CHAPTER SIX

NEW PROBLEMS

The Arabs and the Mongols

WHILE HARSHA WAS REIGNING OVER A POWERFUL KINGDOM IN north India and Hsuan-Tsang, the Chinese scholar-pilgrim, was studying at Nalanda University, Islam was taking shape in Arabia. Islam was to come to India both as a religious and a political force and create many new problems, but it is well to remember that it took a long time before it made much difference to the Indian scene. It was nearly 600 years before it reached the heart of India and when it came to the accompaniment of political conquest, it had already changed much and its standard-bearers were different. The Arabs who, in a fine frenzy of enthusiasm and with a dynamic energy, had spread out and conquered from Spain to the borders of Mongolia carrying with them a brilliant culture, did not come to India proper. They stopped at its north-western fringe and remained there. Arab civilization gradually decayed and various Turkish tribes came into prominence in central and western Asia. It was these Turkish and Afghans from the Indian borderland who brought Islam as a political force to India.

Some dates might help to bring these facts home to us. Islam may be said to begin with the Hijrat, the departure of the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca "to Medina, in 622 **A.C**. Mohammed died ten years latter. Some time was spent in consolidating the position in Arabia, and then those astounding series of events took place which carried the Arabs, with the banner of Islam, right across central Asia in the east and across the whole north African continent to Spain and France in the west. In the seventh century and by the beginning of the eighth, they had spread over Iraq, Iran, and central Asia. In 712 **A.C**. they reached and occupied Sind in the north-west of India and stopped there. A great desert separated this area from the more fertile parts of India. In the west the Arabs crossed the narrow straits between Africa and Europe (since called the Straits of Gibraltar) and entered Spain in 711 **A.C**. They occupied the whole of Spain and crossed the Pyrenees into France. In 732 they were defeated and checked by Charles Martel at Tours in France.

This triumphant career of a people, whose homelands were the deserts of Arabia and who had thus far played no notable

part in history, is most remarkable. They must have derived their vast energy from the dynamic and revolutionary character of their Prophet and his message of human brotherhood. And yet it is wrong to imagine that Arab civilization suddenly rose out of oblivion and took shape after the advent of Islam. There has been a tendency on the part of Islamic scholars to decry the pre-Islamic past of the Arab people and to refer to it as the period of *jahiliyat,* a kind of dark age of ignorance and supersition. Arab civilization, like others, had a long past, intimately connected with the development of the Semitic race, the Phoenicians, Cretans, Chaldeans, Hebrews. The Israelites became more exclusive and separated themselves from the more catholic Chaldeans and others. Between them and other Semitic races there were conflicts. Nevertheless all over the Semitic area there were contacts and interchanges and to some extent a common background. Pre-Islamic Arab civilization grew up especially in Yemen. Arabic was a highly developed language at the time of the Prophet, with a mixture of Persian and even some Indian words. Like the Phoenicians, the Arabs went far across the seas in search of trade. There was an Arab colony in south China, near Canton, in pre-Islamic days.

Nevertheless it is true that the Prophet of Islam vitalized his people and filled them with faith and enthusiasm. Considering themselves the standard-bearers of a new cause, they developed the zeal and self-confidence which sometimes fills a whole people and changes history. Their success was also undoubtedly due to the decay of the states in western and central Asia and in north Africa. North Africa was torn by internecine conflicts between rival Christian factions, leading often to bloody struggles for mastery. The Christianity that was practised there at the time was narrow and intolerant and the contrast between this and the general toleration of the Moslem Arabs, with their message of human brotherhood, was marked. It was this that brought whole peoples, weary of Christian strife, to their side.

The culture that the Arabs carried with them to distant countries was itself continuously changing and developing. It bore the strong impress of the new ideas of Islam, and yet to call it Islamic civilization is confusing and probably incorrect. With their capital at Damascus, they soon left their simple ways of living and developed a more sophisticated culture. That period might be called one of Arab-Syrian civilization. Byzantine influences came to them, but most of all, when they moved to Baghdad, the traditions of old Iran affected them and they developed the Arab-Persian civilization which became dominant over all the vast areas they controlled.

Widespread and apparently easy as the Arab conquests were, they did not go far beyond Sind in India, then or later. Was

this due to the fact that India was still strong enough to resist effectively the invader? Probably so, for it is difficult to explain otherwise the lapse of several centuries before a real invasion took place. Partly it may have been due to the internal troubles of the Arabs. Sind fell away from the central authority at Baghdad and became a small independent Moslem state. But though there was no invasion, contacts between India and the Arab world grew, travellers came to and from, embassies were exchanged, Indian books, especially on mathematics and astronomy, were taken to Baghdad and were translated into Arabic. Many Indian physicians went to Baghdad. These trade and cultural relations were not confined to north India. The southern states of India also participated in them, especially the RSshtrakutas, on the west coast of India, for purposes of trade.

This frequent intercourse inevitably led to Indians getting to know the new religion, Islam. Missionaries also came to spread this new faith and they were welcomed. Mosques were built. There was no objection raised either by the state or the people, nor were there any religious conflics. It was the old tradition of India to be tolerant to all faiths and forms of worship. Thus Islam came as a religion to India several centuries before it came as a political force.

The new Arab Empire under the Ommeya Khalifas (Ommeyade Caliphs) had its seat and capital at Damascus where a splendid city grew up. But soon, about 750 **A.C**. the Abbasiya (Abbaside) Khalifas took the capital to Baghdad. Internal conflicts followed and Spain fell away from the central empire, but continued for long as an independent Arab state. Gradually the Baghdad Empire also weakened and split up into several states, and the Seljuk Turks came from central Asia and became politically all-powerful at Baghdad, though the Khalifa still funcioned at their pleasure. Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, a Turk, arose in Afghanistan, a great warrior and a brilliant captain, and he ignored and even taunted the Khalifa. But still Baghdad continued as the cultural centre of the Islamic world and even far-way Spain looked to it for inspiration. Europe was backward then in learning and science and art and the amenities of life. It was Arab Spain, and especially the university of Cordoba, that kept the lamp of learning and intellectual curiosity burning throughout those dark ages of Europe and some of its light pierced the European gloom.

The Crusades beginning in 1095 **A.C**. went on for over a century and a half. These did not merely represent a struggle between two aggressive religions, a conflict between the Cross and the Crescent. 'The Crusades,' says Professor G. M. Trevelyan, the eminent historian, 'were the military and religious aspect of a general urge towards the east on the part of the reviving energies

of Europe. The prize that Europe brought back from the Crusades was not the permanent liberation of the holy Sepulchre or the potential unity of Christendom, of which the story of the Crusades was one long negation. She brought back instead the finer arts and crafts, luxury, science, and intellectual curiosity—everything that Peter the Hermit would most have despised.'

Before the last of the Crusades had ingloriously petered out, something cyclonic and cataclysmic had taken place in the heart of Asia. Chengiz (or Jenghiz) Khan had begun his devastating march westward. Born in Mongolia in 1155 A.c., he started on this great march, which was to convert central Asia into a heap of smoking ruins, in 1219. He was no youngster then. Bokhara, Samarkand, Herat, and Balkh, all great cities, each having more than a million inhabitants, were reduced to ashes. Chengiz went on to Kiev in Russia and then returned; Baghdad somehow escaped as it did not lie on his route. He died in 1227 at the age of seventy-two. His successors went further into Europe and, in 1258, Hulagu captured Baghdad and put an end to that famous centre of art and learning, where for over 500 years treasures from all parts of the world had come and accumulated. That gave a great shock to the distinctive Arab-Persian civilization in Asia, though this survived even under the Mongols; it continued especially in parts of North Africa and especially in Spain. Crowds of scholars with their books fled from Baghdad to Cairo and Spain and a renaissance of art and learning took place there. But Spain itself was slipping from the Arab grasp and Corodoba had fallen in 1236 A.C. For another two centuries and a half the kingdom of Granada continued as a bright centre of Arab culture. In 1492 A.C. Granada also fell to Ferdinand and Isabella, and Arab dominion in Spain ended. Thenceforward Cairo became the chief Arab centre, though it came under Turkish domination. The Ottoman Turks had captured Constantinople in 1453, thereby releasing those forces which gave birth to the European Renaissance.

The Mongol conquests in Asia and Europe represented something new in the art of warfare. 'In scale and in quality,' says Liddell Hart, 'in surprise and in mobility, in the strategic and in the tactical indirect approach their (the Mongols') campaigns surpass any in history.' Chengiz Khan was undoubtedly one of the greatest, if not the greatest, military leaders that the world has produced. The chivalry of Asia and Europe was matchwood before him and his brilliant successors, and it was pure chance that central and western Europe escaped conquest. From these Mongols Europe learnt new lessons in strategy and the art of warfare. The use of gunpowder also came to Europe, through these Mongols, from China.

The Mongols did not come to India. They stopped at the Indus river and pursued their conquests elsewhere. When their great

empires faded away a number of smaller states rose in Asia, and then in 1369 Timur, a Turk, claiming to be a descendant of Chengiz Khan through his mother, tried to repeat the exploits of Chengiz. Samarkand, his capital, again became a seat of empire, brief-lived though this was. After Timur's death his successors were more interested in a quiet life and in cultivating the arts than in military exploits. A Timurid renaissance, as it is called, took place in central Asia and it was in this environment that Babar, a descendant of Timur, was born and grew up. Babar was the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India; he was the first of the Grand Mughals. He captured Delhi in 1526.

Chengiz Khan was not a Moslem, as some people seem to imagine because of his name which is now associated with Islam. He is said to have believed in Shamaism, a religion of the sky. What this was I do not know but the word inevitably makes one think of the Arab word for Buddhists—Samani, which was derived from the Sanskrit Shravana. Debased forms of Buddhism flourished then in various parts of Asia, including Mongolia and it is probable that Chengiz grew up under their influence.

It is odd to think that the greatest military conqueror in history was probably some kind of a Buddhist.*

In Central Asia, even to-day four legendary figures of great conquerors are remembered—Sikander (Alexander), Sultan Mahmud, Chengiz Khan and Timur. To these four must be added now a fifth, another type of person, not a warrior, but a conqueror in a different realm, round whose name legend has already gathered —Lenin.

The Flowering of Arab Culture and Contacts with India

Having rapidly conquered large parts of Asia, Africa, and a bit of Europe, the Arabs turned their minds to conquests in other fields. The empire was being consolidated, many new countries had come within their ken and they were eager to find out about this world and its ways. The intellectual curiosity, the adventures in rationalist speculation, the spirit of scientific inquiry among the Arabs of the eighth and ninth centuries are very striking.

