are probably many paths to an understanding of the *chitta* and *kala* of a civilisation. In studying the eighteenth century Indian society and polity, I traversed one such path. But that path led only to a sketchy comprehension of merely the physical manifestations of the Indian mind. It gave some understanding of the way Indians preferred to organise their social, political and economic life, when they were free to do so according to their own genius and priorities. And, their modes of organisation probably had something to do with the *chitta* and *kala* of India.

To learn about the people of India, to try to understand the way they live, the way they think, the way they talk, the way they cope with the varied problems of day-to-day living, the way they behave in various situations– and thus to know in detail about the ways of the Indians is perhaps another path to a comprehension of the Indian *chitta* and *kala*. But this is a difficult path. We are probably too far removed from the reality of Indian life to be able to perceive intelligently the ways in which the people of India live within this reality.

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It may be relatively easier to comprehend the Indian mind through the ancient literature of Indian civilisation. In fact, the process of understanding the Indian *chitta* and *kala* cannot possibly begin without some understanding of the vast corpus of literature that has formed the basis of Indian civilisation and regulated the actions and thoughts of the people of India for millennia. We have to come to some understanding of what this literature– beginning with the *Rig Veda*, and running through the *Upanishadas*, the *Puranas*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Bauddha* and the *Jaina* canons– says about the Indian ways and preferences. Indian texts dealing with the problems of mundane living, like those of the *Ayurveda*, the *Silpa sastra*, and the *Jyotisha sastra*, etc., also have to be similarly understood.

We should probably begin by forming a quick overview of the totality of this literature. Such an overview should provide us with a preliminary picture of the Indian mind, and its various manifestations in the political, social, economic, and technological domains. This initial picture of Indian-ness shall get more and more refined, as we continue our explorations into the corpus of Indian literature, and supplement it with observations

on the present and investigations into the historical past. In the process of this refinement, we may find that the preliminary picture which we had formed was inadequate and perhaps even erroneous in many respects. But by then that preliminary picture would have served its purpose of setting us on our course in the search for a comprehension of the Indian *chitta* and *kala*.

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We have so far not been able to form such a preliminary picture of the Indian *chitta* and *kala*. It is not that no work is being done in India on Indian literature. We have a large number of institutes founded with the specific mandate of studying the various texts of Indian literature. Many high scholars have spent long years investigating various parts of the Indian corpus. But, these institutes and the scholars, it seems, have been looking at Indian literature from the perspective of modernity.

Indology, by its very definition, is the science of comprehending India from a non-Indian perspective, and practically all Indian scholars and Indian institutions engaged in the study of Indian literature fall within the discipline of Indology. They have thus been trying to make India comprehensible to the world. But what we need to learn from Indian literature is how to make modernity comprehensible to us, in terms of our *chitta* and *kala*. We need to form a picture of the Indian *chitta* and *kala*, and to place the modern consciousness and modern times within that picture. Instead, our scholars have so far only been trying to place India, the Indian mind and Indian consciousness, within the world-picture of modernity.

This exercise of exploring India from the perspective of Western modernity has been going on for a long time. The West has been studying various aspects of India for the last four to five centuries. Western scholars have tried to comprehend our polity, our customs, our religious and philosophical texts, and our sciences, arts and techniques, etc. Their attempts have obviously been guided by the interests and concerns of the West at various times. They read into Indian literature what suited and concerned them at any particular time.

Following the scholars of the West, and more or less under their inspiration, some modern Indian scholars also started getting interested in the study of Indian literature. Consequently, specialised institutions for such study began to be founded in India.

A number of these institutions opened up in Maharashtra. Many similar institutions came up in Bengal. And, some so-called Universities for Sanskrit learning began to function in various parts of India.

All these institutions, colleges and universities of Indian learning were conceived along the lines laid down by Western scholarship. Their organisation had no relation to the traditional organisation of learning in India. They were in fact structured on the pattern of the corresponding Western institutions, especially those in London. And, their main objective was to find a place for Indian learning within the various streams of modern Western scholarship.

The Sanskrit University at Varanasi is one example of the institutions of Indian learning that came up in India. An institution known as the Queen's College had been functioning in Varanasi from the times of Warren Hastings. Later the same College was named the Sampurnananda Sanskrit University. Today this University is counted amongst the most important institutions of Indian learning in the country. Most of the other Indian institutions engaged in the study of Indian literature have similar antecedents and inspirations behind them. And more of the same type are being established even today.

These institutions, created in the image of their Western counterparts, are burdened from their very inception with all the prejudices of the West and the complete theoretical apparatus of Western scholarship on India. Like the Western scholars, the Indian indologists have been merely searching for occasional scraps of contemporary relevance from the remains of a civilisation that for them is perhaps as dead and as alien as it is for the West.

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The work of the indologists is in fact akin to anthropology. Anthropology, as recognised by its practitioners, is a peculiar science of the West. The defeated, subjugated and fragmented societies of the non-Western world form the subject of this science. Anthropology thus is the science of the study of the conquered by the conquerors. Claude Levi Strauss, an authentic spokesman and a major scholar of anthropology, defines his discipline more or less in these terms.<sup>1</sup> Indian indologists, anthropologists, and

other academics may wish to disagree with such a definition, but within the community of practitioners of anthropology there is hardly any dispute on the issue.

It is true that not many scholars would like to state the objectives of anthropology quite as bluntly as Claude Levi Strauss does. But then Levi Strauss is an incisive philosopher who does not care to hide the facts behind unnecessary verbiage. It is obvious that anthropological tools cannot be used for

studying one's own society and civilisation. Nor is it possible for the scholars of the non-Western world to invert the logic of this science, and study the conquerors through the methods evolved for the study of the conquered. But Indian indologists are in fact trying to study India through anthropological categories. If Claude Levi Strauss is to be trusted, they can achieve no comprehension of their own society through these efforts. They can at best collect data for the Western anthropologists to comprehend us.

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It is not that this supplementary anthropological work requires no great effort or scholarship. Indian indological scholars have in fact invested enormous labour and stupendous scholarship in the work they have been doing. A few years ago a critical edition of the *Mahabharata* was brought out in India. This edition must have involved hard slogging effort of some forty or fifty years. Similar editions of the *Ramayana*, the *Vedas* and many other Indian texts have been produced in India.

There has also been a great deal of translation activity. Many texts, originally in Sanskrit, Pali, Tamil, and other Indian languages, have been translated into English, German and French. There have also been occasional translations into some other European languages. And, of course, there have been translations of the ancient texts into modern Indian languages. The Gita Press of Gorakhpur has translated a large body of classical Indian literature into simple Hindi, and has managed to bring these translated texts within the reach of the ordinary Hindi-speaking Indian. A number of texts have also been translated into Gujarati. And, perhaps there have been similar translations into many other Indian languages. All this amounts to a fairly large body of work. And this work has indeed been accomplished with great labour and painstaking scholarship.

These scholarly redactions, translations and commentaries have, however, all been carried out from a modern perspective, and according to the rules of the game of Indology laid down by the Western scholars. When the Indian scholars have managed to avoid Western biases and Western methodologies, as those associated with the Gita Press of Gorakhpur have done to a large extent, they have been carried away by a sense of uncomprehending devotion. This great effort has therefore contributed little towards a comprehension of the Indian *chitta* and *kala*. If any



thing, it has only helped in reading modern Western prejudices and concepts into Indian literature, and perhaps also in attributing these to the essential Indian consciousness. In fact, what has emerged from the efforts of Indian indologists, when it is not entirely inane, reads like a queer commentary, a deviant *bhashya*, by someone who has been completely swept off his feet by the currents of modernity.

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To gauge how deeply modernity has insinuated itself into the work of Indian scholars, it is enough to have a look at Sri Sripad Damodar Satawalekar's translation of *Purusha Sukta*, and his commentary on it. Sri Satawalekar reads the *Purusha Sukta* to mean that from the sacred effort, *tapas*, of Brahman, there arose, at the beginning of the universe, a modern government with its varied departments. And, he goes on to name some twenty departments which the *Purusha Sukta* supposedly defines. From Sri Satawalekar's commentary, it seems as if the content of the *Purusha Sukta* is merely a concise prescription for the establishment of a government on the pattern of modern departmental bureaucracy.

Sri Satawalekar was a great scholar. He is recognised and respected as a modern *rishi* of India. His intellect, his commitment to the Indian thought, and the intensity of his effort were indeed very high. But even he got so carried away by the unrelenting sweep of modernity that he began to see a prescience of the modern governmental organisation in the *Purusha Sukta*. Much of the work done by the Indian scholars on Indian literature is similarly tainted by the touch of modernity. In essence, what these scholars assert is that the peculiar attributes and specific comprehensions of the world that the West displays today had been arrived at long ago in the Indian literature. Ancient Indian literature, according to their understanding, records in its somewhat quaint language and phraseology essentially the same thoughts and apprehensions, and even the same organisational principles and techniques, that the West has arrived at only recently.

During the last twenty or thirty years there has been a fresh spurt in this kind of indological activity. But what use is all this scholarship? If we are concerned only about others' understanding of the world, and carry out our discourse on their terms and in their categories, then that can well be done without

bringing the ancient Indian literature into the picture. Why demean this ancient literature by imputing it with modernistic presentiments? Why drag in our ancient *rishis* to stand witness to our blind validation of Western modernity? We may call upon our ancestors and their literature in testimony of a resurgence of the Indian spirit. But modernity hardly needs their testimony to assert itself.

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Let us look at another example of the type of scholarly work on the Indian literature being carried out in India. For a long time, perhaps for more than a hundred years, the scholars of Indology have been trying to make a compilation of the available catalogues and lists of known Indian manuscripts in various languages. After their long and tedious search, they have recently come to the conclusion that there exist probably two thousand catalogues of Indian manuscripts in Sanskrit, Pali, Tamil, Prakrit, etc. These two thousand catalogues are from perhaps seven or eight hundred different locations, and about one third of these locations may be outside India. Each of these catalogues lists a hundred or two hundred manuscripts. The scholars thus have a listing of two to four lakh Indian manuscripts.

This compilation of all available catalogues is indeed a task of great labour and scholarship. It could not have been easy to collect catalogues from seven to eight hundred different locations and compile them into a single comprehensive catalogue. But what purpose of ours will be served by this comprehensive catalogue compiled with so much labour and scholarship? It has taken more than a hundred years to complete this compilation. Numerous foreign and Indian scholars have contributed to this task. But we do not even have an idea of the state of the manuscripts listed in this grand compilation. We do not know how many of the manuscripts listed actually survive today, and of those which survive, how many are in a condition fit enough to be opened and read, or even microfilmed.

In a somewhat similar exercise of scholarly thoroughness, some eminent scholars of India keep mentioning that there are some fifty crore Indian manuscripts in various Indian languages which have survived till today. Again, nobody has any idea where and how these crores of manuscripts are to be found, and what is to be done with them. It is in a way astonishing that we are occupied with exploring and establishing the possible existence

of lakhs and crores of manuscripts that will almost certainly remain unavailable and unreadable, while we are making no efforts to understand and comprehend the literature that happens to be easily available to us.

It is true that there are scholars in all ages who prefer to engage themselves in esoteric exercises, the results of which are unlikely to be of any earthly use to anybody. The grand compilation of Indian manuscripts and the speculation about there being crores of manuscripts to be located and catalogued, probably belong to a similar genre of scholarship. In functioning societies much of the scholarship is directed to specific social purposes, though some amount of this kind of esoteric activity also often takes place. When a society is moving on a well-defined course of its own, and the majority of the scholars are purposefully engaged, then the few who are so inclined are allowed to indulge in their explorations into the unusable and the futile. And, functioning societies, sooner or later, are able to put the results of their esoteric investigations also to some use somewhere.

But we have neither the resources nor the time for such indulgence. If we are to comprehend our *chitta* and *kala*, and thus prepare a conceptual ground on which we may firmly stand and have a look at the world, then this directionless scholarship can be of little help. We need to form a picture of the Indian view of the world based on a quick overview of the totality of literature available to us, so that we have a framework within which the mainstream of Indian scholarship may operate. Once that mainstream is established and starts running strong and deep, there will also be time and opportunity for various scholarly deviations and indulgences.

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Whenever I speak of the need to arrive at some such rough and ready outline of the Indian view of the world through a study of the ancient Indian literature, my friends advise me to keep out of this business. I am told that ordinary mortals like us can hardly understand this literature. As most of these texts are in Sanskrit, they insist that one must be a serious scholar of Sanskrit in order to have any comprehension of these texts of India. Approaching these texts through Hindi or English, it is said, can only lead to error and confusion. Therefore, if one were bent upon reading this literature, then one must first immerse oneself in a study of the Sanskrit language.

But how many in India today have any fluency in Sanskrit? Nowadays, one can even get a doctorate in Sanskrit without seriously learning the language. One can write a thesis in English and obtain a Ph.D. degree for Sanskrit literature from most Indian universities. It seems that scholars who are seriously interested in learning Sanskrit are now found only in Germany. Or, perhaps, some Japanese scholars may be learning this great Indian language. There may also be some fluent Sanskritists in Russia and America. But there are hardly any serious students of Sanskrit amongst the modern scholars of India. There may be a thousand or so of the traditional Pandits who still retain a certain level of competence in the language. And, among the families traditionally associated with Indian learning, there may still be four or five lakh individuals who can read and understand Sanskrit, though few would be fluent enough to converse in it. That is about all the talent we have in the language.

The All India Radio (Akashvani), has been broadcasting an early morning news-bulletin in Sanskrit for many years. But there are probably not many who listen to this bulletin. I once asked Sri Ranganatha Ramachandra Divakar whether there would be ten lakh listeners of the Sanskrit news-bulletin. Sri Divakar had spent many decades in the public life, and he was a venerable scholar in his own right. His understanding was that in India the number of listeners of the Sanskrit news-bulletin could not be that large.

South India has had a long tradition of Sanskrit learning. Some time ago, I happened to meet Sri Sivaraman, the scholarly former editor of the Tamil daily, *Dinamani*. I asked him about his estimate of the number of people in South India who might still be fluent in the language, and who might feel comfortable reading, writing and speaking in Sanskrit. His answer was that there was probably not a single such individual in South India. There might be, he later said, about a thousand scholars, definitely not any more, who would have some level of competence in Sanskrit, but even they were unlikely to be fluent in the language.

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If this is the state of Sanskrit learning in the country, if there are hardly any people left who can read, write and speak Sanskrit fluently, then there is no point in insisting that all Indian literature must be approached through Sanskrit. We have to accept the condition to which we have been reduced, and we must

start building up from there. If for the time being, Sanskrit has become inaccessible to us, then we must do without Sanskrit, and work with the languages that we are familiar with.

It is of course true that no high scholarly work on Indian literature can be done without knowing the language of that literature. But what is urgently needed is not high scholarship, but a rough and ready comprehension of ourselves and the world. We need a direction, a vision, a conceptual basis, that is in consonance with the Indian *chitta* and *kala*, and through which we can proceed to understand the modern world and the modern times. Once such a way is found, there will be time enough to learn Sanskrit, or any other language that we may need, and to undertake detailed high scholarship in our own way, on not only the Indian literature but also perhaps on the literature of other civilisations of the world.