Normally, in the early days of a religion based on fixed concepts and beliefs, faith is dominant and variations are not approved or encouraged. That faith had carried the Arabs far and that trium-

**A kind of Shamanism or Shamaism still lingers in Arctic Siberia, Mongolia, and in Tanna Tuva in Soviet Central Asia. This appears to be based entirely on a belief in spirits and has apparently no connection whatever with Buddhism. Tet it may have been influenced long ago by some degraded forms of Buddhism which were gradually submerged in local-primitive superstitions. Tibet, which is patently a Buddhist country, has developed its own avriety of Buddhism called Lamaism. Mongolia with its Shamanism has also the Living Buddha tradition. Thus there seem to be various gradations in northern and central Asia of Buddhism fading off into primitive beliefs.*

phant success itself must have deepened that faith. And yet we find them going beyond the limits of dogma and creed, dabbling with agnosticism, and turning their zeal and energy towards adventures of the mind. Arab travellers, among the greatest of their kind, go to far countries to find out what other peoples were doing and thinking, to study and understand their philosophies and sciences and ways of life, and then to develop their own thought. Scholars and books from abroad were brought to Baghdad and the Khalif al-Mansur (middle eighth century) established a research and translation bureau where translations were made from Greek, Syriac, Zend, Latin, and Sanskrit. Old monasteries in Syria, Asia Minor, and the Levant were ransacked for manuscripts. The old Alexandrian schools had been closed by Christian bishops and their scholars had been driven out. Many of these exiles had drifted to Persia and elsewhere. They now found a welcome and a safe haven in Baghdad and they brought Greek philosophy and science and mathematics with them—Plato and Aristotle, Ptolemy and Euclid. There were Nestorian and Jewish scholars and Indian physicians; philosophers and mathematicians.

All this continued and developed during the reigns of the Khalifs Harun-al-Rashid and al-Mamun (eighth and ninth centuries) and Baghdad became the biggest intellectual centre of the civilized world.

There were many contacts with India during this period and the Arabs learnt much of Indian mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. And yet, it would appear, that the initiative for all these contacts came chiefly from the Arabs and though the Arabs learned much from India, the Indians did not learn much from the Arabs.

The Indians remained aloof, wrapped up in their own conceits, and keeping as far as possible within their own shells. This was unfortunate, for the intellectual ferment of Baghdad and the Arab renaissance movement would have shaken up the Indian mind just when it was losing much of its creative vigour. In that spirit of intellectual inquiry the Indians of an older days would have found kinship in thought.

The study of Indian learning and science in Baghdad was greatly encouraged by the powerful Barmak family (the Barmecides) which gave viziers to Harun-al-Rashid. This family had probably been converted from Buddhism. During an illness of Harun-al-Rashid, a physician named Manak was sent for from India. Manak settled down in Baghdad and was appointed the head of a large hospital there. Arab writers mention six other Indian physicians living in Baghdad at the time, besides Manak. In astronomy the Arabs improved on both the Indians and the Alexandrians and two famous names stand out: A1 Khwarismi, a mathematician and astronomer of the ninth century, and the poet-astronomer Omar Khayyam of the twelfth century. In medicine,

Arab physicians and surgeons were famous in Asia and Europe. Most famous of them was Ibn Sina (Avicenna) of Bokhara, who **was** called the Prince of Physicians. He died in 1037 **A.C**. One of the great Arab thinkers and philosophers was Abu Nasr Farabi.

In philosophy the influence of India does not seem to have been marked. Both for philosophy and science the Arabs looked to Greece and the old Alexandrian schools. Plato and, more especially, Aristotle exercised a powerful influence on the Arab mind and since then, and up to the present day, they have become more in Arabic commentaries than in the original versions, standard subjects for study in Islamic schools. Neo-Platonism from Alexandria also influenced the Arab mind. The materialist school of Greek Philosophy reached the Arabs and led to the rise of rationalism and materialism. The rationalists tried to interpret religious tenets and injunctions in terms of reason; the materialists almost rejected religion altogether. What is noteworthy is the full freedom of discussion allowed in Baghdad for all these rival and conflicting theories. This controversy and conflict between faith and reason spread from Baghdad all over the Arab world and reached Spain. The nature of God was discussed and it was stated that He cannot have any qualities, such as were commonly attributed to Him. These qualities were human. To call God benevolent or righteous was, it was suggested, just as pagan and degraded as to say that He has a beard.

Rationalism led to agnosticism and scepticism. Gradually with the decline of Baghdad and the growth of the Turkish power, this spirit of rationalist inquiry lessened. But in Arab Spain it still continued and one of the most famous of Arab philosophers in Spain went to the limits of irreligion. This was Ibn Rushd (Averroes) who lived in the twelfth century. He is reported to have said of the various religions of his time that they were meant for children or for fools or they could not be acted upon. Whether he actually said so or not is doubtful, but even the tradition shows the kind of man he was, and he suffered for his opinions. In many ways he was remarkable. He wrote strongly in favour of giving women a chance to play a part in public activities and held that they were fully capable of justifying themselves. He also suggested that incurables and such-like persons should be liquidated as they were a burden on society.

Spain was then far in advance of the other centres of European learning and Arab and Jewish scholars from Cordoba were greatly respected in Paris and elsewhere. These Arabs evidently had no high opinion of the other Europeans. An Arab writer named Said, of Toledo, described the Europeans living north of the Pyrenees thus: 'They are of a cold temperament and never reach maturity. They are of a great stature and of a white colour. But they lack all sharpness of wit and penetration of intellect.'

The flowering of Arab culture and civilization in western and ccntral Asia derived its inspiration from two main sources—Arab and Iranian. The two mixed inextricably, producing a vigour of thought as well as a high standard of living conditions for the upper classes. From the Arabs came the vigour and the spirit of inquiry; from the Iranians, the graces of life, art, and luxury.

As Baghdad waned under Turkish domination, the spirit of rationalism and inquiry also declined. Chengiz Khan and the Mongols put an end to all this. A hundred years later central Asia woke up again and Samarkand and Herat became centres for painting and architecture, reviving somewhat the old traditions of Arab-Persian civilization. But there was no revival of Arab rationalism and interest in science. Islam had become a more rigid faith suited more to military conquests rather than the conquests of the mind. Its chief representatives in Asia were no longer the Arabs, but the Turks* and the Mongols (later called Mughals in India), and to some extent the Afghans. These Mongols in western Asia had become Moslems; in the Far East and in the middle regions many took to Buddhism.

Mahmud of Ghazni and the Afghans

Early in the eighth century, in 712, the Arabs had reachcd Sind and occupied it. They stopped there. Even Sind fell away from the Arab Empire within half a century or so, though it continued as a small independent Moselm state. For nearly 300 years there was no further invasion of or incursion into India. About 1000 **A.C**. Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni in Afghanistan, a Turk who had risen to power in central Asia, began his raids into India. There were many such raids and they were bloody and ruthless, and on every occasion Mahmud carried away with him a vast quantity of treasure. A scholar contemporary, Alberuni, of Khiva, describes these raids: 'The Hindus became like the atoms of dust scattered in all directions and like a tale of old in the mouths of people. Their scattered remains cherish of course the most inveterate aversion towards all Moslems.'

This poetic description gives us some idea of the devastation caused by Mahmud, and yet it is well to remember that Mahmud touched and despoiled only a part of north India, chiefly along the lines of his marches. The whole of central, eastern, and south India escaped from him completely.

South India at that time and later, was dominated by the powerful Chola Empire which controlled the sea routes and had

** I have often used the word 'Turk' or 'Turki'. This may confuse, as 'Turk' is associated now with the people of Turkey, who are descended from the Osmanli or Ottoman Turks. Bnt there were other kinds of Turks also—Seljuks, etc. All the Turanian races of Central Asia, Chinese Turkestan, etc., may be called Turks or Turkis.*

reached as far as Srivijaya in Java and Sumatra. The Indian colonies in the eastern seas were also flourishing and strong. Sea power was shared between them and south India. But this did not save north India from a land invasion.

Mahmud annexed the Punjab and Sind to his dominions and returned to Ghazni after each raid. He was unable to conquer Kashmir. This mountain country succeeded in checking and repulsing him. He met with a severe defeat also in the Rajputana desert regions on his way back from Somnath in Kathiawar.* This was his last raid and he did not return.

Mahmud was far more a warrior than a man of faith and like many other conquerors he used and exploited the name of religion for his conquests. India was to him just a place from which he could carry off treasure and material to his homeland. He enrolled an army in India and placed it under one of his noted generals, Tilak by name, who was an Indian and a Hindu. This army he used against his own co-religionists in central Asia.

Mahmud was anxious to make his own city of Ghazni rival the great cities of central and western Asia and he carried off from India large numbers of artisans and master builders. Building interested him and he was much impressed by the city of Mathura (modern Muttra) near Delhi. About this he wrote: 'There are here a thousand edifices as firm as the faith of the faithful; nor is it likely that this city has attained its present condition but at the expense of many millions of dinars, nor could such another be constructed under a period of 200 years.'

In the intervals of his fighting Mahmud was interested in encouraging cultural activities in his own homeland and he gathered together a number of eminent men. Among these was the famous Persian poet Firdausi, author of the 'Shahnamah', who later fell out with Mahmud. Alberuni, a scholar and traveller, was a contemporary, and in his books he gives us a glimpse into other aspects of life in central Asia then. Born near Khiva, but of Persian descent, he came to India and travelled a great deal. He tells us df the great irrigation works in the Chola kingdom in the south,

** There is a curious passage relating to this defeat in an old chronicle in Persian, the Tarikh -i- Sorath (translated by Ranchodji Amarji, Bombay, 1882) p. 112: 'Shah Mahmud took to his heels in dismay and saved his life, but many of hisfollowers of both sexes were captured.. Turk, Afghan, and Mughal female prisoners, if they happened to be virgins, were accepted as wives by the. Indian soldiers. . . .The bowels of the others, however, were cleaned by means of emetics and purgatives, and thereafter the captives were married to men of similar rank.' 'Low females were joined to low men. Respectable mm were compelled to shave off their beards, and were enrolled among the Shekhavat and the Wadhel tribes of Rajputs; whilst the lower kinds were allotted to the castes of Kolis, Khantas, Babrias, and Mers.' I am not myself acquainted with the Tarikh-i-Sorath and do not know how far it can be considered as reliable. I have taken this quotation from K. M. Munshi's 'The Glory that was Gurjardesa' Part III, p. 140. What is especially interesting is the way foreigners are said to have been absorbed into the Rajput clans and even marriages having taken place. The cleansing process mentioned is novel.*

though it is doubtful if he visited them himself or went to south India. He learnt Sanskrit in Kashmir and studied the religion, philosophy, science, and arts of India. He had previously learnt Greek in order to study Greek philosophy. His books are not only a storehouse of information, but tell us how, behind war and pillage and massacre, patient scholarship continued, and how the people of one country tried to understand those of another even when passion and anger had embittered their relations. That passion and anger no doubt clouded judgments on either side, and each considered his own people superior to the other. Of the Indians, Alberuni says that they are 'haughty, foolishly vain, self-contained, and stolid,' and that they believe 'that there is no country like theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no science like theirs.' Probably a correct enough description of the temper of the people.

Mahmud's raids are a big event in Indian history, though politically India as a whole was not greatly affected by them and the heart of India remained untouched. They demonstrated the weakness and decay of north India, and Alberuni's accounts throw further light on the political disintegration of the north and west.

These repeated incursions from the north-west brought many new elements into India's closed thought and economy. Above all they brought Islam, for the first time, to the accompaniment of ruthless military conquest. So far, for over 300 years, Islam had come peacefully as a religion and taken its place among the many religions of India without trouble or conflict. The new approach produced powerful psychological reactions among the people and filled them with bitterness. There was no objection to a new religion but there was strong objection to anything which forcibly interfered with and upset their way of life.

India was, it must be remembered, a country of many religions, in spite of the dominance of the Hindu faith in its various shapes and forms. Apart from Jainism and Buddhism, which had largely faded away and been absorbed by Hinduism, there were Christianity and the Hebrew religion. Both of these had reached India probably during the first century after Christ, and both had found a place in the country. There were large numbers of Syrian Christians and Nestorians in south India and they were as much part of the country as anyone else. So were the Jews. And so too was the small community of the Zoroastrians who had come to India from Iran in the seventh century. So also were many Moslems on the west coast and in the north-west.

Mahmud came as a conqueror and the Punjab became just an outlying province of his dominions. Yet when he had established himself as a ruler there, an attempt was made to tone down his previous methods in order to win over the people of the province to some extent. There was less of interference with their ways and

Hindus were appointed to high office in the army and the administration. Only the beginnings of this process are noticeable in Mahmud's **time; it** was **to grow later.**

Mahmud died in 1030. More than 160 years passed after his death without any other invasion of India or an extension of Turkish rule beyond the Punjab. Then an Afghan, Shahab-ud-Din Ghuri, captured Ghazni and put an end to the Ghaznavite Empire. He marched to Lahore and then to Delhi. But the king of Delhi, Prithvi Raj Chauhan, defeated him utterly. Shahab-ud-Din retired to Afghanistan and came back next year with another army. This time he triumphed and in 1192 he sat on the throne of Delhi.

Prithvi Raj is a popular hero, still famous in song and legend, for reckless lovers are always popular. He had carried away the girl he loved and who loved him from the very palace of her father, Jaichandra, King of Kanauj, defying an assembled host of princelings who had come to offer court to her. He won his bride for a brief while, but at the cost of a bitter feud with a powerful ruler and the lives of the bravest on both sides. The chivalry of Delhi and central India engaged in internecine conflict and there was much mutual slaughter. And so, all for the love of a woman, Prithvi Raj lost his life and throne, and Delhi, that seat of empire, passed into the hands of an invader from outside. But his love story is sung still and he is a hero, while Jaichandra is looked upon almost as a traitor.

This conquest of Delhi did not mean the subjugation of the rest of India. The Cholas were still powerful in the south, and there were other independent states. It took another century and a half for Afghan rule to spread over the greater part of the south. But Delhi was significant and symbolic of the new order.

The Indo-Afghans. South India. Vijayanagar. Babar Sea Power

Indian history has usually been divided by English as well as some Indian historians into three major periods: Ancient or Hindu, Moslem, and the British period. This division is neither intelligent nor correct; it is deceptive and gives a wrong perspective. It deals more with the superficial changes at the top than with the essential changes in the political, economic, and cultural development of the Indian people. The so-called ancient period is vast and full of change, of growth and decay, and then growth again. What is called the Moslem or medieval period brought another change, and an important one, and yet it was more or less confined to the top and did not vitally affect the essential continuity of Indian life. The invaders who came to India from the north-west, like **so** many of their predecessors in more ancient times, became

absorbed into India and part of her life. Their dynasties becamc Indian dynasties and there was a great deal of racial fusion by intermarriage. A deliberate effort was made, apart from a few exceptions, not to interfere with the ways and customs of the people. They looked to India as their home country and had no other affiliations. India continued to be an independent country.

The coming of the British made a vital difference and the old system was uprooted in many ways. They brought an entirely different impulse from the west, which had slowly developed in Europe from the times of the Renaissance, Reformation, and political revolution in England, and was taking shape in the beginnings of the industrial revolution. The American and French Revolutions were to carry this further. The British remained outsiders, aliens and misfits in India, and made no attempt to be otherwise. Above all, for the first time in India's history, her political control was exercised from outside and her economy was centered in a distant place. They made India a typical colony of the modern age, a subject country for the first time in her long history.

Mahmud of Ghazni's invasion of India was certainly a foreign Turkish invasion and resulted in the Punjab being separated from the rest of India for a while. The Afghans who came at the end of the twelfth century were different. They were an Indo-Aryan race closely allied to the people of India. Indeed, for long stretches of time Afghanistan had been, and was destined to be, a part of India. Their language, Pashto, was basically derived from Sanskrit. There are few places in India or outside which are so full of ancient monuments and remains of Indian culture, chiefly of the Buddhist period, as Afghanistan. More correctly, the Afghans should be called the Indo-Afghans. They differed in many ways from the people of the Indian plains, just as the people of the mountain valleys of Kashmir differed from the dwellers of the warmer and flatter regions below. But in spite of this difference Kashmir had always been and continued to be an important seat of Indian learning and culture. The Afghans differed also from the more highly cultured and sophisticated Arabs and Persians. They were hard and fierce like their mountain fastnesses, rigid in their faith, warriors not inclined towards intellectual pursuits or adventures of the mind. They behaved to begin with as conquerors over a rebellious people and were cruel and harsh.

But soon they toned down. India became their home and Delhi was their capital, not distant Ghazni as in Mahmud's time. Afghanistan, where they came from, was just an outlying part of their kingdom. The process of Indianization was rapid, and many of them married women of the country. One of their great rulers, Alauddin Khilji, himself married a Hindu lady, and so did his son. Some of the subsequent rulers were racially Turks, such as Qutb-ud-Din Aibak, the Sultana Razia, and Iltutmish; but the nobility

and army continued to be mainly Afghan. Delhi flourished as an imperial capital. Ibn Batuta, a famous Arab traveller from Morocco, who visited many countries and saw many cities from Cairo and Constantinople to China, described it in the fourteenth century, perhaps with some exaggeration, as 'one of the greatest cities in the universe.'

The Delhi Sultanate spread southwards. The Chola kingdom was declining, but in its place a new sea faring power had grown. This was the Pandya kingdom, with its capital at Madura and its port at Kayal on the east coast. It was a small kingdom but a great centre of trade. Marco Polo twice visited this port on his way from China, in 1288 and 1293, and described it 'as a great and noble city,' full of ships from Arabia and China. He also mentions the very fine muslins, which 'look like tissues of a spider's web' and which were made on the east coast of India. Marco Polo tells us also an interesting fact. Large numbers of horses were imported by sea from Arabia and Persia into south India. The climate of south India was not suited to horse-breeding, and horses, apart from their other uses, were necessary for military purposes. The best breeding-grounds for horses were in central and western Asia, and this may well explain, to some extent, the superiority of the central Asian races in warfare. Chengiz Khan's Mongols were magnificent horsemen and were devoted to their horses. The Turks were also fine horsemen, and the love of the Arab for his horse is well-known. In north and west India there are some good breeding-grounds for horses, especially in Kathiawar, and the Rajputs are very fond of their horses. Many a petty war was waged for a famous charger. There is a story of a Delhi Sultan admiring the charger of a Rajput chief and asking him for it. The Hara chief replied to the Lodi king: 'There are three things you must not ask of a Rajput: his horse, his mistress, or his sword,' and he galloped away. There was trouble afterwards.

Late in the fourteenth century, Timur, the Turk or Turco-Mongol, came down from the north and smashed up the Delhi Sultanate. He was only a few months in India; he came to Delhi and went back . But all along his route he created a wilderness adorned with pyramids of skulls of those he had slain; and Delhi itself became a city of the dead. Fortunately, he did not go far and only some parts of the Punjab and Delhi had to suffer this terrible affliction.

It took many years for Delhi to wake up from this sleep of death, and even when it woke up it was no longer the capital of a great empire. Timur's visit had broken that empire and out of it had arisen a number of states in the south. Long before this, early in the fourteenth century, two gerat states had risen—Gulbarga, called the Bahmani kingdom,* and the Hindu kingdom of Vijaya-

* *The name and origin of the Bahmani Kingdom of the South is interesting. The founder*

nagar. Gulbarga now split up into five states, one of these being Ahmadnagar. Ahmad Nizam Shah, the founder of Ahmadnagar in 1490, was the son of Nizam-ul-Mulk Bhairi, a minister of the Bahmani kings. This Nizam-ul-Mulk was the son of a Brahmin accountant named Bhairu (from which his name Bhairi). Thus the Ahmednagar dynasty was of indigenous origin, and Chand Bibi, the heroine of Ahmednagar, had mixed blood. All the Moslem states in the south were indigenous and Indianized.

After Timur's sack of Delhi, north India remained weak and divided up. South India was better off and the largest and most powerful of the southern kingdoms was Vijayanagar. This state and city attracted many of the Hindu refugees from the north. From contemporary accounts it appears that the city was rich and very beautiful. 'The city is such that eye has note seen nor ear heard of any place resembling it upon the whole earth,' says Abdur-Razzak, from central Asia. There were arcades and magnificent galleries for the bazaars, and rising above them all was the palace of the king, surrounded by 'many rivulets and streams flowing through channels of cut stone, polished and even.' The whole city was full of gardens and because of them, as an Italian visitor in 1420, Nicolo Conti, writes, the circumference of the city was sixty miles. A later visitor was Paes, a Portuguese who came in 1522 after having visited the Italian cities of the Renaissance. The city of Vijayanagar, he says, is as 'large as Rome and very beautiful to the sight'; it is full of charm and wonder with its innumerable lakes and waterways and fruit gardens. It is 'the best-provided city in the world' and 'everything abounds.' The chambers of the palace were a mass of iyory, with roses and lotuses carved in ivory at the top—'it is so rich and beautiful that you would hardly find anywhere another such.' Of the ruler, Krishna Deva Raya, Paes writes: 'He is the most feared and perfect king that could possibly be, cheerful of disposition and very merry; he is one that seek to honour foreigners, and receives them kindly, asking about all their affairs whatever their condition may be.'