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But the detailed scholarship can wait. What cannot wait is the task of finding our direction and our way, of forming a quick vision of the Indian *chitta* and *kala*. This task has to be performed quickly, with whatever competence we have on hand, and with whatever languages we know at the present time.

### III

As we seem to have little comprehension of the Indian *chitta* and *kala*, we are often bewildered by the variety of questions that arise in ordinary social living. What is the relationship between the individual, the society and the state? Which of them has primacy in which fields? What are the bases of healthy interaction between individuals? What is civilised behaviour in various situations? What are good manners? What is beautiful and what is ugly? What is education and what is learning?

In societies that retain their connection with their traditions, and which function according to the norms of their own *chitta* and *kala*, all such questions are answered in the normal course. Of course the answers change from time to time, and context to context, but that too happens naturally, without conscious effort.

But since we have lost practically all contact with our tradition, and all comprehension of our *chitta* and *kala*, there are no standards and norms on the basis of which we may answer these questions, and consequently we do not even dare to raise these questions openly any more. Ordinary Indians perhaps still retain an innate understanding of the norms of right action and right thought, though signs of confusion on such issues are often seen even among them. But our elite society seems to have lost all touch with any stable norms of behaviour and thinking. All around, and in all situations, there prevails a sense of confusion and forgetfulness. It seems as if we are left with no standards of discrimination at all.

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A few years ago, the then Governor of Andhra Pradesh visited the Sankaracharya of Sringeri. During their conversation, a reference to the *varna vyavastha* arose in some context, and the Sankaracharya started explaining different facets of this *vyavastha* to the Governor. At this the Governor advised the Acharya that he should avoid talking about the *varna* arrangement. And the Sringeri Acharya fell silent. Later, relating the incident to his junior Acharya, he regretted that India had reached a state, where the Acharyas could not even talk about *varna*.

In a functioning society, such an incident would seem rather odd. The oddity is not related to the validity or otherwise

of the *varna* arrangement. There can of course be many different opinions about that. But a Governor asking a Sankaracharya to stop referring to the *varna vyavastha* is a different matter. In a society rooted in its traditions and aware of its civilisational moorings, this dialogue between a head of the State and a religious leader would be hard to imagine. Saints are not asked to keep quiet by governors, except in societies that have completely lost their anchorage.

Religious leaders are not supposed to be answerable to the heads of the State. Their answerability is only to their tradition and to the community of their disciples. It is part of their calling to interpret the tradition, and to give voice to the *chitta* and *kala* of their society, according to their understanding. No functioning societies can afford to curb them in their interpretations and articulations.

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Numerous instances of a similar lack of discrimination in social and personal conduct on the part of the best of India's men and women can be recounted. Consider the example of Sri Purushottam Das Tandon taking to the habit of wearing rubber chappals because he wanted to avoid the violence involved in leather-working. Sri Tandon was one of the most erudite leaders of India. His contribution to the struggle for *swaraj* was great. He had deep faith in the concept of *ahimsa*. And, in pursuance of the practice of *ahimsa*, he took to wearing rubber chappals bought from Bata, the multinational footwear chain, giving up the ordinary leather chappals made by the local shoemaker. There must have been many others who, like Sri Tandon, chose Bata chappals over the locally made leather footwear in their urge to practise the principle of *ahimsa*.

It is of course creditable that important leaders of India had become so careful about their personal conduct and apparel, and took such pains to ensure that they did not participate in the killing of animals even indirectly. But *ahimsa* does not merely imply non-killing. *Ahimsa* as understood in the Indian tradition and as elaborated by Mahatma Gandhi is a complete way of life.

A major aspect of the *ahimsa* way of life is to minimise one's needs and to fulfill these, as far as possible, from within one's immediate neighbourhood. This practice of relying preferentially on what is available in the immediate neighbourhood and locality is as important a part of the principle of *ahimsa* as the

doctrine of non-killing. That is why for Mahatma Gandhi *ahimsa* and *swadesi* were not two different principles. Looked at in this perspective, Sri Tandon's practice of ignoring the local cobbler and taking to the rubber footwear from Bata would have violated the aesthetic as well as the ethical sensibilities of the *ahimsa* way of life.

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Nowadays it is fashionable in the high society of India to use special ethnic goods which are often brought from thousands of miles away. And, this is often done with the noble intention of encouraging *khadi* and village industries, or Indian handicrafts.

This, then, is another instance of our failure to discriminate between the essence of a principle, and its contextually and temporally limited applications.

Mahatma Gandhi laid stress upon *khadi* and village industries as two specific applications of the principle of *swadesi*. In the context and the time of the freedom struggle these two were perhaps the most effective applications that he could choose, though, as he said in 1944, given a different context he would have probably chosen agriculture as the activity that most symbolised *swadesi*. In any case none of these specific activities and applications could in themselves form the essence of *swadesi*. The essence is in the frame of mind that seeks to fulfill all societal needs from the resources and the capabilities of the immediate neighbourhood. Using ethnic goods imported from far off places violates the essence, while conforming to the form, of *swadesi*.

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The instances we have mentioned are probably matters of mere personal etiquette. It can be said that too much should not be read into these personal idiosyncrasies. We, however, seem to be similarly befuddled on questions of much larger social relevance.

For example, we seem to have so far failed to decide on the meaning of education for ourselves. Recently, there was a conference on education held at Saranath. A number of eminent scholars of India had gathered there. Amongst them there were vice-chancellors of major universities, reputed professors of philosophy, and celebrated practitioners of high literature. They had come together at Saranath to deliberate on the question of education. They had chosen a beautiful venue for their meeting. In



Saranath there is a major institute of Buddhist learning, the Tibetan Institute. The conference on education was being held in this Institute. The director of the Tibetan Institute, Sri Samdhong Rinpoche, a high scholar himself- the highest Acharyas in Tibet, including the Dalai Lama, have the title of Rinpoche- sat through most of the deliberations of the conference.

At the beginning of this conference, I sought to know from the assembled scholars the meaning of education as understood by us. Is it merely the craft of reading and writing, or is it something else? There was no answer at that stage. But, on the fourth day of the conference, just before the conclusion of the deliberations, Sri Samdhong Rinpoche was asked to speak, and he took up the question of defining what we call education.

Sri Samdhong said that he had failed to grasp much of what had been said during the four days of the conference, because he did not know the meaning of the English word 'education'. In any case, he said, he did not know much English. But he knew what is meant by the term *siksha*. And *siksha* in his tradition, according to him, meant the acquisition of the knowledge of *prajna*, *sila* and *samadhi*. In rough translation, these terms mean right intellect, right conduct and right meditation. According to Sri Samdhong, knowledge of these three was education. The learning of various arts, crafts, and various physical techniques and sciences did not come under the term *siksha*. At least in the tradition to which he belonged this learning, he said, was not called 'education'.

Now, if this is the Indian definition of education then it needs serious consideration. If knowledge of *prajna*, *sila* and *samadhi* is what is called 'education' in our tradition, then we have to understand this form of education. We also need to find out how many amongst us are educated in this sense of education.

Perhaps there are not many Indians who may be called educated on this criterion. There may be only half a percent of Indians who are educated in the practice of *prajna*, *sila* and *samadhi*. Or, there may even be five percent, for all we know. But supposing there are only half a percent Indians who turn out to be educated in this sense of education, even that number may be five to ten times the number of people adept at *prajna*, *sila* and *samadhi* throughout the world. According to our own definition of education, therefore, we may be the most educated people of the world.

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It is possible that knowledge of *prajna*, *silā* and *samadhi* is only one of the various kinds of education known in our tradition. Perhaps what is more commonly recognised as education is the knowledge of correct personal and social conduct, and the ability to earn a living for oneself and one's dependents. If this is our definition of 'education', then some 90 to 95 percent of the Indian people are indeed educated. Viewed from this perspective, some 5 to 7 percent of highly modernised Indians like us may seem rather uneducated. Because, most of us who have gone through the modern systems of education and learning have lost the knowledge of correct personal and social conduct within the Indian context, and have acquired no productive skills appropriate for making a living.

Or, perhaps neither the knowledge of appropriate conduct in one's own social context and the ability to make a living, nor the knowledge of *prajna*, *silā* and *samadhi* conform with our definition of 'education'. Perhaps by 'education' we only mean the capability of reading and writing. We define 'education' to be merely literacy, and on this criterion we find 60 to 80 percent of Indians to be uneducated. But even if we define education in this limited sense, we still have to come to some decision about the type of literacy we wish to impart through what we perceive to be education.

If somebody knows reading and writing in Bhojpuri, then do we take him to be educated or uneducated? Perhaps to us he will seem uneducated. We shall probably say that though he is familiar with letters, yet familiarity with Bhojpuri letters hardly constitutes literacy, and we may insist that to qualify as an educated person, he should know at least *nagari* Hindi.

But then someone may object that knowledge of only Hindi is also not enough. To be called educated, a person must know at least Sanskrit. And, then someone else will say that Sanskrit literacy is hardly education. An educated person must know English, and that too of the Shakespearean variety. Or perhaps knowledge of the English that is taught in Oxford or spoken on the British Broadcasting Corporation broadcasts will alone meet our criterion of education. But at that point, someone may tell us that the days of British English are over. This English is no use in the United States of America. Americans speak a new type of English, and it is the American English that is current in the world today. Then we shall perhaps insist that for an Indian to be properly educated, he must know the American English.

If after a great deal of effort some Indians manage to learn good American English and thus get educated according to our current standards, we may find that by then America itself has lost its preeminence in the world. The future may turn out to be the age of the Germans, or of the Russians. It may even happen that one of the African nations starts dominating the world. Or the Arabs may take the lead. Then, shall we insist that for an Indian to be educated, he must be literate in the language of whoever happen to look like the current masters of the world?

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The attempt at imitating the world and following every passing fad can hardly lead us anywhere. We shall have no options in the world till we evolve a conceptual framework of our own, based on an understanding of our own *chitta* and *kala*. Such a framework will at least provide us with a basis for discriminating between right and wrong, and between what may be useful for us and what is futile. Such a framework will also provide us with some criterion for right conduct and thought. And, it will allow us to define, though tentatively, our way of living and being. We shall thus have some sense of the direction along which we must proceed in order to bring India back into her own.

The conceptual framework we devise now may not last long. Within a few years, such a framework may start looking inadequate, or inappropriate, or even erroneous. We may have to revise or even completely recast it in, say, just five years. But any conceptual framework can only be a temporary guide to action. All such frameworks are, after all, human constructs. These are not meant to be unchangeable and indestructible.

Conceptual systems devised by man do get revised, changed and even thrown overboard. Basic axioms and laws of even physical sciences keep changing, fundamental principles of humanities and social sciences are of course revised every so often. There is nothing unchanging in any of this. And, if there is something of the ultimate reality, of the absolute truth, in the conceptual frameworks we devise, then that absolute in any case remains unaffected by the changes we make in our temporal devices. The business of the world runs on the basis of temporary and changeable conceptual frameworks, which provide nothing more than useful guidelines for immediate action. Some such temporary but usable conceptual framework of our understanding of the Indian *chitta* and *kala* is what we need to create for ourselves.

We shall ourselves have to make the effort to construct this conceptual basis for Indian thought and action in the modern times. Others can hardly help us in this. They cannot possibly devise for us a conceptual structure that will be in consonance with our *chitta* and *kala*. No outsiders could perform this task for us, even if they had wanted to. How can any outsider look into the *chitta* and *kala* of another people, and present them with a meaningful understanding of themselves?

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The effort to construct a framework for Indian thought and action in the modern world and in the present times is not to be confused with the search for the ultimate, the *sanatana* truth of India. That, of course, is a long and perhaps unending search. But it is not the ultimate truth that we need immediately. We only need some basis from which to start asking the appropriate questions. And, when we start asking those questions, the answers will also begin to emerge. Or, perhaps there will never be any final answers. But the fact of having raised the right questions would have provided us with some direction to the right path. At least the confusion that prevails regarding right conduct and thought, even in the ordinary day-to-day situations, will get cleared.

In a fascinating context of the Valmiki *Ramayana*, Sita questions Sri Rama about the violent tendencies that she discerns arising in him.<sup>2</sup> As Sri Rama leaves Chitrakuta and proceeds deeper into the forest, he and Lakshmana start flaunting their weapons and their physical prowess in a rather conspicuous manner. Noticing this, Sita warns Sri Rama against the warlike inclinations that the possession of weapons invariably generates. 'As contact with fire works changes in a piece of wood,' she says, 'so the carrying of arms works alteration in the mind of him who carries them.' And then she goes on to question the propriety of their bearing arms in the forest, where they were supposed to be leading an ascetic life:

The bearing of arms and retirement to the forest, practice of war and the exercise of asceticism are opposed to each other; let us therefore honour the moral code that pertains to the peace. Murderous thoughts, inspired by desire for

gain, are born of the handling of weapons. When thou does return to Ayodhya, thou will be able to take up the duties of a warrior once more. The joy of my mother and father-in-law will be complete, if during the renunciation of thy kingdom, thou dost lead the life of an ascetic...

Sri Rama did reply to the questions Sita raised about his warlike demeanor in the forest. But it is the questioning that is important. Not so much the answers. What is important is to keep raising questions about human conduct in various situations, not necessarily to arrive at final prescriptions.

In the same vein of raising questions without insisting on any final answers, there is a dialogue between Bhrigu and Bharadvaja in the *Santi Parva* of *Mahabharata*, which is also reproduced almost in the same form in the *Narada Purana*.<sup>3</sup> Bhrigu initiates the dialogue with his teaching that after creating the humans and other beings, Brahman classified the former into four different *varnas*. Bharadvaja asks for the basis of this differentiation:

(You say) that one *varna* in the four fold division of men is different from the other. What is the criterion thereof? Sweat, urine, faecal matter, phlegm, bile and blood circulate within everyone. Then on what basis is the *varna* divided?

Bhrigu answers that originally there was no distinction among the people. At the beginning, all were of the same *varna*. But with the passing of time, they began to differentiate into different *varnas*, according to their *karmas*. But Bharadvaja persists with his questioning. He wants to know how an individual becomes a Brahmana, a Kshatriya, a Vaisya or a Sudra. Bhrigu says that it is the *karmas* and the qualities of an individual that determine his *varna*. And, so the dialogue goes on.

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Here, as in the *Ramayana* context above, there are no final answers that the text provides. Perhaps this way of continuous questioning is the Indian way. To keep asking questions about personal and social conduct, and about the appropriate modes of social organisation, to keep meditating about these issues, and to keep finding provisional answers in various contexts—this way of continuous awareness and continuous reflection is perhaps

the essence of the Indian way of life. We have somehow lost this habit of constant questioning and the courage to question. If we only start raising those questions again, we may regain some anchorage in our *chitta* and *kala*.

## IV

To form a comprehension of the *chitta* and *kala* of India, we should probably begin with those aspects of the ancient Indian literature which seem to form the basis for all the rest. For example, there is the story of the creation and unfolding of the universe, which is found with slight variation in most of the *Puranas*. This story seems to have a direct bearing on Indian consciousness, and Indian understanding of the universe and its unfolding in time.