While Vijayanagar was flourishing in the south, the petty sultanate of Delhi had to meet a new foe. Yet another invader came down from the northern mountains and on the famous battlefield of Panipat, near Delhi, where so often India's fate has been decided, he won the throne of Delhi in 1526. This was Babar, a Turco-Mongol and a prince of the Timurid line in central Asia. With him begins the Mughal Empire of India.

Babar's success was probably due not only to the weakness of the Delhi Sultanate but to his possessing a new and improved type of artillery which was not in use in India then. From this period

of this state was an Afghan Moslem who had a Hindu patron in his early days—Gangu Brahmin. In gratitude to him he even took his name and his dynasty was called the Bahmani (from Brahmin) dynasty.

onwards India seems to lag behind in the developing science of warfare. It would be more correct to say that the whole of Asia remained where it was while Europe was advancing in this science. The great Mughal Empire, powerful as it was in India for 200 years, probably could not compete on equal terms with European armies from the seventeenth century onwards. But no European army could come to India unless it had control over the sea routes. The major change that was taking place during these centuries was the development of European sea power. With the fall of the Chola kingdom in the south in the thirteenth century, Indian sea power declined rapidly. The small Pandya state, though intimately connected with the sea, was not strong enough. The Indian colonies, however, still continued to hold command over the Indian Ocean till the fifteenth century, when they were ousted by the Arabs, who were soon to be followed by the Portuguese.

Synthesis and Growth of Mixed Culture
Purdah. Kabir. Guru Nanak. Amir Khusrau

It is thus wrong and misleading to talk of a Moslem invasion of India or of the Moslem period in India, just as it would be wrong to refer to the coming of the British to India as a Christian invasion, or to call the British period in India a Christian period. Islam did not invade India; it had come to India some centuries earlier. There was a Turkish invasion (Mahmud's), and an Afghan invasion, and then a Turco-Mongol or Mughal invasion, and of these the two latter were important. The Afghans might well be considered a border Indian group, hardly strangers to India, and the period of their political dominance should be called the Indo-Afghan period. The Mughals were outsiders and strangers to India and yet they fitted into the Indian structure with remarkable speed and began the Indo-Mughal period.

Through choice or circumstances or both, the Afghan rulers and those who had come with them, merged into India. Their dynasties became completely Indianized with their roots in India, looking upon India as their homeland, and the rest of the word as foreign. In spite of political conflict, they were generally considered as such and many even of the Rajput princes accepted them as their over-lords. But there were other Rajput chiefs who refused to submit and there were fierce conflicts. Feroze Shah, one of the well-known Sultans of Delhi, had a Hindu mother; so had Ghyas-ud-Din Tughlak. Such marriages between the Afghans, Turkish, and the Hindu nobility were not frequent, but they did take place. In the south the Moslem ruler of Gulbarga married a Hindu princess of Vijayanagar with great pomp and ceremony.

It appears that in the Moslem countries of central and western Asia Indians had a good reputation. As early as the eleventh

century, that is, before the Afghan conquest, a Moslem geographer, Idrisi, wrote: 'The Indians are naturally inclined to justice, and never depart from it in their actions. Their good faith, honesty, and fidelity to their engagements are well-known, and they are so famous for these qualities that people flock to their country from every side.'*

An efficient administration grew up and communications were especially improved, chiefly for military reasons. Government was more centralized now though it took care not to interfere with local customs. Sher Shah (who intervened during the early Mughal period) was the ablest among the Afghan rulers. He laid the foundations of a revenue system which was later to be expanded by Akbar. Raja Todar Mai, Akbar's famous revenue minister, was first employed by Sher Shah. Hindu talent was increasingly used by the Afghan rulers.

The effect of the Afghan conquest on India and Hinduism was two-fold, each development contradicting the other. The immediate reaction was an exodus of people to the south, away from the areas under Afghan rule. Those who remained became more rigid and exclusive, retired into their shells, and tried to protect themselves from foreign ways and influences by hardening the caste system. On the other hand, there was a gradual and hardly conscious approach towards these foreign ways both in thought and life. A synthesis worked itself out: new styles of architecture arose; food and clothing changed; and life was affected and varied in many other ways. This synthesis was especially marked in music, which, following its old Indian classical pattern, developed in many directions. The Pesrian language became the official court language and many Persian words crept into popular use. At the same time the popular languages were developed.

Among the unfortunate developments that took place in India was the growth of *purdah* or the seclusion of women. Why this should have been so is not clear but somehow it did result from the inter-action of the new elements on the old. In India there had been previously some segregation of the sexes among the aristocracy, as in many other countries and notably in ancient Grcece. Some such segregation existed in ancient Iran also and to some extent all over western Asia. But nowhere was there any strict seclusion of women. Probably this started in the Byzantine court circles where eunuchs were employed to guard the women's apartments. Byzantine influence travelled to Russia where there was a fairly strict seclusion of women right up to Peter the Great's time. This had nothing to do with the Tartars who, it is well established, did not segregate their women-folk. The mixed Arab-Persian civilization was affected in many ways by Byzantine customs **and** possibly the segregation of upper-class women grew to some

**From Sir H. M. Elliot's 'History of India', Vol. 1, p. 88.*

extent. Yet, even so, there was no strict seclusion of women in Arabia or in other parts of western or central Asia. The Afghans, who crowded into northern India after the capture of Delhi, had no strict purdah. Turkish and Afghan princesses and ladies of the court often went riding, hunting, and paying visits. It is an old Islamic custom, still to be observed, that women must keep their laces unveiled during the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca. Purdah seems to have grown in India during Mughal times, when it became a mark of status and prestige among both Hindus and Moslems. This custom of seclusion of women spread especially among the upper classes of those areas where Moslem influence had been most marked—in the great central and eastern block comprising Delhi, the United Provinces, Rajputana, Bihar, and Bengal. And yet it is odd that purdah has not been very strict in the Punjab and in the Frontier Province, which are predominantly Moslem. In the south and west of India there has been no such seclusion of women, except to some extent among the Moslems.

I have no doubt at all that among the causes of India's decay in recent centuries, purdah, or the seclusion of women, holds an important place. I am even more convinced that the complete ending of this barbarous custom is essential before India can have a progressive social life. That it injures women is obvious enough, but the injury to man, to the growing child who has to spend much of its time among women in purdah, and to social life generally is equally great. Fortunately this evil practice is fast disappearing among the Hindus, more slowly among the Moslems.

The strongest factor in this liquidation of purdah has been the Congress political and social movements which have drawn tens of thousands of middle-class women into some kind of public activity. Gandhiji has been, and is, a fierce opponent of purdah and has called it a 'vicious and brutal custom' which has kept women backward and undeveloped. 'I thought of the wrong being done by men to the women of India by clinging to a barbarous custom which, whatever use it might have had when it was first introduced, had now become totally useless and was doing incalculable harm to the country.' Gandhiji urged that woman should have the "same' liberty and opportunity of self-development as man. 'Good sense must govern the relations between the two sexes. There should be no barrier erected between them. Their mutual behaviour should be natural and spontaneous.' Gandhiji has indeed written and spoken with passion in favour of women's equality and freedom, and has bitterly condemned their domestic slavery.

I have digressed and made a sudden jump to modern times, and must go back to the medieval period after the Afghans had established themselves in Delhi and a synthesis was working

itself out between old ways and new. Most of these changes took place at the top, among the nobility and upper classes, and did not affect the mass of the population, especially the rural masses. They originated in court circles and spread in the cities and urban areas. Thus began a process which was to continue for several centuries, of developing a mixed culture in north India. Delhi, and what are known now as the United Provinces, became the centre of this, just as they had been, and still continued to be, the centre of the old Aryan culture. But much of this Aryan culture drifted to the south, which became a stronghold of Hindu orthodoxy.

After the Delhi Sultanate had weakened owing to Timur's incursion, a small Moslem state grew up in Jaunpur (in the United Provinces). Right through the fifteenth century this was a centre of art and culture and toleration in religion. The growing popular language, Hindi, was encouraged, and an attempt was even made to bring about a synthesis between the religious faiths of the Hindus and the Moslems. About this time in far Kashmir in the north an independent Moslem King, Zainul-abdin, also became famous for his toleration and his encouragement of Sanskrit learning and the old culture.

All over India this new ferment was working and new ideas were troubling people's minds. As of old, India was sub-consciously reacting to the new situation, trying to absorb the foreign element and herself changing somewhat in the process. Out of this ferment arose new types of reformers who deliberately preached this synthesis and often condemned or ignored the caste system. There was the Hindu Ramanand in the south, in the fifteenth century, and his still more famous disciple Kabir, a Moslem weaver of Benares. Kabir's poems and songs became, and still are, very popular. In the north there was Guru Nanak, who is considered the founder of Sikhism. The influence of these reformers went far beyond the limits of the particular sects that grew up after them. Hinduism as a whole felt the impact of the new ideas, and Islam in India also became somewhat different from what it was elsewhere. The fierce monotheism of Islam influenced Hinduism and the vague pantheistic attitude of the Hindu had its effect on the Indian Moslem. Most of these Indian Moslems were converts bred up in and surrounded by the old traditions; only a comparatively small number of them had come from outside. Moslem mysticism, and Sufism, which probably had had it beginnings in neo-Platonism, grew.

Perhaps the most significant indication of the growing absorption of the foreign element in India was its use of the popular language of the country, even though Persian continued to be **the** court language. There are many notable books written by **the** early Moslems in Hindi. The most famous of these writers

was Amir Khusrau, a Turk whose family had setded in the United Provinces for two or three generations and who lived in the fourteenth century during the reigns of several Afghan Sultans. He was a poet of the first rank in Persian, and he knew Sanskrit also. He was a great musician and introduced many innovations in Indian music. He is also said to have invented the *sitar,* the popular stringed instrument of India. He wrote on many subjects and, in particular, in praise of India, enumerating the various things in which India excelled. Among these were religion, philosophy, logic, language, and grammar (Sanskrit), music, mathematics, science and the mango fruit!

But his fame in India rests, above all, on his popular songs, written in the ordinary spoken dialect of Hindi. Wisely he did not choose the literary medium which would have been understood by a small coterie only; he went to the villager not only for his language but for his customs and ways of living. He sang of the different seasons and each season, according to the old classical style of India, had its own appropriate tune and words; he sang of life in its various phases, of the coming of the bride, of separation from the beloved, of the rains when life springs anew from the parched earth. Those songs are still widely sung and may be heard in any village or town in northern or central India. Especially when the rainy season begins and in every village big swings are hung from the branches of the mango or the peepul trees, and all the village girls and boys gather together to celebrate the occasion.

Amir Khusrau was the author also of innumerable riddles and conundrums which are very popular with children as well as grown-ups. Even during his long life Khusrau's songs and riddles had made him famous. That reputation has continued and grown. I do not know if there is any other instance anywhere of songs written 600 years go maintaining their popularity and their mass appeal and being still sung without any change of words.

The Indian Social Structure. Importance of the Group

Almost everyone who knows anything at all about India has heard of the caste system; almost every outsider and many people in India condemn it or criticize it as a whole. Probably there is hardly anyone left even in India who approves of it in all its present ramifications and developments, though there are undoubtedly many still who accept its basic theory and large numbers of Hindus adhere to it in their lives. Some confusion arises in the use of the word caste for different people attach different meaning to it. The average European, or an Indian who is allied to him in thought and approach, thinks of it as just a petrification

of classes, an ingenious method to preserve a certain hierarchy of classes, to keep the upper classes permanently at the top and the lower ones permanently at the bottom of the scale. There is truth in that and in its origin it was probably a device to keep the Aryan conquerors apart from and above the conquered peoples. Undoubtedly in its growth it has acted in that way, though originally there may have been a good deal of flexibility about it. Yet that is only a part of the truth and it does not explain its power and cohesiveness and the way it has lasted down to our present day. It survived not only the powerful impact of Buddhism and many centuries of Afghan and Mughal rule and the spread of Islam, but also the strenuous efforts of innumerable Hindu reformers who raised their voices against it. It is only to-day that it is seriously threatened and its very basis has been attacked. That is not chiefly because of some powerful urge to reform itself which has arisen in Hindu society, though such urge is undoubtedly present, nor is it because of ideas from the west, though such ideas have certainly exerted their influence. The change that is taking place before our eyes is due essentially to basic economic changes which have shaken up the whole fabric of Indian society and are likely to upset it completely. Conditions of life have changed and thought-patterns are changing so much that it seems impossible for the caste system to endure. What will take its place is more than I can say, for something much more than the caste system is at stake. The conflict is between two approaches to the problem of social organisation, which are diametrically opposed to each other: the old Hindu conception of the group being the basic unit of organisation, and the excessive individualism of the west, emphasizing the individual above the group.

That conflict is not of India only; it is of the west also and of the entire world, though it takes different forms there. The nineteenth century civilization of Europe, taking shape in democratic liberalism and its extensions in the economic and social fields, represented the high-water mark of that individualism. That nineteenth century ideology with its social and political organization has extended itself and flowed into the twentieth century, but it seems wholly out of date now and is cracking under stress of crisis and war. The importance of the group and the community is emphasized more now, and the problem is to reconcile the respective claims of the individual and the group. The solution of that problem may take different forms in different countries, yet there will be an ever-increasing tendency for one basic solution to apply to all.

The caste system does not stand by itself; it is a pait, and an integral part, of a much larger scheme of social organization. It may be possible to remove some of its obvious abuses and to lessen its rigidity, and yet to leave thfc system intact. But that

is highly unlikely, as the social and economic forces at play are not much concerned with this superstructure; they are attacking it at the base and undermining the other supports which held it up. Indeed, great parts of these are already gone or are rapidly going, and more and more the caste system is left stranded by itself. It has ceased to be a question of whether we like caste or dislike it. Changes are taking place in spite of our likes and dislikes. But it is certainly in our power to mould those changes and direct them, so that we can take full advantage of the character and genius of the Indian people as a whole, which have been so evident in the cohesiveness and stability of the social organization they built up.

Sir George Birdwood has said somewhere: 'So long as the Hindus hold to the caste system, India will be India; but from the day they break from it, there will be no more India. That glorious peninsula will be degraded to the position of a bitter "East End" of the Anglo-Saxon Empire.' With caste or without it, we have long been degraded to that position in the British Empire; and, in any event, whatever our future position is likely to be, it will not be confined within the bounds of that empire. But there is some truth in what Sir George Birdwood said, though probably he did not look at it from this point of view. The break-up of a huge and long standing social organization may well lead to a complete disruption of social life, resulting in absence of cohesion, mass suffering and the development on a vast scale of abnormalities in individual behaviour, unless some other social structure, more suited to the times and to the genius of the people, takes its place. Perhaps disruption is inevitable during the transition period; there is enough of this disruption all over the world to-day. Perhaps it is only through the pain and suffering that accompany such disruption that a people grow and learn the lessons of life and adapt themselves anew to changing conditions.

Nevertheless, we cannot just disrupt and hope for something better without having some vision of the future we are working for, however vague that vision may be. We cannot just create a vacuum, or else that vacuum will fill itself up in a way that we may have to deplore. In the constructive schemes that we may make, we have to pay attention to the human material we have to deal with, to the background of its thought and urges, and to the environment in which we have to function. To ignore all this and to fashion some idealistic scheme in the air, or merely to think in terms of imitating what others have done elsewhere, would be folly. It becomes desirable therefore to examine and understand the old Indian social structure which has so powerfully influenced our people.

This structure was based on three concepts: the autonomous village community, caste, and the joint family system. In all

these three it is the group that counts; the individual has a secondary place. There is nothing very unique about all this separately and it is easy to find something equivalent to any of these three in other countries, especially in mediaeval times. Like the old Indian republics, there were primitive republics elsewhere. There was also a kind of primitive communism. The old Russian *mir* might be comparable in some way to the Indian village community. Caste has been essentially functional and similar to the medieval trade guilds of Europe. The Chinese family system bears a strong resemblance to the Hindu joint family. I do not know enough of all these to carry the comparison far, and, in any case, it is not important for my purpose. Taken as a whole the entire Indian structure was certainly unique and, as it developed, it became more so.

Village Self-Government. The Shukra Nitisara

There is an old book of the tenth century which gives us some idea of Indian polity as it was conceived prior to the Turkish and Afghan invasions. This is the *Nitisara,* the Science of Polity, by Shukracharya. It deals with the organization of the central government as well as of town and village life; of the king's council of state and various departments of government. The village *panchayat* or elected council has large powers, both executive and judicial, and its members were treated with the greatest respect by the king's officers. Land was distributed by this *panchayat,* which also collected taxes out of the produce and paid the government's share on behalf of the village. Over a number of these village councils there was a larger *panchayat* or council to supervise and interfere if necessary.

Some old inscriptions further tell us how the members of the village councils were elected and what their qualifications and disqualifications were. Various committees were formed, elected annually, and women could serve on them. In case of misbehaviour, a member could be removed. A member could be disqualified if he failed to render accounts of public funds. An interesting rule to prevent nepotism is mentioned: near relatives of members were not to be appointed to public office.

These village councils were very jealous of their liberties and it was laid down that no soldier could enter the village unless he had a royal permit. If the people complained of an official, the *Nitisara* says that the king 'should take the side, not of his officers, but of his subjects.' If many complained then the official was to be dismissed, 'for who does not get intoxicated by drinking of the vanity of office.' The king was to act in accordance with the opinion of the majority of the people. 'Public opinion is more powerful than the king as the rope made of many fibres

is strong enough to drag a lion.' 'In making official appointments work, character and merit are to be regarded neither caste nor family,' and 'neither through colour nor through ancestors can the spirit worthy of a Brahmin be geneiated.'

In the larger towns there were many artisans and merchants, and craft guilds, mercantile associations, and banking corporations were formed. Each of these controlled its own domestic affairs.

All this information is very fragmentary but it does appear from this and many other sources that there was a widespread system of self-government in towns and villages and the central government seldom interfeied, so long as its quota of taxes was paid. Customary law was strong and the political or military power seldom interfered with rights based on custom. Originally the agrarian system was based on a co-operative or collective village. Individuals and families had certain rights as well as certain obligations, both of which were determined and protected by customary law.

There was no theocratic monarchy in India. In Indian polity if the king is unjust or tyrannical, the right to rebel against him is admitted. What the Chinese philosopher, Mencius, said 2,000 years ago might apply to India: 'When a ruler treats his subjects like grass and dirt, then subjects should treat him as a bandit and an enemy.' The whole conception of monarchical power differed from that of European feudalism, where the king had authority over all persons and things in his domain. This authority he delegated to lords and barons who vowed allegiance to him. Thus a hierarchy of authority was built up. Both the land and the people connected with it belonged to the feudal lord and, through him, to the king. This was the development of the Roman conception of dominium. In India there was nothing of this kind. The king had the right to collect certain taxes from the land and this revenue-collecting power was all he could delegate to others. The peasant in India was not the lord's serf. There was plenty of land available and there was no advantage in dispossessing the peasant. Thus in India there was no landlord system, as known in the west, nor was the individual peasant the full owner of his patch of land. Both these concepts were introduced much later by the British with disastrous results.

Foreign conquests brought war and destructon, revolts and their ruthless suppression, and new ruling classes relying chiefly on armed force. This ruling class could often ignore the numerous constitutional restraints which had always been part of the customary law of the country. Important consequences followed and the power of the self-governing village communities decreased and later various changes were introduced in the land-revenue system. Nevertheless the Afghan and Mughal rulers took

special care not to interfere with old customs **and** conventions **and** no fundamental changes were introduced, and the economic **and** social structure of Indian life continued as before. Ghyas-ud-Din Tughlak issued definite instructions to his officials to preserve customary law and to keep the affairs of the state apart from religion, which was a personal matter of individual preference. But changing times and conflicts, as well as the increasing centralization of government, slowly but progressively lessened the respect given to customary law. The village self-governing community, however, continued. Its break-up began only under British rule.