The story of creation that the *Puranas* recount is extremely powerful in itself. In bare essentials, according to this story, the creation begins with the intense effort, the *tapas*, and the determination, the *samkalpa*, of Brahman. The universe once created passes through a number of cycles of growth and decay, and at the end is drawn back into Brahman. This cycle of creation of the universe from Brahman and its disappearance into Him is repeated again and again according to the predefined flow of time. Within this large cycle, there are a number of shorter cycles, at the end of each of which the universe gets destroyed, and created again at the beginning of the next. Thus the universe keeps on passing through repeated cycles of creation and destruction, and there are series of cycles within cycles.

The terms 'creation' and 'destruction' are probably not wholly appropriate in this context. Because, at the time of creation, it is not something external to Him that Brahman creates. He only manifests Himself in the varied forms of the universe, and at the end He merely contracts those manifestations into Himself, and thus there is in reality nothing that gets created or destroyed. The universe, in a sense, is a mere play of Brahman, a cosmic game of repeated expansion and contraction of the ultimate essence of the universe. But it is a game that is played according to well defined cycles of time. The universe is play, but the play is not arbitrary. Even Brahman is governed by *kala*. He manifests and contracts according to a definite flow of time that even He cannot transcend.

Every Indian is probably aware of this Indian view of the universe as the play of Brahman. Every Indian is also aware of the supremacy of *kala* in this play. Many Indians may not know the very detailed arithmetic of the various cycles of time that is given in the *Puranas*. But the thought that the universe is a play that had no beginning and will have no end, and that this play

of Brahman proceeds according to the inexorable flow of *kala*, is deeply etched on the *chitta* of the people of India.

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According to the *Puranas*, in these cycles of creation and decay of the universe, the basic unit is that of *chaturyuga*. Every new cycle begins with *Krita yuga*. This first *yuga* of creation is the period of bliss. In the *Krita*, the *jeeva*, the being, is not yet much differentiated from Brahman. There is, of course, yet no differentiation at all between one being and another. Amongst human beings, there is only one *varna*. In fact the concept of *varna* has probably not yet arisen.

In the *Krita*, life is simple and easy. There is no complexity anywhere. Complicating phenomena, like *mada*, *moha*, *lobha* and *ahankara*—forgetfulness, attachment, greed and egotism respectively, in rough translation—have not yet manifested themselves. There is no *kama*, sexual desire, either. Procreation takes place merely through the wish, the *samkalpa*. The needs of life are rather few. No special effort needs to be made for sustaining life. There is something called *madhu*, which is abundantly available. Everyone lives on *madhu*. And, this *madhu* is self-generated. *Madhu* is not the honey made through the efforts of the bees. No effort is involved in making or collecting it. In this simple blissful state of life, even knowledge is not required. Therefore, there is no *Veda* yet in the *Krita yuga*.

This state of bliss lasts for a very long time. According to the calculations of the *Puranas*, the length of the *Krita yuga* is 17,28,000 years. But with the passage of time, the universe starts getting more and more complex. The innate order starts getting disturbed. *Dharma* starts getting weakened. And, towards the end of *Krita*, the creator has to take birth on earth in various forms to re-establish the *dharma*.

Several *avatars* of Vishnu, the aspect of the Brahman charged with the maintenance of the universe, take place in the *Krita*, and the cycle of decay and re-establishment of *dharma*, through the direct intervention of Vishnu, gets repeated several times already in *Krita*. But at the end of every cycle of decay of *dharma* and its re-establishment, the universe is left in a state of higher complexity. The *dharma* is restored by the *avatara*, but the original innate simplicity of life does not return. The universe moves farther away from the original bliss. While the order of life is restored, life moves to a lower level. And, through these



cyclical movements, each leading to a somewhat lower level of existence, the *Krita yuga* finally comes to an end.

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At the beginning of the next *yuga*, the *Treta*, the universe is no longer as simple and straightforward as it was in the *Krita*. According to the *Puranas*, *dharma*, as symbolized by a bull, which stood on all its four feet to securely support the earth during the *Krita*, is left with only three feet in the *Treta yuga*. In this state of relative instability, man requires knowledge and also some administrative authority, in order to sustain *dharma*. That is why man is provided with a *Veda* and a king at the beginning of *Treta*. This is also the time when *mada*, *moha*, *lobha* and *ahankara*, etc., appear for the first time. But at the beginning of *Treta* these frailties of the human mind are as yet only in their nascent state, and thus can be controlled relatively easily.

In *Treta* the needs of life start multiplying. Life can no more be lived now on mere *madhu*. But there is no agriculture yet. Some cereals grow without any ploughing and sowing, etc. These cereals and the fruits of a few varieties of self-growing trees suffice for the maintenance of life. There are not many varieties of trees and vegetation yet. Differentiation has not yet gone that far.

In this *yuga* of limited needs and requirements, man starts learning some skills and acquiring a few crafts and techniques. Some skill and technique are required for the gathering of cereals and fruits, even if these grow on their own without any effort. At this stage, man also starts forming homes, *gramas* and cities. For these human settlements, some more skills, crafts and techniques are called forth.

With increasing complexity of the universe, differentiation sets in. In *Treta* man is divided into three *varnas*. Brahmana, Kshatriya, and Vaisya *varnas* are formed in the *Treta*. But there are no Sudras yet.

In spite of this differentiation and division, communication between various forms of life is not yet obstructed. Dialogue between man and other creatures is still possible. The events described in the Valmiki *Ramayana* happen towards the end of *Treta*. In the *Ramayana*, Sri Rama is seen communicating with facility with the birds of the forest, and with various animals. He calls upon the *vanaras* and *bhalus*, probably meaning monkeys and bears, etc., to help him in defeating the great scholar and

warrior Ravana. The story of *Ramayana* probably indicates that till the end of *Treta* communication between man and other creatures had not stopped. There was differentiation between the various forms of life, but it was not so deep as to foreclose all possibilities of contact and dialogue.

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*Treta* also lasts a very long time. But the duration of *Treta* is only three fourths that of the *Krita*. According to some texts, *Treta* ends with the departure of Sri Rama from earthly existence. And, then the third *yuga*, the *Dvapara* begins. What is known as history in the Indian perception also seems to begin with *Dvapara*. In *Dvapara* the universe has moved very far from the easy simplicity of the *Krita*. All living beings and all phenomena start getting sharply differentiated. The one *Veda* of *Treta* now gets divided into four. And then, even these four acquire many branches. It is in this *yuga* that various arts, skills and crafts start appearing. Knowledge gets divided and subdivided, and numerous *sastras* come into being.

In the complex universe of *Dvapara* man needs a variety of skills and techniques in order to live. So, a large number of technologies and sciences start evolving. Agriculture also does not remain simple any more. Growing of cereals now requires a number of complex operations and great skill. Perhaps, it is to bear the multiplicity of newly evolving arts and crafts that the Sudra as a *varna* comes into existence for the first time at the end of *Treta* or the beginning of *Dvapara*.<sup>4</sup> *Dvapara* thus acquires the full complement of four *varnas*.

*Dvapara yuga* in a sense is the *yuga* of the kings. Some present day scholars even reckon the beginning of *Dvapara* from the time of the ascendance of Sri Rama to the throne of Ayodhya. The multitude of stories about the kings that is found in the *Santi Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, and in the other *Puranas*, seem

to belong to the *Dvapara yuga*. And, the atmosphere that prevails in these stories of the kings is quite different from the atmosphere of the *Ramayana*. The *Ramayana* period is clearly the period of the dominance of *dharma*. But the kings of *Dvapara* seem to be always immersed in Kshatriya-like excitement and anger. There is said to be unbounded jealousy and greed in them. Unnecessary cruelty seems to be an integral part of their mental makeup. Perhaps that is why the *Puranas* believe that *dharma* is left with only two feet in the *Dvapara*. Founded on that unstable basis *dharmic* life keeps on getting disrupted during the *Dvapara yuga*, which is to last for half the duration of *Krita*.

In this atmosphere of the decay of *dharma*, and jealousy, greed and cruelty of the Kshatriyas, Prithvi, the goddess earth, finally approaches Vishnu with the request that He should now relieve her of this unbearable burden of creation gone astray. Then Vishnu takes birth in the form of Sri Krishna and Sri Balarama. Other gods and goddesses also appear on earth in various forms. And, after all this grand preparation, the *Mahabharata* war happens. It is commonly believed that in the war of *Mahabharata*, *dharma* won over *adharma*. But in spite of this victory of *dharma*, the coming of the *Kali yuga* cannot be stopped.

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Within a few years of the culmination of the *Mahabharata* war, Sri Krishna and the whole of his *Yadava vamsa* come to their end. The event of the extermination of the *Yadava vamsa* is taken to be the beginning of the fourth *yuga*, the *Kali yuga*. Learning of the departure of Sri Krishna from the earth, the Pandavas also depart for the Himalaya, along with Draupadi, to end their lives. Thus all the protagonists of the *Mahabharata* war are gone. Only Parikshit, the grandson of the Pandavas, who miraculously survives the destruction wrought by the *Mahabharata* war, is left behind. After a short time he too dies, of snake-bite. Parikshit is said to be the first king of the *Kali yuga*.

It is said that the *Mahabharata* war was fought 36 years before the beginning of *Kali*. According to the commonly accepted modern scholarly calculations, the current year is the 5094th year of *Kali* [A.D. 1991]. This is only the early phase of *Kali yuga*. Like the other three *yugas*, the *Kali yuga* is also to last a long time, even though the duration of *Kali* is only one fourth that of

*Krita*. The total duration of *Kali* is believed to be of 4,32,000 years.

The main characteristic of the *Kali yuga* is that in this *yuga*, *dharma* stands only on one foot. *Dharma* becomes rather unstable in *Dvapara* itself. But, in *Kali* the position of *dharma* becomes precarious. In this *yuga* of wavering *dharma*, creation has gone much beyond the simple bliss of *Krita*. Complexity, division and differentiation are the norm. Mere living becomes a difficult art. Life loses the natural ease and felicity of the earlier *yugas*.

But in this difficult *yuga*, the path of *dharma* is made somewhat easier for man. The piety and virtue that accrue only through great *tapas* in the earlier *yugas* can be earned in the *Kali yuga* by simple and ordinary acts of virtue. This is perhaps due to the compassion of the creator for those caught in the complexity of *Kali yuga*. This compassion generates a continuing process of balance between the state of man in the four *yugas*, at least as regards his relationship with Brahman. This can perhaps also be seen as the process of continuous balancing between the sacred and mundane attitudes of man.

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This, in short, is the Indian story of creation. Most Indians form their view of the universe and their place in it on the basis of this story. The details of this story and the style of narration vary from *Purana* to *Purana*. But the basic facts seem unvarying and are clearly etched in all renderings of this story. And according to this basic Indian understanding of creation and its unfolding, the universe after creation constantly moves towards lower and lower levels of existence and being. The various arts and crafts, various sciences and technologies, and various kinds of knowledge arise at relatively later stages of the unfolding of the universe. All these help to make life livable in a universe that has degraded to a high level of complexity. But none of these arts, crafts, sciences and technologies can change the downward direction of the universe.

The natural tendency of the universe to keep moving towards more and more complexity, more and more differentiation and division, and thus farther and farther away from the state of natural simplicity and bliss, cannot be halted by even the *avatars* or the creator Himself. Such *avatars* arrive again and again, but even they are able to restore only a degree of balance

in the naturally disturbed state of the universe. They, too, cannot reverse the march. That is why in spite of all the efforts of Sri Krishna, and His massive and far-reaching intervention in the form of the *Mahabharata* war, the onset of *Kali yuga* can neither be stopped, nor delayed. But without the cleaning up of the burdens of *Dvapara*, that the great *Mahabharata* war achieved, the coming of the *Kali* might have been too much to bear for mere man.

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The major lesson of the Indian story of creation is of the smallness of man and his efforts in the vast drama of the universe that has no beginning and no end. The cosmic play of creation unfolds on a very large scale, in time cycles of huge dimensions. In that large expanse of time and universe, neither the man living in the simple bliss of *Krita*, nor the man caught in the complexity of *Kali*, has much significance. Simplicity and complexity, bliss and anxiety keep following each other. But the play goes on.

The cycle of *chaturyuga* seems big to us. It takes 43,20,000 years for the universe to pass through this one cycle of *chaturyuga*. But according to the *pauranic* conception, a thousand such cycles, called a *kalpa*, make merely one day of Brahma, the godhead representing Brahman as the creator. After a day lasting a *kalpa*, Brahma rests for the night, which too is a *kalpa* long. And, then another *kalpa* and another cycle of a thousand *chaturyuga* cycles begins. Three hundred and sixty such days and nights, of a *kalpa* each, make a year of Brahma. Brahma lives a life of a hundred years. And, then another Brahma arrives and the play starts all over again. In these cosmic cycles of the inexorable *kala*, what is the significance of mere man living his momentary life in some tiny corner of the universe?

## V

The peculiarly Indian awareness of the insignificance of man and his efforts in the unending flow of *kala* is, however, not in consonance with modernity. The belief that in every new cycle the universe, from the moment of its creation, starts declining towards a lower and lower state is also incompatible with modern consciousness. And to look upon various arts and crafts, and sciences and technologies, etc., merely as temporary human artifacts required to sustain life in a constantly decaying state of the universe goes completely counter to the modern view of sciences and technologies, and of human capabilities in general. According to the world view of modernity, man, through his efforts, his sciences and technologies, his arts and crafts, and his various other capabilities, keeps on refining the world, lifting it higher and higher, making it better and better, and moulding it more and more into the image of heaven.

If the Indian understanding of the unfolding of the universe, and the place of man and his efforts in it, is so contrary to the concepts of modernity, then this contrariness has to be seriously pondered over. The structures that we wish to implant in India and the processes of development that we want to initiate can take root here, only if they seem compatible with the Indian view of the universe, with the Indian *chitta* and *kala*. Structures and processes that are contrary to the picture of the universe and its unfolding etched on the Indian mind are unlikely to find much response in India. At least the people of India, those who are still basically anchored in their own *chitta* and *kala*, are unlikely to participate in any efforts that seem essentially alien to the Indian comprehension of the universe.

We must, therefore, work out what the thoughts and ideas ingrained in the Indian consciousness imply in practice. What structures and processes seem right from the perspective of Indian *chitta* and *kala*? What sort of life seems worth living and what sort of efforts worth making from that perspective? Before meditating afresh on such temporal structures and models, however, we shall have to comprehend and come to terms with some of the major aspects of the Indian ways of organising the mundane day-to-day world of social and physical reality.

• • •

Differentiation between what is called the *para vidya* (knowledge of the sacred), and the *apara vidya* (knowledge of the mundane), is one such aspect of the Indian ways of organising physical and social reality, which seems to be directly related to the fundamental Indian consciousness, to the Indian *chitta* and *kala*. At some early stage in the Indian tradition, knowledge must have split into these two streams. Knowledge that deals with the unchangeable Brahman beyond the continuously changing temporal world, knowledge that shows the path towards the realisation of Brahman and union with Him, is *para vidya*. And that which deals with the day-to-day problems of temporal life and makes ordinary life in this complex world possible is *apara vidya*. In the Indian tradition, it is believed that *para vidya* is higher than the *apara vidya*. In fact, it is said, that *para vidya* alone is real and the *apara vidya* is merely an illusion.

When this division between *para* and *apara* knowledge occurred in the Indian tradition cannot be said with any certainty. This could not have happened in the *Krita yuga*. Because in that *yuga* no knowledge at all was required. There was no *Veda* in the *Krita*. This division is unlikely to have occurred in *Treta* also. Because there was only one undifferentiated *Veda* at that stage.

This sharp differentiation may, however, have arisen sometime towards the end of *Treta* and the beginning of *Dvapara*, when a variety of skills and crafts started appearing on the earth to help man live with the increasing complexity of the universe.

It is commonly believed that the four *Vedas*, along with their various branches and connected *Brahmanas*, *Upanishadas*, etc., form the repository of *para vidya*. And, the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*, etc., as also the various canonical texts of different sciences and crafts like the *Ayurveda*, *Jyotisha*, etc., deal with the *apara vidya*. In reality, however, the canonical texts of various disciplines do not differentiate between *para vidya* and *apara vidya* as sharply as is commonly believed.

It is probably true that the *Upanishadas* deal with nothing but *para vidya*. But, the same can hardly be said about the *Vedas*. In a large number of contexts the *Vedas* seem to be dealing with such mundane subjects as would fall only under the category of *apara vidya*. On the other hand, there are extensive discussions in the *Puranas* about the attributes of Brahman and about the possible modes of realising Him, which are the subject of *para vidya*. Then there are disciplines like *vyakarana*, grammar, which of necessity belong to both *para* and *apara*, because *vyakarana* is needed for the proper communication of

either kind of knowledge. For the same reason, *Jyotisha sastra*, the science of the motion of stars and planets and the art of determining time and place, must also belong to both the *para* and *apara* streams to some extent. But even in the texts of purely mundane disciplines, like those of *Ayurveda*, issues related to *para vidya* are discussed, and attempts are made, for example, to perceive the problem of maintenance of health within the context of man's relation with the universe and the Brahman.

In spite of the presence of both streams of knowledge together in almost all canonical texts, the dividing line between *para vidya* and *apara vidya* seems to be etched rather deeply in the minds of the Indian people. On raising the context of the *Puranas* in routine discussion among even the ordinary people, one is likely to be told that these tales and fables are not to be relied upon, and that the *Vedas* alone are true. It seems that the Indian mind has somehow come to believe that all that is connected with *apara vidya* is rather low, and that knowledge of the *para* alone is true knowledge. This consciousness seems to have become an integral part of the Indian mind. And high scholars of Indian literature, who ought to know better, seem to believe even more than the others that the essential Indian concern is only with the *para*, and the great body of *apara* knowledge found in the Indian tradition is of little relevance in understanding India.

This contempt for the *apara vidya* is probably not fundamental to Indian consciousness. Perhaps the original Indian understanding was not that the *apara* is to be shunned. What was perhaps understood and emphasised at an early stage of the evolution of Indian thought was that while dealing with *apara*, while living within the complexity of the world, one should not forget that there is a simple undifferentiated reality behind this seeming complexity, that there is the unchangeable Brahman beyond this ever-changing mundane world. What the Indians realised was the imperative need to keep the awareness of the *para*, of the ultimate reality, intact while going through the complex routine of daily life. What they emphasised was the need to regulate the mundane in the light of the Indian understanding of the ultimate unity of the universe, to keep the *apara vidya* informed of the *para*.

With the passage of time, this emphasis on regulating the *apara vidya* through our understanding of the *para vidya* turned into a contempt for the *apara*. How and when this happened is a question to which we need to give very serious thought. And, indeed, we have to find some acceptable interpretation of the



appropriate relationship between *para vidya* and *apara vidya* within the larger Indian understanding of the processes of the creation and the unfolding of the universe, and the inexorable movement of *kala*.

There is evidently an imbalance in our attitudes towards *para vidya* and *apara vidya*, which has to be somehow remedied. It is possible that this imbalance is not of recent creation. In the world of scholarship, this imbalance may have arisen rather early. It is the usual tendency of scholarship to emphasise the abstract and the formal over the concrete and the contextual reality of day-to-day living. This normal scholarly preoccupation with the abstract may have got incorporated in basic Indian literature over its long history. Or, perhaps it was felt that the details of ordinary living cannot form the subject-matter of high literature.<sup>5</sup> Or, it may be that in our mentally and spiritually depressed state, we have been too obsessed with the *para* knowledge of India, and consequently have failed to seriously search for the texts of *apara* learning. Therefore, this seeming imbalance of Indian literature and Indian thought may merely be a consequence of our lopsided viewing.

• • •

Whatever may be the causes of the imbalance in our attitude towards *para vidya* and *apara vidya*, it cannot be denied that the available literature of Indian civilisation and the commonly agreed understanding of the *chitta* and *kala* of India today seem abnormally skewed towards the *para*. This imbalance has affected our thinking on numerous other subjects and issues. For instance, take our understanding of the *varna vyavastha*. In interpreting this *vyavastha*, we have somehow assumed that the *varnas* connected with textual practices and rituals of the *para vidya* are higher, and those involved in the *apara* are lower. Closeness of association with what are defined to be *para* practices becomes the criterion for determining the status of a *varna* and evolving a hierarchy between them. Thus the Brahmanas associated with the recitation and study of the *Vedas* become the highest, and the Sudras engaged in the practice of the arts and crafts of ordinary living become the lowest.

This hierarchy may not in reality be a fundamental aspect of classical Indian thought. There is some discussion on this subject in the *Puranas*. We have already referred to the dialogue in the *Mahabharata* and the *Narada Purana*, where Bharadvaja questions Bhrigu on the rationale of the *varna* hierarchy. Mahatma Gandhi also believed that it cannot be right to place one *varna* above the other. Around 1920, Gandhiji wrote and spoke a great deal on this subject. But even his efforts were not sufficient to restore an appropriate balance in our current thinking on the *varna Vyavastha*.

The issue of the hierarchy of the *varnas* is not, however, a closed question in the Indian tradition. During the last two thousand years, there have occurred numerous debates on this question within the Indian tradition. And, in practical social life such a formulation of high and low could not have survived anyway. The concepts of the irreconcilability of *para vidya* and *apara vidya*, and the corresponding asymmetry between the Brahmana and the Sudra, could never have meant much in actual practice in any healthily functioning social organisation. The canonical and fundamental texts of Indian literature also do not show this degree of imbalance on the question of the relative status of *para* and *apara vidya*, and correspondingly that of the Brahmana and the Sudra. The imbalance seems to have arisen mainly through the interpretations of the canonical texts that have been made from time to time.

The *Purusha Sukta* indeed states that the Sudras appeared from the feet of Brahman, the Vaisyas from the thighs, the

Kshatriyas from the arms and the Brahmanas from the head. But this does not necessarily define a hierarchy between the *varnas*. The *Sukta* is a statement of the identity of the microcosm and the macrocosm. It presents the world as an extension of the body of Brahman. In its cryptic Vedic style, the *Sukta* informs us that the creation is a manifestation of Brahman. It is His extension, His play. The *Sukta* also probably recounts the variety of tasks that have to be performed in the world that Brahman creates. But nowhere in the *Purusha Sukta* is it said that some of these tasks, and consequently the performers of those tasks, are better than others. That the functions of the head are higher than those of the feet could only be a matter of a somewhat literal interpretation that came later. At another time, such interpretations can even get reversed. After all, it is only on his feet that a man stands securely on earth. It is only when the feet are stable that the head and hands play their parts. When the feet are not securely placed on the earth, nothing else remains secure either.

Incidentally, the *Purusha Sukta* does not even imply that all four *varnas* came into existence simultaneously at the beginning of creation. The *Sukta* does not give the story of creation and its unfolding— it only explains, through the analogy of the body of Brahman, an already manifest and differentiated universe. In fact, as we have seen earlier, the *pauranic* texts seem to suggest that at the beginning there was only one *varna*, and it is only later, as the need for newer and newer human capacities started arising, that the *varnas* divided, first into two and then into three and four.

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Like the hierarchy of *varnas*, there is also the hierarchy of the *karmas*, of actions, in our present day Indian consciousness. And this hierarchy of *karmas* also seems to have arisen from the ideas of the superiority of the *para* over the *apara*. Now, the concept that every action has an unalterable consequence is a fundamental aspect of Indian consciousness. As we believe that everything that is created must come to an end, so we believe that every event that happens must have a cause in a previous action. Thus, from the Indian perspective, life and indeed the whole of creation seem like a long sequence of actions and their consequences, with the consequences, leading to further consequences and so on. And all that happens in the world takes place within this interconnected sequence of *karmas*.

Yet this fundamental theory of *karma* seems to have nothing to do with the commonly prevalent ideas about the hierarchy of *karmas*: that some kinds of *karmas* are superior and others are inferior. The idea that, for example, the recitation of the *Vedas* is a high *karma* and weaving of cloth is low does not follow from the *karma* theory. These ideas of high and low *karmas* seem to have arisen out of the imbalance in our perception of the *para vidya* and *apara vidya*.

This belief in a hierarchy of *karmas* has, however, got so deeply ingrained in us that even our major scholars often explain away large scale poverty and hunger as the consequences of the earlier lowly *karmas* of the sufferers. Such interpretations of the *karma* theory have become so mechanical, that even as high a scholar as Sri Brahmananda Saraswati, Sankaracharya of Joshi Math, used to casually state that destitution and poverty are only matters of *karmas*.

But, this is hardly an appropriate interpretation of the *karma* theory. In any case, the theory could not have implied that even the best of our men dismiss all thoughts of compassion for their fellow human beings, and give up all efforts to redress social imbalances.

The meaning of the *karma* theory is perhaps something else. All *karmas*, all actions, are after all the same in themselves. What probably differentiates one *karma* from another is the mental attitude and the sense of concern with which it is performed. It is the mode of performing a *karma* that makes it high or low. If recitation of the *Vedas* is done with concern and attention, then that recitation is a high *karma*.

By the same token if someone cooks food with great attention and care, then that cooking too is a high *karma*. In India, cooking was in fact one of the functions of the Brahmanas. There are Brahmana cooks even today. And, it seems that the recitation of the *Vedas* and the cooking of food are indeed not such different *karmas*. A Brahmana is likely to acquire the same burden of evil *karmas*, whether he recites the *Vedas* without care and attention, with the attitude of somehow completing an uninteresting and thankless task that has been forced upon him, or whether he cooks food with the same attitude and similar lack of attention and care.

The same must hold for all other kinds of *karmas*. There is nothing inherently evil or low in the *karma* of sweeping the floor, or bringing up children, or washing clothes, or making

pots, or shoes, or weaving cloth, or looking after cattle, or ploughing and sowing the land. All these *karmas* become high, if performed with care, attention and concern; and become low otherwise. They could not be high or low in themselves.

• • •

There is a *Mahabharata* story that seems highly instructive in this context. Once there was a *rishi*. He sat unmoving, at one place, in deep meditation, for uncountable number of years. One day his meditation was disturbed and he woke up with a start. He found that the excreta of a sparrow had fallen on his head. In great anger, he turned his eyes towards the sparrow, and the bird was at once burnt to ashes. Seeing this, the *rishi* thought that his penance had been accomplished and he had achieved great powers.

He got up from his meditation, and walked up to the nearby habitation. There he knocked on the door of the first dwelling he reached and asked for food. The lady of the house was probably busy with her household chores. It took her some time to open the door and answer the *rishi's* call. This delay infuriated the *rishi*. When the lady of the house finally opened her door, the *rishi* looked at her with intense anger, just as he had looked at the sparrow. But nothing happened. And, the lady said, with great composure: 'Maharaj, please do not unnecessarily trouble yourself. Give up your anger. After all, I am not that sparrow.'

The *rishi* was stunned. He could not understand how the powers he had acquired through such great penance proved so utterly futile against this ordinary woman. And, how had she, sitting at her home, divined the incident of the sparrow? He wanted to know the secret of her powers. But she referred him to a seller of animal flesh.

The *rishi* was even more surprised. He went to the meat-seller, and the latter told him that the lady against whom he tried to use his powers was performing her household duties with great care and attention. Her housekeeping was in no way inferior to his meditation and penance. And, in any case, the reward of his penance was fully exhausted when he looked at that poor sparrow in such anger. The meat-seller also told the *rishi* that he himself was engaged in the selling of animal flesh, but he performed this task with great care and devotion. All tasks performed with such an attitude are equally great. What matters is

to do your task well, with concern and care. It does not matter whether what you do is penance and meditation, or merely house-keeping, or even the selling of animal flesh.

• • •

This *Mahabharata* story presents one interpretation of the theory of *karma*. There may be several other interpretations in Indian literature. Similarly there would be numerous interpretations of *para vidya* and *apara vidya*, and also of the *varna vyavastha*. Comprehending and appreciating these various interpretations, and working out a new interpretation that falls within the ancient tradition and is yet capable of being related to the modern contexts, is perhaps the paramount task of Indian scholarship. This continuous reinterpretation and renewal of the tradition, continuous meditation on the ways of manifesting the Indian *chitta* and *kala* in practical day-to-day life, and the continuous exploration of the Indian way of life in different times and different contexts, is what the *rishis*, *munis* and other great scholars of India have been concerned with through the ages.

## VI

There is an episode in the *Vishnu Purana* concerning Maharshi Vyasa, which seems to offer an interesting interpretation of our present *Kali yuga*. It is said that once Vyasa was bathing in a river. At that time some *rishis* came to visit him, and from a distance they saw that the great Vyasa, standing in the river, was clapping his hands and shouting, 'Great is the *Kali yuga*', 'Great are the women of the earth', and 'Great are the Sudras.'

The *rishis* were wonder-struck. Later they asked Vyasa the reason for his loud praise of the *Kali yuga*, the women and the Sudras. Vyasa explained that what had been possible for men in the other three *Yugas* with great effort and penance was easily accessible to them in the *Kali yuga*. In the *Kali yuga*, said Vyasa, man could achieve realisation of the Brahman with merely a little devotion. And, the women and the Sudras could obtain that realisation by merely performing their mundane day-to-day tasks well, with care and concern.

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Vyasa is one of the great *rishis* of India. It is said that in *Dvapara* he divided the one *Veda* into four, and later he divided them into numerous branches. Later still, he composed the *Mahabharata* epic, especially for the edification of the women and the Sudras. In the writing of this epic, Ganesa himself acted as his scribe, because none else could have matched the pace and sophistication of Vyasa's composition. But reflecting on the state of the world after completing his great epic, Vyasa felt a sadness in his heart. He noticed that the women and the Sudras had been deprived of the *Vedas*, and the epic that he had composed for them was full of pain and sorrow. It was a story that provided no solace to the mind, generated no enthusiasm for life, and gave no pleasure.

Then, the great Vyasa, to make up for these deficiencies and with compassion for mankind, composed the *Puranas*. Through the *Puranas*, he tried to make the path of devotion and faith in the creator easily available to all. Amongst the *Puranas*, *Srimadbhagavata Purana* seems the most steeped in the faith and devotion that Vyasa wished to propagate. *Srimadbhagavata Purana*, composed on the advice of Narada Muni, describes events in the life of Vasudeva Srikrishna. And, this *Purana* is today probably the main source of the non-scholarly Indian *grihastha*'s acquaintance with the ancient Indian literature.