The Theory and Practice of Caste. The Joint Family

'In India', says Havell, 'religion is hardly a dogma, but a working hypothesis of human conduct adapted to different stages of spiritual development and different conditions of life.' In the ancient days when Indo-Aryan culture first took shape, religion had to provide for the needs of men who were as far removed from each other in civilization and intellectual and spiritual development as it is possible to conceive. There were primitive forest-dwellers, fetishists, totem-worshippers and believers in every kind of superstition, and there were those who had attained the highest flights of spiritual thought. In between, there was every shade and gradation of belief and practice. While the highest forms of thought were pursued by some, these were wholly beyond the reach of many. As social life grew, certain uniformities of belief spread, but, even so, many differences, cultural and temperamental, remained. The Indo-Aryan approach was to avoid the forcible suppression of any belief or the destruction of any claim. Each group was left free to work out its ideals along the plane of its mental development and understanding. Assimilation was attempted but there was no denial or suppression.

A similar and even more difficult problem had to be faced in social organization. How to combine these utterly different groups in one social system, each group co-operating with the whole and yet retaining its own freedom to live its own life and develop itself. In a sense—though the comparison is farfetched—this may be compared to the numerous minority problems of to-day which afflict so many countries and are still far from solution. The United States of America solve their minority problems, more or less, by trying to make every citizen a 100 per cent American. They make everyone conform to a certain type. Other countries, with a longer and more complicated past, are not so favourably situated. Even Canada has its strong race, religion and language-conscious French group. In Europe the barriers are higher and deeper. And yet all this applies to Europeans, or those who have

spread from Europe; people who have a certain common background and similarity of culture. Where non-Europeans come in, they do not fit this pattern. In the United States, negroes, though they may be 100 per cent American, are a race apart, deprived of many opportunities and privileges, which others have as a matter of course. There are innumerable worse examples elsewhere. Only Soviet Russia is said to have solved its problem of nationalities and minorities by creating what is called a multi-national state.

If these difficulties and problems pursue us even to-day with all our knowledge and progress, how much harder they must have been in the ancient days when the Indo-Aryans were evolving their civilization and social structure in a land full of variety and different types of human beings. The normal way to deal with these problems then and later was to exterminate or enslave the conquered populations. This way was not followed in India, but it is clear that every precaution was taken to perpetuate the superior position of the upper groups. Having ensured that superiority, a kind of multiple-community state was built up, in which, within certain limits and subject to some general rules, freedom was given to each group to follow its avocation and live its own life in accordance with its own customs or desires. The only real restriction was that it must not interfere or come into conflict with another group. This was a flexible and expanding system, for new groups could always be formed either by newcomers or by dissident members of an old group, provided they were numerous enough to do so. Within each group there was equality and democracy and the elected leaders guided it and frequently consulted the entire group whenever any important question arose.

These groups were almost always functional, each specializing in a particular trade or craft. They became thus some kind of trade unions or craft-guilds. There was a strong sense of solidarity within each, which not only protected the group but sheltered and helped an individual member who got into trouble or was in economic distress. The functions of each group or caste were related to the functions of other castes, and the idea was that if each group functioned successfully within its own framework, then society as a whole worked harmoniously. Over and above this, a strong and fairly successful attempt was made to create, a common national bond which would hold all these groups together—the sense of a common culture, common traditions, common heroes and saints, and a common land to the four corners of which people went on pilgrimage. This national bond was of course very different from present-day nationalism; it was weak politically but, socially and culturally, it was strong. Because of its political lack of cohesiveness it facilitated foreign

conquest; because of its social strength it made recovery easy, as well as assimilation of new elements. It had so many heads that they could not be cut off and they survived conquest and disaster.

Thus caste was a group system based on services and functions. It was meant to be an all-inclusive order without any common dogma and allowing the fullest latitude to each group. Within its wide fold there was monogamy, polygamy, and celibacy; they were all tolerated, just as other customs, beliefs, and practices were tolerated. Life was to be maintained at all levels. No minority need submit to a majority, for it could always form a separate autonomous group, the only test being: is it a distinctive group large enough to function as such? Between two groups there could be any amount of variation of race, religion, colour, culture, and intellectual development.

An individual was only considered as a member of a group; he could do anything he liked so long as he did not interfere with the functioning of the group. He had no right to upset that functioning, but if he was strong enough and could gather enough supporters, it was open to him to form another group. If he could not fit in with any group, that meant that he was out of joint so far as the social activities of the world were concerned. He could then become a *sanyasi* who had renounced caste, every group and the world of activity, and could wander about and do what he liked.

It must be remembered that while the Indian social tendency was to subordinate the individual to the claims of the group and society, religious thought and spiritual seeking have always emphasized the individual. Salvation and knowledge of the ultimate truth were open to all, to the member of every caste, high or low. This salvation or enlightenment could not be a group affair; it was highly individualistic. In the search for this salvation also there were no inflexible dogmas and all doors were supposed to lead to it.

Though the group system was dominant in the organization of society, leading to caste, there has always been an individualistic tendency in India. A conflict between the two approaches is often in evidence. Partly that individualism was the result of the religious doctrine which laid emphasis on the individual. Social reformers who criticized or condemned the caste system were usually religious reformers and their main argument was that the divisions of the caste system came in the way of spiritual development and that intense individualism to which religion pointed. Buddhism was a breakaway from the group-caste ideal towards some kind of individualism as well as universalism. But this individualism became associated with a withdrawal from normal social activites. It offered no effective alternative social

structure to caste, and so caste continued then and later.

What were the main castes? If we leave out for a moment those who were considered outside the pale of caste, the untouchables, there were the Brahmins, the priests, teachers, intellectuals; the Kshatriyas or the rulers and warriors; the Vaishyas or merchants, traders, bankers, etc.; and the Shudras, who were the agricultural and other workers. Probably the only closely knit and exclusive caste was that of the Brahmins. The Kshatriyas were frequently adding to their numbers both from foreign incoming elements and others in the country who rose to power and authority. The Vaishyas were chiefly traders and bankers and also engaged in a number of other professions. The main occupations of the Shudras were cultivation and domestic service.

There was always a continuous process of new castes being formed as new occupations developed, and for other reasons the older castes were always trying to get up in the social scale. These processes have continued to our day. Some of the lower castes suddenly take to wearing the sacred thread which is supposed to be reserved for the upper castes. All this really made little difference, as each caste continued to function in its own ambit and pursued its own trade or occupation. It was merely a question of prestige. Occasionally men of the lower classes, by sheer ability, attained to positions of power and authority in the state, but this was very exceptional.

The organization of society being, generally speaking, non-competitive and non-acquisitive, these divisions into castes did not make as much difference as they might otherwise have done. The Brahmin at the top, proud of his intellect and learning and respected by others, seldom had much in the way of worldly possessions. The merchant, prosperous and rich, had no very high standing in society as a whole.

The vast majority of the population consisted of the agriculturists. There was no landlord system, nor was there any peasant proprietorship. It is difficult to say who owned the land in law; there was nothing like the present doctrine of ownership. The cultivator had the right to till his land and the only real question was as to the distribution of the produce of the land. The major share went to the cultivator, the king or the state took a share (usually one-sixth), and every functional group in the village, which served the people in any way, had its share—the Brahmin priest and teacher, the merchant, the blacksmith, the carpenter, the cobbler, the potter, the builder, the barber, the scavenger, etc. Thus, in a sense, every group from the state to the scavenger was a shareholder in the produce.

Who were the depressed classes and the untouchables? The 'depressed classes' is a new designation applying rather vaguely to a number of castes near the bottom of the scale. There is no

hard and fast line to separate them from the others. The untouchables are more definite. In north India only a very small number, engaged in scavenging or unclean work, are considered untouchable. Fa-Hsien tells us that when he came the persons who removed human faeces were untouchable. In south India the numbers are much larger. How they began and grew to such numbers it is difficult to say. Probably those who were engaged in occupations considered unclean were so treated; later landless agricultural labour may have been added.

The idea of ceremonial purity has been extraordinarily strong among the Hindus. This has led to one good consequence and many bad ones. The good one is bodily cleanliness. A daily bath has always been a essential feature of a Hindu's life, including most of the depressed classes. It was from India that this habit spread to England and elsewhere. The average Hindu, and even the poorest peasant, takes some pride in his shining pots and pans. This sense of cleanliness is not scientific and the man who bathes twice a day will unhesitatingly drink water that is unclean and full of germs. Nor is it corporate, at any rate now. The individual will keep his own hut fairly clean but throw all the rubbish in the village street in front of his neighbour's house. The village is usually very dirty and full of garbage heaps. It is also noticeable that cleanliness is not thought of as such but as a consequence of some religious sanction. When that religious sanction goes, there is marked deterioration in the standards of cleanliness.

The evil consequence of ceremonial purity was a growth of exclusiveness, touch-me-notism, and of not eating and drinking with people of other castes. This grew to fantastic lengths unknown in any other part of the world. It led also to certain classes being considered untouchable because they had the misfortune to do some kinds of essential work which were considered unclean. The practice of normally feeding with one's own caste people spread to all castes. It became a sign of social status and the lower castes stuck to it even more rigidly than some of the higher ones. This practice is breaking up now among the higher castes but it still continues among the lower castes, including the depressed classes.

If interdining was taboo, much more so was intermarriage between castes. Some mixed marriages inevitably took place but on the whole it is extraordinary how much each caste kept to itself and propagated its own kind. The continuation of racial identity through long ages is an illusion and yet the caste system in India has to some extent managed to preserve distinctive types, epescially among the higher castes.

Some groups at the bottom of the scale are sometimes referred to as outside the caste groups. As a matter of fact, no group

not even the untouchables, are outside the framework of the caste system. The depressed classes and the untouchables form their own castes and have their *panchayats* or caste councils for settling their own affairs. But many of them have been made to suffer cruelly by being excluded from the common life of the village.

The autonomous village community and the caste system were thus two of the special features of the old Indian social structure. The third was the joint family where all the members were joint sharers in the common property and inheritance went by survivorship. The father or some other elder was the head but he functioned as a manager, and not as the old Roman paterfamilias. A division of property was permitted under certain circumstances and if the parties concerned so desired. The joint property was supposed to provide for the needs of all the members of the family, workers or non-workers. Inevitably this meant a guaranteed minimum for all of them, rather than high rewards for some. It was a kind of insurance for all including even the subnormal and the physically or mentally deficient. Thus while there was security for all, there was a certain levelling down of the standard of service demanded as well as of the recompense given. Emphasis was not laid on personal advantage or ambition but on that of the group, that is the family. The fact of growing up and living in a large family minimized the egocentric attitude of the child and tended to develop an aptitude for socialization.

All this is the very opposite of what happens in the highly individualistic civilization of the west and more especially of America, where personal ambition is encouraged and personal advantage is the almost universal aim, where all the plums go to the bright and pushing, and the weak, timid or second rate go to the wall.

The joint family system is rapidly breaking up in India and individualistic attitudes are developing, leading not only to far-reaching changes in the economic background of life but also to new problems of behaviour.

All the three pillars of the Indian social structure were thus based on the group and not on the individual. The aim was social security, stability and continuance of the group, that is of society. Progress was not the aim and progress therefore had to suffer. Within each group, whether this was the village community, the particular caste, or the large joint family, there was a communal life shared together, a sense of equality, and democractic methods. Even now caste *panchayats* function democractically. It surprised me at one time to see the eagerness of a villager, sometimes illiterate, to serve on elected committees for political or other purposes. He soon got into the way of it and was a helpful

member whenever any question relating to **his life came up, and** was not easily subdued. But there was **an** unfortunate tendency for small groups to split up and quarrel among themselves.

The democratic way was not only well-known but was a common method of functioning in social life, in local government, trade-guilds, religious assemblies, etc. Caste, with all its evils, kept up the democratic habit in each group. There used to be elaborate rules of procedure, election and debate. The Marquis of Zetland has referred to some of these in writing about the early Buddhist assemblies: 'And it may come as a surprise to many to learn that in the Assemblies of the Buddhists in India 2,000 or more years ago are to be found the rudiments of our own parliamentary practice of the present day. The dignity of the Assembly was preserved by the appointment of a special officer-—the embryo of "Mr. Speaker" in the House of Commons. A second officer was appointed whose duty it was to see that when necessary a quorum was secured—the prototype of the parliamentary chief whip in our own system. A member initiating business^did so in the form of a motion which was then open to discussion. In some cases this was done once only, in others three times, thus anticipating the practice of parliament in requiring that a Bill be read a third time before it becomes law. If discussion disclosed a difference of opinion the matter was decided by the vote of the majority, the voting being by ballot.'*

The old Indian social structure had thus some virtues, and indeed it could not have lasted so long without them. Behind it lay the philosophical ideal of Indian culture—the integration of man and the stress of goodness, beauty and truth rather than acquisitiveness. An attempt was made to prevent the joining together and concentration of honour, power, and wealth. The duties of the individual and the group were emphasized, not their rights.

The *Smritis* (Hindu religious books) give lists of dharmas, functions and duties of various castes but none of them contains an inventory of rights. Self-sufficiency was aimed at in the group, especially in the village and, in a different sense, in the caste. It was a closed system, allowing a certain adaptability, change, and freedom within its outer framework, but inevitably growing more and more exclusive and rigid. Progressively it lost its power to expand and tap new sources of talent. Powerful vested interests prevented any radical change and kept education from spreading to other classes. The old superstitions, known to be such by many among the upper classes, were preserved and new ones were added to them. Not only the national economy but thought itself became stationary, traditional, rigid, unexpansive and unprogressive.

The conception and practice of caste embodied the aristo-

** Quoted by G. T. Garratt in 'The Ltgacy of India' (1937), p. xi.*

cratic ideal and was obviously opposed to democratic conceptions. **It** had its strong sense of *noblesse oblige,* provided people [kept to their hereditary stations and did not challenge the established order. India's success and achievements were on the whole [confined to the upper classes; those lower down in the scale had [very few chances and their opportunities were stricdy limited. I These upper classes were not small limited groups but large in numbers and there was a diffusion of power, authority and influence. Hence they carried on successfully for a very long period. But the ultimate weakness and failing of the caste system and the Indian social structure were that they degraded a mass of human beings and gave them no opportunities to get out of that condition—educationally, culturally, or economically. That degrada- I tion brought deterioration, all along the line including in its scope even the upper classes. It led to the petrification which became a dominant feature of India's economy and life. The contrasts between this social structure and those existing elsewhere in the past were not great, but with the changes that have taken place **all** over the world during the past few generations they have become far more pronounced. In the context of society to-day, the caste system and much that goes with it are wholly incompatible, reactionary, restrictive, and barriers to progress. There can be no equality in status and opportunity within its framework, nor can there be political democracy and much less economic democracy. Between these two conceptions conflict is inherent and only one of them can survive.

Babar and Akbar: The Process of Indianization

To go back. The Afghans had settled down in India and had become Indianized. Their rulers had to face first the problem of lessening the hostility of the people and then of winning them over. So, as a deliberate policy, they toned down their early ruthless methods, became more tolerant, invited co-operation, and tried to function not as conquerors from outside but as Indians born and bred in the land. What was at first a policy gradually became an inevitable trend as the Indian environment influenced these people from the north-west and absorbed them. While the process continued at the top, more powerful currents arose spontaneously among the people, aiming at a synthesis of thought and ways of living. The beginnings of a mixed culture began to appear and foundations were laid on which Akbar was to build.

Akbar was the third of the Mughal dynasty in India, yet it was in effect by him that'the empire was consolidated. His grand**father,** Babai, had won the throne of Delhi in **1526,** but he was **a stranger** to India and continued to feel so. He had come from the **north,** where **the** Timurid Renaissance was flourishing in his

homelands in central Asia and the influence of the art and culture of Iran was strong. He missed the friendly-society he was used to, the delights of conversation, the amenities and refinements of life which had spread from Baghdad and Iran. He longed for the snow and ice of the northern highlands, for the good flesh and flowers and fruits of Ferghana. Yet, with all his disappointment at what he saw, he says that Hindustan is a remarkably fine country.

Babar died within four years of his coming to India, and much of his time was spent in fighting and in laying out a splendid capital at Agra, for which he obtained the services of a famous architect from Constantinople. Those were the days of Suleiman the Magnificent in Constantinople, when fine buidings were rising up in that city.

Babar saw little of India and, surrounded as he was by a hostile people, missed much. Yet his account tells us of the cultural poverty that had descended on north India. Partly this was due to Timur's destruction, partly to the exodus of many learned men and artists and noted craftsmen to the south. But it was also due to the drying up of the creative genius of the Indian people. Babar says that there was no lack of skilled workers and artisans, but there was no ingenuity or skill in mechanical invention. Also, it would appear that in the amenities and luxuries of life India was considerably behind Iran. Whether this was due to some inherent want of interest in this aspect of life in the Indian mind or to later developments, I do not know. Perhaps, as compared with the Iranians, the Indians of those days were not so much attracted to these refinements and luxuries. If they had cared for them sufficiently they could have easily got them from Iran, as there was frequent intercourse between the two countries. But it is more likely that this was a later development, another sign of the cultural rigidity and decline of India.

In earlier periods, as can be seen from classical literature and paintings, there was refinement enough and, for those times, a high and complicated standard of living. Even when Babar came to north India, Vijayanagar in the south had been spoken of by many European travellers as representing a very high standard of art and culture, refinement and luxury.

But in north India cultural decay was very evident. Fixed beliefs and a rigid social structure prevented social effort and advance. The coming of Islam and of a considerable number *of* i people from outside, with different ways of living and thought, affected existing beliefs and structure. A foreign conquest, with all its evils, has one advantage: it widens the mental horizon of the people and compels them to look out of their shells. They realise that the world is a much bigger and more variegated place than they had imagined. So the Afghan conquest had affected India and many changes had taken place. Even more

so the Mughals, who were far more cultured and advanced in ways of living than the Afghans, brought changes to India. In particular, they introduced the refinements for which Iran was famous, even to the extent of the highly artificial and strictly prescribed court life, which influenced the ways of living of the nobility. The Bahmani kingdom in the south had direct contacts with Iran via Calicut.

There were many changes in India and new impulses brought freshness and life to art and architecture and other cultural patterns. And yet all this was the result of two old-world patterns coming into contact, both of which had lost their initial vitality and creative vigour and were set in rigid frames. Indian culture was very old and tired, the Arab-Persian culture had long passed its zenith and the old curiosity and sense of mental adventure which distinguished the Arabs were no more in evidence.

Babar is an attractive person, a typical Renaissance prince, bold and adventurous, fond of art and literature and good living. His giandson, Akbar, is even more attractive and has greater qualities. Daring and reckless, an able general, and yet gentle and full of compassion, an idealist and a dreamer, but also a man of action and a leader of men who roused the passionate loyalty of his followers. As a warrior he conquered large parts of India, but his eyes were set on another and more enduring conquest, the conquest of the minds and hearts of the people. Those compelling eyes of his were 'vibrant like the sea in sunshine,' as Portuguese Jesuits of his court have told us. In him the old dream of a united India again took shape, united not only politically in one state but organically fused into one people.

Throughout his long reign of nearly fifty years from 1556 onwards he laboured to this end. Many a proud Rajput chief, who would not have submitted to any other person, he won over to his side. He married a Rajput princess, and his son and successor, Jehangir, was thus a half Mughal and half Rajput Hindu. Jehangir's son, Shah Jehan, was also the son of a Rajput mother. Thus racially this Turko-Mongol dynasty became far more Indian than Turk or Mongol.

Akbar was an admirer of and felt a kinship with the Rajputs, and by his matrimonial and other policy he formed an alliance with the Rajput ruling classes which strengthened his empire greatly. This Mughal-Rajput co-operation, which continued in subsequent reigns, affected not only government and the administration and army, but also art, culture, and ways of living. The Mughal nobility became progressively Indianized and the Rajputs and others were influenced by Persian culture.

Akbar won many people to his side and kept them there, but he failed to subdue the proud and indomitable spirit of Rana Pratap of Mewar in Rajputana, who preferred to lead a hunted

life in the jungle rather than give even formal allegiance to one he considered a foreign conqueror.

Round himself Akbar collected a brilliant group of men, devoted to him and to his ideals. Among these were the two famous brothers Fyzee and Abul Fazl, Birbal, Raja Man Singh, and Abdul Rahim Khankhana. His court became a meeting place for men of all faiths and all who had some new idea or new invention. His toleration of views and his encouragement of all kinds of beliefs and opinions went so far as to anger some of the more orthodox Moslems. He even tried to start a new synthetic faith to suit everybody. It was in his reign that the cultural amalgamation of Hindu and Moslem in north India took a long step forward. Akbar himself was certainly as popular with the Hindus as with the Moslems. The Mughal dynasty became firmly established as India's own.

The Contrast between Asia and Europe in Mechanical Advance and Creative Energy

Akbar was full of curiosity, ever seeking to find out about things, both spiritual and temporal. He was interested in mechanical contrivances and in the science of war. He prized war-elephants especially, and they formed an important part of his army. The Portuguese Jesuits of his court tell us that 'he was interested in and curious to learn about many things, and possessed an intimate knowledge not only of military and political matters, but many of the mechanical arts.' In 'his eagerness for knowledge' he 'tried to learn everything at once, like a hungry man trying to swallow his food at a single gulp'.