The great compassion of Vyasa, which propelled him to compose the *Puranas*, his feeling of concern and care for man—caught in the complexity of the universe and pulled farther and farther away from his creator by the flow of time—is transparently reflected in the above episode from the *Vishnu Purana*, where he proclaims the *Kali yuga* to be the *yuga* of the women and the Sudras. This interpretation of the *Kali yuga* seems highly significant. It is possible that as there is only one *varna* in the *Krita yuga*, so in the *Kali yuga* too, only one *varna* remains: that of the Sudras. Perhaps in the *Kali yuga*, everyone turns into a Sudra. Or, perhaps, in this *yuga* of the ascendance of the *apara vidya*, the role of the women and the Sudras, the major practitioners of the *apara vidya*, of the practical arts and crafts of sustaining life, becomes the most valuable. In our own times, Mahatma Gandhi expressed the same thought, when he insisted that in this *yuga* everyone must become a Sudra.

• • •

There is, of course, no point in asking whether Vyasa's interpretation of the *Kali yuga* is correct or not. All interpretations keep changing with time and the context. What matters, perhaps, is not the accuracy of an interpretation, but the sense of compassion that the interpreter feels for his fellow beings. It is this compassion, the concern for the state of all beings and respect for their efforts, even if these seem insignificant on the cosmic canvas, which makes a particular interpretation valuable. Only in the light of such compassion and concern can we hope to make any meaningful new interpretations of the Indian *chitta* and *kala*. Contemporary interpretation, flowing from such transparent compassion and concern alone, can have any chance of forming a secure basis for the re-establishment of the Indian way of life today. Interpretations that lack compassion, like the one about poverty and destitution being the result of one's own earlier *karmas*, are not going to be of much help in such an effort.

Along with the deep sense of compassion for fellow beings, there must also be an abiding faith in the inherent soundness and strength of the Indian tradition. There are many amongst us who believe that Indian civilisation was indeed great in some distant past, but now its days are gone. Many of us sincerely believe that with the rise of modernity, Indian *chitta* and *kala* and Indian understanding of creation and unfolding of the universe have lost all significance, and there is no use any more of deliberating upon such matters. Even someone like Sri Jayendra Saraswati, Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, seems to suggest that there was a time when we were great, and the memory of that time is valuable; but there is nothing that can be said with any assurance about the relevance and place of Indian consciousness in the present.

What is of significance, however, is always the present. If we wish to affirm the validity of Indian consciousness, of Indian *chitta* and *kala*, we can do so only by establishing the Indian way of life in the present-day world. And, this re-assertion of India in the present context is the major task today which Indian scholarship, Indian politics, Indian sciences and technologies, Indian arts, crafts and other diverse skills must accomplish.

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It is conceivable that some sections of the Indian people do not subscribe to their traditional understanding of creation and unfolding of the universe; and probably some of them even believe that they have no relationship with the Indian *chitta* and *kala*.



There may also be Indians, especially among the Indian Muslims, Christians and Parsis, who do not believe that there are any such times as the *Kali yuga*, or any cycles of *kala* as the *chaturyuga* and *kalpa*, etc. Someone like Periyar Ramaswami Nayakar, and his followers, may even deny the validity of these *kala* cycles. In different parts of India, there may be many other people who do not believe in any of the concepts that seem to be fundamental to Indian consciousness. But, the differences in the beliefs of all these people may not be as large as they are made out to be. And, many of those who claim to have no faith in the *Puranas* often have their own *Jati Puranas*. The latter, in their essential conception, are not much different from the *Puranas* written by Vyasa.

This at least can be said about all Indians, even about the ordinary Christians of India: their *chitta* and *kala* have little in common with modern European civilisation. They are all equally alien in the world of European modernity. In fact, except for at most half a percent of Indians, the rest of India has precious little to do with European modernity. Whatever else may be etched on the minds of these 99.5 percent of Indians, there is nothing there that even remotely resembles the consciousness of the modern West, or even that of ancient Greece or Rome.

But in the unbounded flow of modernity, almost every Indian seems to have lost the ability to express his innate consciousness even in small ways. Even his festivals, that in a way reminded him of his *kala*, and gave him, till recently, some little pleasure in his otherwise impoverished drab life, and even the most vital of his rituals, those of birth, marriage and death, that gave him a sense of belonging to the universe of his *chitta* and *kala*, have fallen by the wayside. Most Indians, of course, still perform these festivals and rituals; but these have been so reviled, that there is little grace left in their mechanical and often unbelieving performance. Not surprisingly, the festivals give us little pleasure and the rituals provide no solace. We have lost our identity, our anchorage in our civilisation. And, this loss of identity afflicts us all. This is a pain that practically all Indians, including the Christians, the Muslims and others, have to bear in common.

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We have to find some way out of such a state of rootlessness. We have to somehow find an anchor again in our civilisational consciousness, in our innate *chitta* and *kala*. Some four or five years ago, the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust had organised an

international gathering of scholars to deliberate on the fundamental questions of Indian identity. In that gathering— it is reported— a European scholar had suggested that the only way out for India was in her taking to Christianity in a big way.

This, of course, is not an entirely new thought. For at least the last two hundred years, the Christianisation of India has been seriously thought of as an option for taking India out of what had seemed to many, especially in Britain, as the morass of her civilisational memory; giving her a more easily understandable identity. There have also been large scale governmental efforts to help in this direction. And the so-called Westernisation of India, which even the governments of independent India have been pursuing with such seeming vigour, is not very different from India's Christianisation.

If all these efforts had led to a thoroughgoing Westernisation of the Indian mind so that the people of India on their own could start associating themselves with the late twentieth and the twenty-first centuries of the West, then that perhaps would have been some sort of a solution of India's problems. If that change of Indian civilisational consciousness had taken place, then the ordinary Indian today would think and behave more or less like the ordinary man of Europe and America, and his priorities and seekings would have become similar.

Indians would then have also lost the peculiarly Indian belief, which even the most ordinary of the ordinary Indians harbours in his heart: that he is a part of the ultimate Brahman, and by virtue of this relationship with Brahman, he too is completely free and sovereign in himself. In place of this feeling of freedom and sovereignty, that so exasperates those who seek to administer or reform India, the Indian too would have then acquired the Western man's innate sense of total subordination to the prevailing system, a subordination of the mind that man in the West has always displayed irrespective of whatever the system was in any particular Western phase: whether a despotic feudal oligarchy, a slave society like that of ancient Greece and Rome, a society of *laissez faire*, or of Marxist communism, or the currently ascendant society of market forces.

Notwithstanding the prosperity and affluence that the West has gained during the last forty or fifty years, the innate consciousness of the Western man seems to have remained one of total subordination to the given system. At the level of the mind, he is still very much the slave of the imaginary Republic of Plato, and the very real empire of Rome. The consciousness of the

Indian people would have also been moulded into the same state of subordination as that of the Western man, if the attempts of the last two hundred years to Westernise or Christianise India had reached anywhere. And, even such slavery of the mind might have been a way out of the present Indian drift.

But perhaps such simple solutions to civilisational problems are well nigh impossible. It does not seem to be given to man to completely erase his civilisational consciousness and establish a new universe of the mind. Not even conquerors are able to so metamorphose the mind of the conquered. The only way such metamorphosis can be achieved is by completely destroying the conquered civilisation, eliminating every single individual, and starting afresh with an imported population. This is what occurred, more or less, in the Americas and Australia. India has so far been saved this denouement at the hands of Europe, though not for any lack of trying.

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If the Westernisation of India is not possible, then we shall have to revert to our own civilisational moorings. We shall have to come back into our own *chitta* and *kala*. Ridding ourselves of the Western ways of thought and action, we shall have to start understanding ourselves and the world from our own civilisational perspective. This effort to understand ourselves and our *kala* will probably be similar to the way Vyasa, in his *Mahabharata*, surveys the complete story of Indian civilisation, explores its diverse seekings, its ways of thought and action, and then, shows a path that is appropriate to the *Kali yuga*. Or, perhaps it will be like the way Srikrishna offers Arjuna a glimpse of the universe and on the basis of that view of the world, the *visvarupa darsana*, shows him the way out of his dilemma. In any case, we shall have to form a view of the world and the present time, from our own perspective, before we can find a path of our own.

This task of having a new *visvarupa darsana* for ourselves, and searching for a path of action in the light of that *darsana*, has to be performed by all those who are closely connected with the Indian tradition and have a deep sense of respect for it. It is, however, important that those involved in this exercise are motivated by compassion for fellow beings. And, for that to happen, the beliefs of the people of India and their ways of thought and action will have to be given priority over anything that is written in the texts.

To be tied mindlessly to the words of texts has never been the Indian way. The Indian *rishis* never believed themselves to be bound by any text. It is true that the *rishis* of India do not often negate or denigrate the text. Their preferred style is that of starting with the text and then interpreting it in newer and newer ways. That is how Vyasa could stand in the river and loudly proclaim the greatness of the women and the Sudras in the *Kali yuga*.

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The direction of a civilisation is determined by meditating on its innate consciousness and its sense of the creation and unfolding of the universe. And that probably is the task of the *rishis*. But it is the ordinary *grihasthas* who carry it forward in the determined direction. And *grihasthas* are all those who are engaged in the mundane routine of life: those who are adept at scholarship, or are skilled in cooking, or are engaged in agriculture, or in various arts and crafts, or those who are familiar with the modern sciences and technologies, or are running modern industry or trade, or those who have learnt the art of running the State, and its administrative and coercive apparatus. All *grihasthas* are collectively charged with the duty of carrying the civilisation along its preferred direction and helping it realise its seekings and aspirations.

Even when the direction is lost and the seekings and aspirations become unclear, the routine of life keeps going on; and therefore, the *grihasthas* have to keep performing their assigned tasks even during such times of drift. They cannot shut off the routine to start meditating on the overall direction that the civilisation may take. Therefore it is ordinarily true that the politicians, the administrators and the managers, and even the scholars of a civilisation should concentrate on the day-to-day running of society, and not let themselves be distracted by fundamental doubts about the state of the civilisation.

But there are times when the direction that a civilisation is to take is so thoroughly lost and the drift is so acute that the daily routine of life itself becomes meaningless. It seems that today India has reached that situation. This is possibly the nether end of one of those cycles of decay of *dharma* and its re-establishment that keep recurring, according to the Indian conception. At such times the *grihastha* also must help with his skills and energies in finding a new direction and a new equilibrium for his civilisation. The present is a time of crisis for the Indian civilisation.

And, we have to shepherd all our energies, skills and capabilities towards making a single-minded effort for getting out of the crisis.

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Once we seriously get down to the task, it may not turn out to be too difficult to find a new direction for the Indian civilisation. To redefine our seekings and aspirations, our ways of thought and action, in a form that is appropriate and effective in today's world may not be too hard a task after all. Such re-assertions and re-definitions of civilisational thrust are not uncommon in world history. For every civilisation, there comes a time when the people of that civilisation have to remind themselves of their fundamental civilisational consciousness and their understanding of the universe and of Time. From the basis of that recollection of the past, they then define the path for their future. Many civilisations of the world have undergone such self-appraisal and self-renewal at different times. In our long history, many times we must have engaged in this recollection and re-assertion of the *chitta* and *kala* of India. We need to undertake such an exploration into ourselves once again.

## Notes

1. During his remarks at the bicentennial celebrations at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC (U.S.A.) on 17 November 1965, Claude Levi-Strauss explained the nature of anthropology in the following words (*Current Anthropology*, Vol. 7, No.2, April 1966, pp. 126):

Anthropology is not a dispassionate science like astronomy, which springs from the contemplation of things at a distance. It is the outcome of a historical process which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other, and during which millions of innocent human beings have had their resources plundered and their institutions and beliefs destroyed, whilst they themselves were ruthlessly killed, thrown into bondage, and contaminated by diseases they were unable to resist. Anthropology is daughter to this era of violence: its capacity to assess more objectively the facts pertaining to the human condition reflects, on the epistemological level, a state of affairs in which one part of mankind treated the other as an object.

A situation of this kind cannot be soon forgotten, much less erased. It is not because of its mental endowments that only the Western world has given birth to Anthropology, but rather because exotic cultures, treated by us as mere things, could be studied accordingly, as things. We did not feel concerned by them whereas we cannot help their feeling concerned by us. Between our attitude toward them and their attitude toward us, there is and can be no parity.

Therefore, if native cultures are ever to look at anthropology as a legitimate pursuit and not as a sequel to colonial era or that of economic domination, it cannot suffice for the players simply to change camps while the anthropological game remains the same. Anthropology itself must undergo a deep transformation in order to

carry on its work among those cultures for whose study it was intended because they lack written record of their history.

Instead of making up for this gap through the application of special methods, the new aim will be to fill it in. When it is practiced by members of the culture which it endeavours to study, anthropology loses its specific nature and becomes rather akin to archaeology, history, and philology. For anthropology is the science of culture as seen from the outside and the first concern of people made aware of their independent existence and originality must be to claim the right to observe themselves, from the inside. Anthropology will survive in a changing world by allowing itself to perish in order to be born again under a new guise.

2. Valmiki Ramayana, Aranya Kanda, Chapter 9&10. The quotations are from *The Ramayana* of Valmiki, tr. Hari Prasad Shastri, Shanti Sadan, London, 1957, Vol. II, pp. 19-20.

3. Mahabharata, Santi Parva, Chapter 188, and Narada Purana, II.43.53-60. The quotations are from *The Narada Purana*, tr. Ganesha Vasudeo Tagare, Motilal Banarasi Dass, Delhi, 1981, pp. 519.

4. The narration relating to Sambuka in the Uttarakanda of the Valmiki Ramayana perhaps symbolises the origin of the first Sudra and his aspiration to enter Svarga, the heaven of the Devas, but along with his body, of which even a Brahmana was said to be incapable of. Hence the destruction of Sambuka by Sri Rama. The dialogue between Bhrigu and Bharadvaja also seems to suggest some similar aspiration by those who at about this stage or a little later began to be termed Sudras. See, *The Ramayana* of Valmiki, cited earlier, Vol. III, pp. 582-583; and *Narada Purana*, cited earlier, especially, II.43.69&70, pp.521.

5. For example, one of the Alankarsastra texts, Kavyadarsa, defines the permissible subjects of a Maha-Kavya, an epic, in the following words:

It [the Maha-Kavya] has its source in a story told in the Itihasas or other good (true) material. It deals with the fruit (or goal) of the four kinds (Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha). It has a great and generous person as the hero. It is embellished with descriptions of the cities, oceans, hills, the seasons, the moonrise, the sunrise, of sport in the garden and of sport in the waters, of drinking scenes, of festivals, of enjoyment (love), of separation (of lovers), of (their) marriage and (their) nuptials and birth of princes, likewise, of consultation with the ministers, of sending messengers or ambassadors, of journeys (royal progress), of war and the hero's victories; dealing with these at length and being full of Rasa (flavour) and Bhava (suggestion): with Sargas (chapters) which are not very lengthy and which are well-formed with verse measures pleasing to the ear; everywhere dealing with a variety of topics (in each case ending each chapter in a different meter). Such a poem being well-embellished will be pleasing to the world at large and will survive several epochs (Kalpas).

It is obvious that ordinary persons and their routine day-to-day occupations cannot be the subject of high literature that is so precisely defined and elaborately circumscribed. A similar view of literature seems to have been held in Europe also till recent times.

### Translator' s note

Any study of the Indian *chitta* and *kala* necessarily involves a number of definitional terms of Indian philosophical discourse, which are, of course, untranslatable. We have not attempted to translate these terms. Instead, we have provided a descriptive glossary of the Indian terms used in the text.

The glossary does not always follow the standard scholarly definition of a term. On the other hand, even at the risk of being long-winded, we have tried to indicate the various nuances commonly associated with a term in both the scholarly and the lay Indian usage. In particular, we have tried to bring out and elaborate upon the specific meanings of a term implied in the text.

For transliteration of Indian terms in Roman script we have followed no specific convention, and have tried to use the form that seems to us to be most common, and most likely to be correctly understood by readers in both north and south India. In the glossary we have given the correct Sanskrit form in Devanagari script for all Indian terms used in the text.

Sri M.D. Srinivas has crucially contributed in the preparation of the glossary. Without his help there would not have been any glossary, at least not in this form. Sri R. Krisnamurthy Sastrigal, Professor of Vedanta, Madras Sanskrit College, has kindly read through the glossary. We are grateful to him for his valuable suggestions.

While translating this essay I have tried to retain the conversational flavour of the Hindi text. But it has not been always possible to remain literally faithful to the original. At places whole paragraphs have been restructured, and some illustrative and elaborative material has been inserted here and there.

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Sri Dharampal had originally spoken about these matters at length, largely in Hindi, but also occasionally in English. The Hindi essay was constructed from those conversations running into many hours. The material was first prepared for serial publication in *Jansatta*, the Hindi daily of the Indian Express Group, and later printed in the form of a small book. It is my

association with this whole process, and the fact of having listened to the original conversations of Sri Dharampal, that gave me the courage to undertake this translation.

My colleagues, Sri S.S. Vasan and Sri T.M. Mukundan, have kindly read through the English text. Their help has been invaluable.

JITENDRA BAJAJ



## GLOSSARY

### Acharya +ÉŚÉÉªÉÇ

Preceptor and teacher. One who initiates the student into *adhyayana*, study of Vedas (see below) and *sastras*, the canonical texts of various disciplines. The first teachers of different schools of philosophy and different *sastras*. Also *Bhashyakara-s*, the commentators, of Vedas and *sastras*.

### Ahankara +½ÆøEòÉ®ô

Attachment to self, conceit, self-consciousness, egotism. Considered to be a form of ignorance in Indian philosophy. Also, the third of the eight basic constitutive elements of the manifest universe in *Sankhya*, one of the major schools of Indian philosophy.

### Ahimsa +Ê½Æø°ÉÉ

The doctrine of non-injury, non-violence. Abstaining from killing or giving pain, and in general abstaining from violating the *Rita*, the natural order of the universe and Time, in thought, word and deed. Considered to be part of the *samanya dharma*, discipline common to all sections of society, in the Indian *dharma-sastra* texts. Mahatma Gandhi re-emphasised *ahimsa* and *satya*, steadfastness in truth, as the supreme principles of individual and social thought and action.

Ahimsak

Adjectival form of *ahimsa*.

### Apara Vidya +{É®ôÉ Ê´ÉtÉ

Knowledge of the mundane, as distinct from *para vidya*, knowledge of the transcendent reality. *Para vidya* and *apara vidya* are defined in the context of the discourse of the *Upanishadas* (see below).

## Artha +İÉÇ

Human effort directed towards the attainment of worldly prosperity in accordance with *dharma*. One of the four *purusharthas*, basic categories of human endeavour, along with *kama*, *dharma* and *moksha* (see below).

## Avatara +´ÉİÉÉ®

Worldly incarnation of the divine. There happen to be ten *avataras of Sri Vishnu* (see below) in every cycle of creation. The names of the ten *avataras* differ from text to text, but the usual list includes: Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Kalki, in chronological order. Besides these ten, Puranas talk of several Avataras that occur at different times. In general, persons with extraordinary divinity are perceived as *avataras* by the Indians.

## Ayodhya +ªÉÉävªÉÉ

Literally, one that cannot be fought against. The capital city of Kosala Desa, located on the banks of Sarayu river. During the *Treta* and *dvapara yugas*, Kosala Desa was ruled by the Ikshvaku Vamsa into which Sri Rama was born. Ayodhya is one of the seven great sacred cities of India that have been in existence since the Pauranic times. The seven are: Dvarika, Avantika (Ujjain), Mathura, Maya (Haridwar), Ayodhya, Kasi and Kanchi. These cities are also known as *mokshadayikas*, the cities that lead to *moksha*. For *moksha*, see below.

## Ayurveda +ÉªÉÖ´ÉÇänù

The Indian science of healthy living. This science is considered as an *Upaveda*, along with *Dhanurveda*, *Gandharvaveda*, and *Sthapatyaveda*, the sciences of archery, fine arts and architecture, respectively.

## Balarama ¢É±É®ôÉ´É

Elder brother of Srikrishna. A great warrior and a great exponent of *Gada Yuddha*, the art of fighting with the mace, which he teaches to both Arjuna and Duryodhana, the two opposing heroes of Mahabharata war. Balarama is one of the few great warriors of the time of Mahabharata who refuse to take part in the war.







## Deva ढँँ

Forms of the divine. Various aspects of the Universe and its functioning are manifestations of different *devas*, such as Indra, Mitra, Varuna, etc. For the Indians any person or object that reminds them of the ultimate reality becomes a *Deva*. The Puranas talk of 33 crore *devas* inhabiting the Universe.

## Dharma ढँँ

The sustaining order of the Universe. Also of human society and individuals. Hence *dharma* of various *varnas* (see below), of various stages of life, and of various situations. *Dharma* in all these cases is the appropriate action and thought in conformity with the order of the Universe. The order of the Universe is *Rita*, and *dharma* is what sustains it. *Adharma* is what would be violative of *Rita*. Since order of the Universe unfolds in time, *dharma* changes with the changing times, and is, in fact, specific to *kala*, *desa* and *avastha*, time, place and circumstance, respectively.

Dharmic

Anglicised adjective form of *dharma*. In accordance with *dharma*.

## Draupadi ढँँ

Daughter of Drupada, the king of Panchala Desa, and wife of the five Pandava brothers (see below). Draupadi was born from the *yajna Veda*, the sacred fire of the Yajna (see Brahmana-s above) performed by Drupada. Draupadi and Srikrishna are the two pivotal figures of Mahabharata, whose *samkalpa* (see below) and determination seem to drive the entire sequence of events. Most localities of south India have a Dharmaraja temple, named after the eldest of the Pandava brothers. In these temples Draupadi is invariably the main deity.

## Dvapara ढँँ

The third of the four *yugas* of the *chaturyuga* cycle. In this *yuga* the bull representing *dharma*, that upholds the earth, is left with only two feet. *Dvapara* in the current *chaturyuga* begins with the ascendance of Srirama and ends with the ascendance of Srikrishna from the earth.

Ganesa/Sri Ganesa **ôMÉhÉäŋÉ/ÉÒ MÉhÉäŋÉ**

God of wisdom. Son of Siva, Mahesvara of the Indian Trinity (see Brahma above), and Parvati. Ganesa literally means the chief of *Ganas*, the army of Siva. Ganesa is invoked as *Vighnesvara*, the remover of obstacles, at the commencement of all undertakings and compositions. The elephant head of Sri Ganesa denotes his great sagacity.

On being invoked by Vyasa (see below), Sri Ganesa agrees to be the writer for his composition of Mahabharata on the condition that Vyasa must compose and dictate the text so fast that Ganesa's quick pen may never stop till the end of the composition. It is said that in order to satisfy this condition and somewhat slow down Sri Ganesa's hand, Vyasa often had to introduce complicated concepts and complex phrases in his composition of Mahabharata.

Ganesa and Hanuman, the *vanara* (see below) chief of incomparable strength and wisdom and the incomparable devotee of Sri Rama, are the two most intimate gods of the Indians. Their temples are found in almost every locality and habitation of India. And in south India, no locality is considered properly inhabited without a *murti*, idol, of Ganesa sanctifying it with his presence.

Gautama Buddha **MÉÉèiÉ"É ¢ÉÖr**

Prince Siddhartha of *Sakya Vamsa* (see below) of Kapilavastu, who moved by *duhkha*, suffering inherent in the transient world, renounced his kingdom and family, undertook great *tapas* (see below) for several years, and finally achieved enlightenment and thus became Gautama Buddha. He became the founder of one of the two great *darsanas*, schools of philosophy, that evolved outside the Vedic schools. Gautama Buddha's teachings spread far and wide, and through his teachings Indian thought reached Sri Lanka, Tibet, China, Korea, Japan and many other countries of South and East Asia. A majority of the people in many of these countries continue to be the followers of Gautama Buddha, who is known by many names and worshipped in many forms. In India, Gautama Buddha is revered as the ninth *avatara* of Sri Vishnu.

## Grama ग्राम

Literally, a coherent group. The community of people of a locality. Such communities in the indigenous polity were largely self-governing and along with the localities in the immediate neighbourhood formed a more or less self-sufficient whole.

## Grihastha गृहस्थ

Householder. The second of the four *asramas*, stages of life defined in the Indian classical texts. *Grihasthasrama* is the stage of married life, during which a person is responsible for bringing up children, for creating and sharing wealth, and performing all acts necessary for the routine sustenance of society. Other three *asramas* are: *brahmacharya*, the stage of studentship and celibacy, *vanaprastha*, the stage of withdrawal from active routines of social life, and *sanyasa*, the stage of renunciation.

## Itihasa इतिहास

Literally, 'it happened thus'. The term generally refers to the two great epics of India, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which recount the important events and the details of life in the *Treta* and the *Dvapara yuga*, respectively. In current Hindi, the term Itihasa is taken to be the equivalent of history.

## Jaina जैन

One of the two ancient *darsanas*, schools of philosophy, that are considered to be outside the Vedic schools. The other is Bauddha. The Vedic schools of philosophy are: *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Purva Mimamsa* and *Uttara Mimamsa*. The last is also referred to as Vedanta. The Jaina school traces its history to great antiquity marked by 24 *Tirthankaras*, the Jaina Avatars, the last of whom is Mahavira. Present scholarship places Mahavira as an elderly contemporary of Gautama Buddha. From the time of Mahavira a separate Jaina *sampradaya*, community of followers of Jaina teachings, came into being.

## Jati जाति

Literally, a group with a generic defining attribute. A community of people joined together by kinship and profession. A *jati* is often spread over a number of localities within a compact region. *Jati* is the basic trans-locality social and political grouping of Indian polity. *Jati* and *grama* are, in fact, the two fundamental constitutive units of this polity. All individuals belong to a



specific *jati* and a *grama*, and they participate in the polity as members of their *jati* and *grama*.

The defining attribute of a *jati* is the *jati dharma*. Many *Jatis* have a *jati Purana* (see, Purana below) of their own, which describes the *jati dharma*, and stories and legends of the origin, and of the great heroes, of the *jati*.

The use of the word *jati* for the kinship community in the sense defined above seems to be of relatively recent origin. The traditional Indian terms connoting this concept are *gotra* and *kula*. The English word 'caste', of Portuguese origin, is an ambiguous term that, at least in the common language, is used indiscriminately to stand for *jati*, *varna*, *vamsa*, (see below for *Varna* and *Vamsa*), or any other Indian grouping or community of people.

Jayendra Saraswati  $\text{VÉ}^a\text{É}\ddot{\text{a}}\text{x}\text{p}^o\text{É}^{\circ}\text{ÉiÉ}^{\circ}$

The second of the three Sankaracharya's of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, who are gracing our times with their presence. The eldest, the Paramacharya, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, one of the holiest men of India, consecrated Sri Jayendra Saraswati as the *Peethadhipati*, the reigning *Sankaracharya*, in the year 1954. Later, in 1983, the youngest, Sri Sankaravijayendra Saraswati was consecrated as the *Peethadhipati*. Also see Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham below.

Jeeva  $\text{VÉ}^{\circ}\text{É}$

The individualised soul. *Jeeva* and *Isvara* are two aspects of Being. *Jeeva* is individualised being, and *Isvara* is the cosmic, undifferentiated Being. Relationship between *jeeva* and *Isvara* is the central issue of discussion in various schools of Indian philosophy.

Joshi Math  $\text{VÉ}^{\circ}\text{É}\ddot{\text{a}}\text{qÉ}^{\circ}\text{É}^{\circ}$

The seat of the Sankaracharya of Jyotirpeetham at Badari in the hills of Uttar Pradesh. Also, see Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham below.

Jyotisha  $\text{V}^a\text{É}^{\circ}\text{É}\ddot{\text{a}}\text{ÊiÉ}^1\text{É}$

One of the six Vedangas, constituent sciences of the Vedas. The other five are: *siksha*, phonetics, *vyakarana*, grammar and linguistics, *nirukta*, etymology, *chhandas*, metrics, and *kalpa*, rules for the performance of rituals. *Jyotisha* deals with the

determination of time, location and direction in conjunction with the movement of the celestial bodies. This is the *ganita skandha*, or the mathematical section of *vyotisha sastra*. There are two other *skandhas*: *Samhita*, dealing with the symbolism of natural and celestial phenomena, and *Jataka*, dealing with the determination of the influence of celestial motion on the human condition.

### Kala काल

Time. *Kala* denotes the concept of time, and is seldom used for calendrical time or for the time of the day. *Kala* in Indian thought is the determinator of all that happens and is said to be *Duratikrama*, inviolable. *Kala* thus is the nearest approximation to the Western concept of the law of nature, except that, unlike the *law*, *kala* is also said to be unknowable in its entirety. Nevertheless, since in the Indian understanding the unfolding of the Universe is cyclical and repetitive, the way things in general are likely to be can largely be inferred from the *yuga* and the epoch one is situated in. This sense of *kala* as the 'tendency' of the epoch often appears in the ordinary Indian usage.

### Kali काली

The fourth and the last *yuga* of a *chaturyuga* cycle. The current Kaliyuga began with the ascendance of Srikrishna from the earth after the Mahabharata war, more than 5,000 years ago. Indian astronomical texts fix the time and date of the onset of current *kaliyuga* either at the midnight of February 17/18 or the sunrise of February 18 of 3102 B.C., which is the *Chaitra Sukla Pratipad* of *Vikrama Purva* 3045 by the Indian calendar.

### Kalpa कल्प

Period of one thousand *chaturyugas*, forming a day of Brahma. A *kalpa* is divided into 14 *manvantaras*, and there is a Manu, the patriarch, of each of the 14 *manvantaras*. The largest Indian time cycle is that of 100 years of the life of Brahma, which is called a *para* and half of it is *parardha*. Currently we are in the *vaivasvata manvantara*, the seventh *manvantara* of the *Svetavaraha Kalpa*, which is at the beginning of the second *parardha*, or the fifty-first year of the current 100 year cycle of Brahma.

## Kama EòÉ"É

One of the *arishadvarga*, the six vitiating attributes of the *Chitta*. The other five are *krodha*, *moha*, *mada*, *matsarya* and *lobha*, roughly translated as anger, attachment, conceit, jealousy, and greed, respectively. Appearing at different stages, these attributes are necessary concomitants of the unfolding universe. *Kama*, loosely translated, is the longing for sensory gratification. *Kama* is also one of the four *purusharthas*, and refers to the human endeavour towards procreation and sensory satisfaction in accordance with *dharma*.

## Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham EòÉ\SÉÒ EòÉ"ÉEòÉäÊ] {ÉÒ"ÉÂû

One of the five Peethams, seats of high learning and sanctity, established by Adi Sankara in different parts of India to re-establish the pre-eminence of *Vedanta* as the Indian way of life and thought. The other four Peethams are at Sringeri, Dvarika, Badari and Puri. These Peethams are presided over by Sankaracharyas, who are also revered as *Jagadgurus*, teachers of the world.

## Karma EòÉ"ÉÇ

Action. The Indian principle of causality, according to which every action has a consequence. In fact, every action sets off a chain of consequences that stretches through all universe and Time. For the individual all actions performed leave their traces, the *samskaras*, which are carried from one birth to the other, and so are the consequences, the *karma-phalas*, of his actions.

## Kavyadarsa EòÉ"ÉÉnù¶ÉÇ

Treatise on *Alankarasastra*, the science of rhetorics, by Dandin, the Sanskrit poet, who is presumed to have lived in south India in early seventh century. His other important works are *Dasakumaracharitam* and *Avantisundarikatha*, both of which are literary compositions known for their *padalalitya*, the simplicity and beauty of composition.

## Khadi JÉÉnùÒ

Handspun and handwoven cotton cloth. Daily hand-spinning and wearing of *khadi* were part of the discipline of *satyagraha* evolved by Gandhiji during the freedom movement. *Satyagraha*—insistence upon truth—was the form of civil disobedience used in India to counter oppression and injustice.

### Krita ए॒प॒ò॒iÉ

The first *yuga* of the *chaturyuga* cycle. In this *yuga*, *dharma* represented by the bull supporting the Universe stands securely on all four legs. The four legs of *dharma* are said to be *satya*, *ahimsa*, *daya*, and *dana*, truth, non-injury, kindness and generosity, respectively, in rough translation.

### Kshatriya iÉÊjÉªÉ

One of the four *Varnas*. Canonically the *kshatriya* is charged with *prajarakshana*, protection of the people, *adhyayana*, self-study, *ijya*, performing *yajnas*, *dana*, giving, and *vishayeshu aprasakti*, detachment from the sense objects.

### Lakshmana ±ÉrÉhÉ

Younger brother of Srirama. Lakshmana is the *avatara* of Adishesha, the serpent associated with Vishnu. Lakshmana represents, for the Indians, the role model of an ideal younger brother and companion.

### Lalita Vistara ±ÉÊ±ÉiÉÊ´É°iÉÉ®ô

Major text of *Mahayana* Buddhism. Written in Samskrit. Belongs to the class of Buddhist texts called Vaipulya Sutras. Lalita Vistara refers to itself as a Purana. The text is divided in 27 chapters, and describes the life of the Buddha up to *dharma chakra pravartanam*, the first sermon. The text was translated into Chinese in the 1st century A.D.

### Lobha ±ÉÉäiÉ

One of the six vitiating attributes of the *Chitta*. *Lobha* connotes the human weakness indicated by terms like covetousness, greed, avarice, etc.

### Mada ¨Én

One of the six vitiating attributes of the *Chitta*. *Mada* connotes the human weakness indicated by terms like conceit, presumptuousness, arrogance, etc.

### Mahabharata ¨É½øÉiÉÉ®ôiÉ

One of the two Itihasas, the other being Ramayana. Mahabharata is the story of the great war fought towards the end of the present *Dvapara yuga*, that involved almost all the kings and

warriors of Bharatavarsha. Only the five Pandavas (see below), their cousin Srikrishna and his nephew Satyaki, on the one side, and three warriors, Kripacharya, Asvatthama and Kritavarma, on the other, survive the war. Within four decades of the war, the entire Yadava *vamsa* of Srikrishna, except for Vajra and Uddhava, also gets wiped out, and Srikrishna himself leaves the earth. So do the Pandavas along with their wife, Draupadi. This event is said to mark the beginning of *kaliyuga*.

Maha-Kavya "É½ØÉÉòÉ´ªÉ

Great literary composition. *Kavya*, according to the Indian texts, consists in the appropriate union of *sabda* and *artha*, word and meaning. In this sense all great literature is *kavya*. *Maha-Kavya* is a *kavya* that has the additional quality of dealing with themes and personages from the Itihasas or Puranas, or other canonical texts of similar stature. *Maha-Kavyas* treat these subjects on a wide canvas, and Indian texts offer rigorous definitions of the qualities that a *kavya* must satisfy for it to be termed a *Maha-Kavya*. *Maha-Kavya*, like all *kavya*, can be in *padya*, verse, *gadya*, prose, or *champu*, mixed form. Five major *padya Maha-Kavyas* of classical Samskrit literature are: Raghuvamsam and Kumarasambhavam of Kalidasa, Kiratarjuniyam of Bharavi, Sisupalavadham of Magha, and Naishadham of Sriharsha. Kadambari of Bana is a major *Maha-Kavya* in the *gadya* form and Champu Ramayana of Bhoja is one of the highly regarded among those in the mixed form.

Maharshi "É½ØÐ¹É

Great Rishi. For Rishi, see below.

Mahatma "É½ØÉÍ"ÉÉ

Literally, great soul. One who is great both by nature and actions. Indians use this honorific for someone who is perceived to be near the divine and beyond worldly temptations.

Mahavira "É½ØÉ´ÉÒ®ô

Vardhamana Mahavira. Born in Vaisali. The 24th *Tirthankara* (see below), who was the first teacher of Jaina *darsana*, one of the two great non-Vedic schools of Indian philosophy, and founder of the Jaina *sampradaya*, community of the followers of Jaina *darsana*. Mahavira is said to be an elderly contemporary of Gautama Buddha. Also, see Jaina above.

Manas "ÉÉxÉ°É

Literally, of the *manas*, loosely translated as the mind. Used in the text in the sense of the shared psychic attributes of a civilisation. Canonically, all sense perception occurs through the agency of *antahkarana*, which is constituted of *manas*, the internal sense organ, *buddhi*, the intellect that discriminates between the received sensations, *ahankara*, the I-sense, and *Chitta*, the pure intellect that is tinted by previous and current perceptions and consequent *samskaras*, (see *Chitta* above). Though *manas* is one of the constituents of *antahkarana*, yet the term is also used as synonymous with *antahkarana*. Defined thus, *manas* can perhaps be said to be the agency through which all phenomena are sieved before perception.

Moha "ÉÉä½Ø

One of the six vitiating attributes of the *Chitta*. Attachment born out of delusion, such as taking the manifest Universe to be the ultimate reality and consequent failure to see the undifferentiated Brahman manifesting as the Universe.

Moksha "ÉÉäİÉ

Literally, liberation. The state of realisation of the unity of all manifest beings. Dissolving of the differentiated being into the Brahman. Such realisation and dissolution frees the individual from *samsara*, the cycle of repeated births and deaths that the individual keeps going through till the sense of the individual identity is not merged with the Brahman. Also, one of the four *purusharthas* (see *Artha* above). Thus, human endeavour towards *moksha*. For the Indians all human endeavour must ultimately be directed towards this state of realisation.

Muni "ÉÖÊxÉ

Literally, one who thinks and reflects. Also, according to some authorities, one who keeps *mauna*, silence. Men of great wisdom and equanimity are generally referred to as *muni-s* in Indian classical literature and also in current usage.

Nagari xÉÉMÉ®ôÒ

Literally, pertaining to the city. Of the city. *Nagari* usually refers to the script of the classical Samskrit corpus of north India. This is also the script in which many languages of India, like Hindi,

Marathi, Nepali, etc., are written. Another meaning of the word, and the one followed in the text, is that which defines the practice of the elite. *Nagari* Hindi, thus, is the Hindi spoken and written by the elite.

Narada Muni नारद ऋषि

A very famous *Rishi* of the Puranas. Narada literally means the one who gives knowledge of Brahman (see above). In the Pauranic narratives Narada Muni often appears at the crucial moments and makes the events move on their destined course through his suggestions and interventions. It is Narada Muni who first recount the story of Sri Rama to Maharishi Valmiki. Narada Muni is known as a great devotee of Sri Vishnu and is the author of the famous Bhakti Sutras. He is also known as a great musician, who wanders through the worlds playing on a stringed instrument and singing devotional songs.

Pali पालि

Literally, that which preserves. Pali is the language in which the teachings of Gautama Buddha are 'preserved'. The corpus of Buddha's teachings is contained in the *Tirpitaka* texts. At a later stage, Buddhism split into *Hinayana* and *Mahayana* streams, and while Pali continued to be the language of the *Hinayana* school, the *Mahayana* school adopted Samskrit.

Pali was the Prakrit of Magadha, the region where Gautama Buddha lived and taught for a long time. For Prakrit, see below.

Pandavas पांडव

The five sons of Pandu, whose elder brother Dhritarashtra was the ruler of the Kuru Desa, the region around modern Delhi, at the time of Mahabharata war. Five sons of Pandu, the Pandavas, and one hundred sons of Dhritarashtra, the Kauravas, are the main protagonists of the war. The names of the Pandava brothers are: Yudhisthira, Bhimasena, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. Their main opponent is Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kaurava brothers.

Pandit पांडित

A learned person. Also used as an honorific.

Para Vidya {É®ôÉ Ê´ÉtÉ

See *Apara Vidya* above.

Parikshit {É®ôÒÊÍÉiÉ

Grandson of Pandavas, who was the only survivor to carry forward the Kuruvamsa, the royal line to which Pandu and Dhritarashtra belonged. Thirty-six years after the end of the Mahabharata war, the Pandavas anointed Parikshit the king, and left the earth along with their wife, Draupadi. Parikshit thus became the first king of the current *kaliyuga*. Srimadbhagavata Purana was recited to Parikshit by Maharshi Suka during the last seven days of Parikshit's life.

Pauranic

Anglicised adjective form of Purana. Of the Puranas. For Purana, see below.

Prajna |ÉYÉÉ

Purified intellect, symbolised by goddess Sarasvati. One of the main components of education is the discipline of purifying the intellect.

Prakrit |ÉÉÉPiÉ

Literally, natural, artless, normal. Any one of the languages spoken in the different regions of India. Samskrit, literally is the 'refined' language, while Prakrit-s are the 'natural' languages. In classical Samskrit drama, women and the ordinary people speak Prakrit, and the male gentry speaks Sanskrit. This distinction, however, is peculiar to the literature of drama alone, and is not found either in the Puranas and Itihasas, or in the other *kavyas*. Many Jaina canonical texts and Jaina Puranas are in Prakrit.

Three major Prakrit languages of classical India are: Sauraseni of the Mathura region, Magadhi of the Magadha region of Bihar, and Maharashtri of Maharashtra.



## Prithvi {ÉPI'ÉÒ

The goddess earth. Also one of the *panchamahabhutas*, the five elementary constituents of the material universe. The other four are: *ap*, *tejas*, *vayu*, *akasa*. Water is largely constituted of the element *ap*, fire of *tejas*, air of *vayu* and space of *akasa*.

## Purana {ÉÖ®ôÉhÉ

Literally, belonging to ancient times. Puranas, along with the Itihasas, recount the major happenings of various epochs. The five defining characteristics of a Purana are: It should describe *sarga*, creation; *pratisarga*, dissolution; *vamsa*, the different lineages from Manu, the first patriarch of the epoch; *manvantara*, the happenings of different *manvantaras* (see *Kalpa* above); and *vamsanucharita*, the genealogies of the protagonists, especially of the kings and the *rishis*. It is said that study of the Vedas has to be complemented by that of the Itihasas and Puranas. Veda without the knowledge of Purana and Itihasa is likely to be misunderstood.

Indians speak of *ashtadasa maha Puranas*, the eighteen great Puranas. The list of eighteen can differ. One of the more commonly accepted lists includes: Vishnu Purana, Bhagavata Purana, Narada Purana, Garuda Purana, Padma Purana, Varaha Purana, Brahma Purana, Brahmanda Purana, Brahmavaivarta Purana, Markandeya Purana, Bhavishya Purana, Vamana Purana, Siva Purana, Linga Purana, Skanda Purana, Agni Purana, Matsya Purana, and Kurma Purana. Besides these there are scores of other Puranas in Sanskrit, and there are also similar Puranas in different regional languages.

Though written in the style of narratives of the kings and *rishis* of an epoch, most Puranas are in fact in the nature of encyclopedias of the major issues of public concern at the relevant epoch. The Pauranic style of narration is the canonical Indian style of presenting the thoughts and events of different times, and besides the major Puranas, there are Puranas of different communities, of different localities and also of great personages of known history.

## Purusha-Sukta {ÉÖ°¹É°ÉÚH

A widely known hymn of Rig Veda, that describes Brahman in the form of the cosmic man, and the creation proceeding from Him. This *sukta* appears as the ninetieth hymn of the tenth *mandala*, the tenth book, of Rig Veda. The *sukta* also appears in Yajurveda.

## Ramayana रमयण

The Itihasa composed by Maharshi Valmiki, that describes the events which took place towards the end of the present *Treta yuga*. Ramayana tells the story of the Ikshvaku prince Sri Rama and his wife Sri Sita, who remain the ideal man and woman for the Indians. And the Indians continue to define ideal polity by reference to *Rama rajya*, the period when Sri Rama graced the throne of Ayodhya, the capital of the Ikshvakus, after having established the supremacy of *Dharma* throughout Bharatavarsha. Maharshi Valmiki's Ramayana is regarded as the *Adi Kavya*, the first great epic of India, and the story of Ramayana has been told again and again by the great poets of all languages and regions of India.

## Rasa रस

Aesthetic emotion generated in a *sahirdaya*, the viewer or the listener of a creative composition, by the dominant and the secondary *bhavas* (see above) present in the composition, and the circumstances within which these *bhavas* are placed. Indian texts of aesthetics recognise 10 distinct *rasas*. These are: *sringara*, *vira*, *bibhatsa*, *raudra*, *hasya*, *bhayanaka*, *karuna*, *adbhuta*, *vatsalya*, and *santa*, love, valour, disgust, fury, humour, fear, pathos, wonder, affection, and tranquillity, respectively, in rough translation.

*Rasa* is also a technical term in *Ayurveda*, where it is used to define the qualities of a substance, and in *rasa sastra*, Indian chemistry, where *rasa* defines the essence of different metals and their compounds.

## Rig-Veda रीग्वेद

The first of the four Vedas. The other three Vedas are: Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvanaveda. Rig-Veda consists of 1,028 Suktas arranged in 10 *mandalas*. *Sukta* may be translated as the hymn, and *mandala* as the book. Each *sukta* of Rig-Veda consists of a number of *richa-s*, the verses of *Rig-Veda*. There are more than 10,000 *richa-s* of Rig-Veda.

## Rishi रishi

Literally, seer. *Rishis* are the great sages of Indian antiquity, who are *drashtas*, seers, of the unfolding of the Universe, and therefore have the ability to see into the past and the future. Most Vedic *mantras*, hymns, are associated with some great *rishi*, who is said to be the *drashta*, or seer, of that hymn.

## Samadhi ०É"ÉÉÊvÉ

Right meditation. According to *Yoga darsana*, the Indian school of philosophy specialising in the analysis and discipline of the mind, *Chitta* is said to be in a state of *samadhi* when its natural tendency of being in constant flux is put under control and the consciousness is highly concentrated. There are different stages of *samadhi*, culminating in the *asamprajnata samadhi*, in which state the distinction between the knower and the known is lost, and the *Chitta* merges with the Brahman.

## Sambuka १É"ᳵÉÚÈò

A *sudra muni*. Towards the end of the reign of Sri Rama, the tranquillity of life in Kosala Desa is disturbed by Sambuka's intense *tapas* (see below) with the objective of ascending to *svarga*, the abode of the *devas*, along with his earthly body. This extraordinary desire disturbs *dharma*, the natural order of the Universe, and the disturbance leads to unnatural occurrences, like the death of a child before that of his parents. In order to restore *dharma*, Sri Rama goes out in search of the source of the disturbance, and finding Sambuka engaged in intense austerities, kills him with a single blow of his sword.

Sambuka is probably the first *sudra*, who appears towards the end of *Treta*. There is perhaps no earlier reference to *sudras* in the Itihasas and Puranas.

## Samkalpa ०ÉÆÈò±{É

Oriented consciousness. Intentionality. Creation and unfolding of the universe follow from the *samkalpa* of Brahman. Fruition of all human action also depends upon *samkalpa*, which in this context would imply orienting the consciousness in conformity with the cosmic design. Such orientation is achieved through *tapas*, disciplined and intense effort. This discipline often includes the practice of great austerities of the mind and the body.

## Sanskrit ०ÉÆ°È᳚iÉ

Literally, properly refined, well-formed and perfect. Language of the classical literature of India.

## Sanatana ०ÉxÉÉiÉxÉ

Eternal. That which has neither a beginning nor an end. What is *sanatana* must also be necessarily whole and undifferentiated,

all divisions and differentiations being transient. Brahman and *dharma* are *sanatana*. Veda, all knowledge, is also *sanatana*, though what human beings at any given stage are given to comprehend of it is only a partial glimpse of the whole, and hence transient.

Sankaracharya ऋषिः श्रीगणेशाय नमः

See Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham above.

Santi-Parva श्रीसन्तिपर्वः

The twelfth of the eighteen *parva*-s, books, of Mahabharata. The eighteen *parva*-s are: adi, sabha, aranya, virata, udyoga, bhishma, drona, karna, salya, sauptika, stri, santi, anusasana, asvamedhika, asramavasika, mausala, mahaprasthanika, svargarohana. Santi-parva describes the *raja dharma*, the discipline of politics, and *moksha dharma*, the discipline of *moksha*, as interpreted by the patriarch Bhishma, from his death bed after the end of the war, for the edification of the Pandavas. Santi-Parva is the canonical compendium of Indian thought on polity and *dharma*.

Saranath श्रीशिवलिंगम्

A sacred place near Kasi, where Gautama Buddha initiated the *dharma chakra pravartana*, literally setting the wheel of *dharma* in motion. In Saranath a famous *stupa*, Buddhist shrine, stands at the spot where Gautama Buddha preached for the first time after achieving enlightenment, and thus becoming the Buddha.

Siksha शिक्षा

The India concept corresponding to the idea of education. *Siksha* also is a *Vedanga*, a science auxiliary to Vedas, that deals with phonetics.

Sila शीलम्

Right conduct. According to the *dharma sastras*, classical Indian texts of worldly conduct, *sila* involves thirteen virtues including the quality of being immersed in Brahman, of respectfully serving parents and ancestors, and of being detached from worldly desires and jealousies, besides the usual attributes of good conduct, like humility, pity, kindness, truthfulness, etc.



Srikrishna ,ÉÒ Eᵖ¹hÉ

The form adopted by Sri Vishnu during His *avatara* on earth towards the end of the present *dvapara* at the time of Mahabharata.

Srimadbhagavata , ÉÒ"ÉnÂù!ÉÉMÉ'ÉiÉ

One of the eighteen *mahapuranas*. *Srimadbhagavata* describes the story of Srikrishna in detail.

Springeri Sarada Peetham

One of the five Peethams established by Adi Sankara. Sringeri is situated on the banks of river Bhadra in Karnataka. Acharya Vidyaranya, the Sankaracharya of Sringeri Peetham in the early fourteenth century, was the guiding spirit in the establishment of Vijayanagara *samrajya*, the Vijayanagara kingdom of south India.

Sri Rama/Srirama

The form adopted by Sri Vishnu during His *avatara* on earth towards the end of the present *Treta*. Sri Vishnu in this *avatara* plays the role of *Maryada Purushottama*, the ideal man who is bound by and lives within human limitations. Sri Rama thus sets the ideals and limits of the human state. See also Ramayana, above.

Sudra, ÉÒ®Ê"É/ÉÒ®Ê"É

One of the four *varnas* into which human society gets divided at a certain stage of the unfolding of the universe. Canonically, *sudras* are charged with *paricharya*, or service. The service tasks, as detailed in the Indian lexicographical texts, include all the arts and crafts that in modern societies are counted under the heads of manufacturing and services.

Swadesi 0'ÉnăùŦÉÒ

Literally, of one's own *desa*, locality or region. Pertaining to the immediate neighbourhood. The concept that enjoins one to organise mental and material needs such that these may be fulfilled from within the resources, skills and wisdom available in the immediate neighbourhood, and to define one's primary responsibility of life with respect to that neighbourhood. During the Indian independence movement the concept of *swadesi*, as

adopted and interpreted by Mahatma Gandhi, became the most cogent argument and a powerful weapon against alien rule.

Swaraj/Swarajya स्वराज

Literally, rule of the self. Gandhiji's term for the Indian polity of his vision. According to this vision, *swaraj* was to be based upon the *swadharma* of India, on the Indian ways of thought, action and belief, and this re-establishment of *swadharma* in Indian polity was to begin with the *grama* (see above). Regenerated *grama*, confidently established in its *swadharma*, was the key component of Gandhiji's vision of *swaraj*, which he also called *grama swaraj*. Gandhiji often compared *swaraj* with *Rama rajya*, the ideal polity of the time when Sri Rama sat on the throne of Ayodhya.

Tapas तपः

Burning away the *samskaras* (see *Chitta* above). *Tapas* essentially is *nanasanaṭpara*, starving the body and senses, following *niyamasvikara*, determined resolution.

Tirthankara तीर्थङ्कर

Literally, one who makes *Tirthas*, which mean both the *sastras* and the holy places. *Avataras* of the divine in Jaina Darsana. Also, see Jaina above.

Treta त्रेता

The second *yuga* of the *chaturyuga* cycle. In this *yuga*, the bull representing *dharma* stands on three feet.

Upanishada उपनिषद्

Upanishadas are the basic philosophical texts, generally found at the end of the Brahmana part of the Vedas. These texts define the nature of Brahman, the *jeeva* and the universe, and the relationship between them. This is what is defined as *brahmavidya*, the knowledge that leads to *moksha*. There are more than a hundred Upanishadas of which the following ten are considered the most important: Isopanishada, Kenopanishada, Kathopanishada, Mundakopanishada, Mandukyopanishada, Prasnopanishada, Aitareyopanishada, Taittiriopanishada, Chhandogyopanishada, and Brihadaranyakopanishada. Upanishadas are the canonical texts of the *Vedanta darsana*.

### Vaisya 'ÉèŋaÉ

One of the *varnas* into which the human society gets divided at a certain stage of the unfolding of the universe. The *vaisyas* are specifically charged with the tasks of *krishi*, *goraksha* and *vanijya*, agriculture, animal husbandry and trade, respectively, in addition to the usual duties of *ijya*, performing *yajnas*, *adhyayana*, self-study, and *dana*, giving.

### Valmiki 'ÉÉ±"ÉÒÊÊò

The great sage who composed Ramayana, the first epic of India. He is, therefore, revered as *Adi Kavi*, the first poet.

### Vamsa 'ÉÆŋÉ

Lineage. All Indians are presumed to belong to one of the two *vamsas* that began with the current Manu, Vaivasvata. These two great *vamsas* are *surya vamsa*, the solar lineage, and *chandra vamsa*, the lunar lineage. Within these great *vamsas* there are several smaller *vamsas*, each starting with a great patriarch, like Ikshvaku *vamsa* of Sri Rama that started with Ikshvaku; Kuru *vamsa* of the Pandavas and the Kauravas that began with Kuru; and Yadava *vamsa* of Srikrishna that began with Yadu.

### Vanara-s 'ÉÉxÉ®ô

The inhabitants of the kingdom of Kishkindha whose help is sought by Sri Rama in his search for Sri Sita, who was kidnapped by Ravana, the King of Lanka. Ultimately, Sri Rama defeats the great scholar and warrior, Ravana, with the help of the *vanara* armies. *Vanara* is also the generic term for different species of apes and monkeys. Also see *Bhalu*, above.

### Varna 'ÉhÉÇ

Large groups, based on occupations, skills and social responsibilities, into which human society gets divided at a certain stage of the unfolding of the Universe. At the stage of highest complexity human society is divided into four Varnas. These are: *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaisya* and *Sudra*. For the specific tasks and skills of these *Varnas*, see above.



Vasudeva 'ÉÉ°ÉÖnäù'É

Literally son of Vasudeva, who was a prince of Yadu *vamsa* and father of Srikrishna and Balarama.

Veda 'Éänù

Literally, knowledge. Veda generally refers to all knowledge, and specifically to the *sanatana* knowledge of India that is said to have no beginning, and that was compiled into four separate texts by Vedavyasa (see Vyasa below) at the end of *dvapara yuga*. Veda is also said to be *sruti*, the text that has been heard or communicated from the beginning of creation.

Vishnu/Sri Vishnu Ê'É'hÉÖ

The aspect of Brahman specially oriented towards the preservation of the creation. Also see Brahma, above.

Visvarupa Darsana Ê'É¶'É°{Énù¶ÉÇxÉ

At the beginning of the Mahabharata war, Arjuna, the chief Pandava warrior, is unnerved at the prospect of fighting against and killing his elders and close relatives. Srikrishna then explains to him that all creation is a manifestation of the Brahman, and all human endeavour is only *nimitta matra*, merely instrumental, in the unfolding of the Universe. Srikrishna also provides Arjuna, though only for a moment, the insight to see the whole Universe manifesting and unfolding within the form of Srikrishna. This event is known as *visvarupa darsana*, literally vision of the Universe. These teachings of Srikrishna constitute the eighteen chapters of Srimadbhagavadgita, which forms part of the Bhishma Parva, the seventh book of Mahabharata. *visvarupa darsana* is described in the eleventh chapter of Srimadbhagavadgita.

Vyakarana 'aÉÉÉÖò®ôhÉ

Grammar and the science of language. One of the six *Vedangas* (see *Jyotisha* above). *Vyakarana* is known to be the primary science of India, that has to be learnt prior to the learning of all other knowledge and on which most other sciences of India are modelled.



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## **DHARAMPAL: LIFE AND WORK**

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Born in 1922, Dharampal had his first glimpse of Mahatma Gandhi around the age of eight, when his father took him along to the 1929 Lahore Congress. A year later, Sardar Bhagat Singh and his colleagues were condemned to death and executed by the British. Dharampal still recalls many of his friends taking to the streets of Lahore, near where he lived, and shouting slogans in protest.

Around the same period, there were excited discussions, especially in school, about whether the British should leave India. Some were against *swaraj* because they feared invasion of the country by Afghan tribesmen and others. With many others his age, Dharampal tended more and more towards the *swaraj* option. Though he underwent western education throughout school and college, his animosity to British rule grew year by year. By 1940, he had started to wear *khadi* regularly— a practice he follows even now— and even tried to take to spinning the *charkha* for a while.

In 1942, he was present as a fervent spectator at the Quit India Session of the Congress in Bombay and he thereafter joined the Quit India Movement. He was active in it till he was arrested in April 1943. After two months in police detention, he was released but externed from Delhi.

Dharampal recalls he was one of countless people who believed that once the British were gone, India would be rid of its misfortunes, particularly its state of disorganisation and impoverishment.

In August, 1944, he was introduced to Mirabeau by his friends. He joined her soon thereafter, at what came to be known as the Kisan Ashram, situated midway between Roorkee and Haridwar. He stayed with Mirabeau, with occasional absences in Delhi (1947-48) and England (1948, 1949) till about 1953 when she retired, first to the Himalayas, and a few years later, to Europe. But the contact stayed. Dharampal met her again for the last time in July 1982 in Vienna, about two weeks before her death. On that day, they talked together for some 6-8 hours in the quiet of the Vienna woods.

Earlier, during 1947-48, Dharampal had come in close contact with Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, and with numerous younger friends in Delhi. He was then associated with an attempt at cooperative rehabilitation of refugees from Pakistan. (He was a member of the Indian Cooperative Union which was founded in 1948 with Kamaladevi as its president.)

The following year, while in England, Dharampal got married to Phyllis who was English. Afterwards, they both decided to live in India. On their way back, they spent some time in Israel and visited a few other countries as well. In 1950, the community village of Bapugram in the Pashulok area, near Rishikesh, began to be formed. Dharampal and Phyllis lived in it till 1953. He returned to England with his family in 1954.

He was back in Delhi again from early 1958 to 1964 with his wife, son and daughter. He now took up the post of General Secretary of the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD); Kamaladevi was its first president. Soon thereafter, Jayaprakash Narayan agreed to be the president of AVARD. (He remained president till about 1975.)

For about two years (1964, 1965) Dharampal worked with the All India Panchayat Parishad (A.I.P.P.) as Director of Research and spent

more than a year in Tamilnadu collecting material that was later published as *The Madras Panchayat System*. Earlier, in 1962, he had already published a smaller book containing the proceedings of the Indian Constituent Assembly relating to the discussion on the subject of "The Panchayat as the Basis of India's Polity".

From Madras, for family reasons, Dharampal once again moved to London in early 1966. His son had met with a serious accident.

By then he was also keen on a detailed study of the Indo-British encounter during the 18th and 19th centuries. This time he stayed on in London till 1982, but visited India in between. In England, he did not have much of an income. There was also a family to support. But notwithstanding all this, he became a regular visitor to the India Office and the British Museum and spent most of his time poring over the archives. Photocopying required money. Oftentimes, old manuscripts could not be photocopied. So he copied them in long hand, page after page, millions of words, day after day. Thereafter, he would have the copied notes typed. He thus retrieved and accumulated thousands of pages of information from the archival record. When he returned to India, these notes— which filled several large trunks and suitcases— proved to be his most prized possessions.

From around 1958, Dharampal had developed an association with Sevagram, especially because of Annasaheb Sahasrabudhe. He spent around a month in Sevagram in 1967, where he did his first writing based on the 18th-19th century data he had collected. His next long stay in Sevagram was from December (1980) to March (1981) when he completed *The Beautiful Tree*. From around August 1982 to 1987, he was mostly in Sevagram with occasional sojourns in Madras.

Dharampal was president of the Patriotic and People-Oriented Science and Technology (PPST) group. He was also closely associated with the Centre for Policy Studies located in Madras.

His wife died in London in 1986.

From 1993, he has been living largely at Ashram Pratisthan in Sevagram.