And yet it is very odd how his curiosity stopped at a point and did not lead him to explore certain obvious avenues which lay open before him. With all his great prestige as the Great Mughal and the strength of his empire as a land power, he was powerless at sea. Vasco de Gama had reached Calicut, via the Cape, in 1498; Albuquerque had seized Malacca in 1511 and established Portuguese sea power in the Indian Ocean. Goa on the western coast of India had become a Portuguese possession. All this did not bring the Portuguese into direct conflict with Akbar. But Indian pilgrims going to Mecca by sea, and these sometimes included members of the imperial family, or of the nobility, were often held up for ransom by the Portuguese. It was obvious that however powerful Akbar might be on land, the Portuguese were masters of the sea. It is not difficult to understand that a continental power did not attach much importance to sea power, although, as a matter of fact, India's greatness and importance in the past had been partly due to her control of the sea routes. Akbar had a vast continent to conquer and had little time to

spare for the Portuguese, to whom he attached no **importance** even though they stung him occasionally. He did think of building ships once, but this was looked upon more as a pastime than a serious naval development.

Again, in the matter of artillery the Mughal armies, as well **as** those of other states in India at the rime, chiefly relied on foreign experts, who were usually Turks from the Ottoman dominions. The Master of the Artillery came to be known by the title of Rumi Khan—Rum being eastern Rome, that is, Constantinople. These foreign experts trained local men, but why did not Akbar or anyone else send his own men abroad for training or interest himself in improvement by encouraging research work?

Yet another very significant thing. The Jesuits presented Akbar with a printed Bible and perhaps one or two other printed books. Why did he not get curious about printing, which would have been of tremendous advantage to him in his governmental activities as well as in his vast enterprises?

Again, clocks. These were very popular with the Mughal nobility, and they were brought by the Portuguese and later by the English from Europe. They were regarded as luxuries for the rich, the ordinary people being content with sundials and sand- and water-clocks. No attempt was made to understand how these spring clocks were made or to get them made in India. This lack of mechanical bent is remarkable, especially as there were very fine craftsmen and artisans in India.

It is not in India alone that this paralysis of creative energy and inventive faculty is visible during this period. The whole of western and central Asia suffered from it even more. I do not know about China but I imagine that some such stagnation affected her also. It must be remembered that both in India and China, during earlier periods, there was considerable progress in various departments of science. Shipbuilding and an extensive sea-trade acted as a constant spur even to mechanical improvements. It is true that no major mechanical development took place in either of these countries or in any other country at the time. The world of the fifteenth century was, from this point of view, not very different from what it had been a thousand or two thousand years earlier.

The Arabs, who had developed to some extent the early beginnings of practical science and had advanced knowledge in many ways during the dark period of the middle ages in Europe, became unimportant and backward. It is said that some of the earliest clocks were made by the Arabs in the seventh century. Damascus had a famous clock and so did the Baghdad of Harun-al-Rashid's day. But with the decline of the Arabs the art of making clocks also disappeared from these countries, although it was progressing in some of the European countries where clocks were not rarities.

Long before Caxton, the Moorish Arabs of Spain used to print from wooden blocks.* This was done by the state for duplication of official orders. Printing there does not seem to have advanced beyond the block stage and even that faded away later. The Ottoman Turks, who for long were the dominant Moslem power in Europe and western Asia, completely'ignored printing for many centuries, although printed books were being produced in large numbers in Europe, right at their very threshold. They must have known about them, but the incentive to utilize this great invention was totally lacking. Partly also religious sentiment was opposed to it, as it was considered that it was sacrilegious to print their holy book, the Koran. The printed sheets might be put to improper use or stepped upon or thrown into the rubbish heap. It was Napoleon who first introduced the printing press into Egypt and from there it spread very gradually and slowly into the other Arab countries.

While Asia had become dormant, exhausted, as it were, by its past efforts, Europe, backward in many ways, was on the threshold of vast changes. A new spirit, a new ferment, was at work sending her adventurers across the oceans and turning the minds of her thinkers in novel directions. The Renaissance had done little for the advancement of science; to some extent it turned people away from science, and the humanistic conservative education which it introduced in the universities prevented the spread of even well-known scientific ideas. It is stated that the majority of educated English people, as late as the middle of the eighteenth century, declined to believe that the earth rotated or that it revolved round the sun, in spite of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton; and the manufacture of good telescopes. Bred up in the Greek and Latin classics, they still clung to Ptolemy's earth-centred universe. That eminent English statesman of the nineteenth ceruury, Mr. W. E. Gladstone, in spite of his deep erudition, neither understood nor was attracted to science. Even to-day probably there are many statesmen and public men (and not in India only) who know little of science or the scientific method, though they live in a world governed by the applications of science and themselves use it for large-scale slaughter and destruction.

The Renaissance had, however, released the mind of Europe from many of its old fetters and destroyed many an idol that it had cherished. Whether it was partly and indirectly due to the Renaissance or whether it was in spite of it, a new spirit of objective inquiry was making itself felt, a spirit which not only challenged old-established authority, but also abstractions and vague

**I do not know how this kind of printing reached the Arabs in Spain. Probably it came to them via the Mongols from China, long before it reachcd northern and western Europe. The Arab world from Cordoba to Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad, had frequent contacts with China even before the Mongols appeared upon the scene.*

speculations. Francis Bacon has written that 'the roads to human power and to human knowledge lie close together, and are nearly the same, nevertheless on account of the pernicious and inveterate habit of dwelling on abstractions it is safer to begin and raise the sciences from those foundations which have relation to practice and let the active part be as a seal which prints and determines the contemplative counterpart.' And later in the seventeenth century, Sir Thomas Browne has said: 'But the mortallest enemy unto knowedge, and that which hath done the greatest execution upon truth, hath been a peremptory adhesion to authority;-and more especially, the establishing of our belief upon the dictates of antiquity. For (as every capacity may observe) most men, of ages present, so superstitiously do look upon ages past, that the authorities of the one exceed the reasons of the other. Whose persons indeed far removed from our times, their works, which seldom with us pass uncontrolled, either by contemporaries, or immediate successors, are now become out of the distance of envies; and the further removed from present times, are conceived to approach the nearer unto truth itself. Now hereby me thinks we manifestly delude ourselves, and widely walk out of the track of truth.'

Akbar's century was the sixteenth, which saw in Europe the birth of dynamics, a revolutionary advance in the life of humanity. With that discovery Europe forged ahead, slowly at first, but with an ever-increasing momentum, till in the nineteenth century it shot forward and built a new world. While Europe was taking advantage of, and exploiting the powers of nature, Asia, static and dormant, still carried on in the old traditional way, relying on man's toil and labour.

Why was this so? Asia is too big and varied a place for a single answer. Each country, especially such vast countries as China and India, must be judged separately. China was certainly then and later more cultured and her people led a more civilized life than any in Europe. India, to all outward seeming, also presented the spectacle, not only of a brilliant court, but of thriving trade, commerce, manufactures, and crafts. In many respects the countries of Europe would have seemed backward and rather crude to an Indian visitor then. And yet the dynamic quality which was becoming evident in Europe was almost wholly absent in India.

A civilization decays much more from inner failure than from an external attack. It may fail because in a sense it has worked itself out and has nothing more to offer in a changing world, or because the people who represent it deteriorate in quality and can no longer support the burden worthily. It may be that the social culture is such that it becomes a bar to advance beyond a certain point, and further advance can only take place after

that bar has been removed or some essential qualitative variation in that culture has been introduced. The decay of Indian civilization is evident enough even before the Turkish and Afghan invasions. Did the impact of these invaders and their new ideas with the old India produce a new social context, thus unbinding the fetters of the intellect and releasing fresh energy?

To some extent this happened, and art and architecture, painting, and music, and the ways of life were affected. But those consequences did not go deep enough; they were more or less superficial, and the social culture remained much the same as it used to be. In some respects indeed it became more rigid. The Afghans brought no new element of progress; they represented a backward feudal and tribal order. India was not feudal in the European sense, but the Rajput clans, who were the backbone of Indian defence, were organized in some kind of a feudal way. The Mughals were also semi-feudal but with a strong monarchical centre. This monarchy triumphed over the vague feudalism of Rajputana.

Akbar might have laid, the foundations of social change if his eager, inquisitive mind had turned in that direction and sought to find out what was happening in other parts of the world. But he was too busy consolidating his empire and the big problem that faced him was how to reconcile a proselytizing religion like Islam with the national religion and customs of the people, and thus to build up national unity. He tried to interpret religion in a rational spirit and for the moment he appeared to have brought about a remarkable transformation of the Indian scene. But this direct approach did not succeed, as it has seldom succeeded elsewhere.

So not even Akbar made any basic difference to that social context of India, and after him the air of change and mental adventure which he had introduced subsided, and India resumed her static and unchanging life.*

**Abul Fazl tells us that Akbar had heard of the discovery of America by Columbus. In the next reign, Jehangir's, tobacco from America reached India, via Europe. It had an immediate and amazing vogue in spite of Jehangir's efforts to suppress it. Throughout the Mughal period India had intimate contacts with central Asia. These contacts extended to Russia and there are references to diplomatic and trade missions. A Russian friend has drawn my attention to such refrences in Russian chronicles. In 1532 an envoy of the Emperor Babar, named Khoja Husain, arrived in Moscow to conclude a treaty of friendship. During the reign of Tsar Michael Fedorovitch (1613-1645) Indian traders settled on the Volga. In 1625 an Indian serai was built in Astrakhan by order of the military governor. Indian craftsmen and especially weavers were invited to Moscow. In 1695 Semean Melenky, a Russian trade-agent, visited Delhi and was received by Aurangzeb. In 1722 Peter the Great visited Astrakhan and granted interviews to Indian traders. In 1745 a party of Indian sadhus, described as hermits, arrived in Astrakhan. Two of these sadhus settled in Rtissia and became Russian subjects.*

Akbar had built so well that the edifice he had erected lasted for another 100 years in spite of inadequate successors. After almost every Mughal reign there were wars between the princes for the throne, thus weakening the central power. But the court continued to be brilliant and the fame of the Grand Mughal spread all over Asia and Europe. Beautiful buildings combining the old Indian ideals in architecture with a new simplicity and a nobility of line grew up in Agra and Delhi. This Indo-Mughal art was in marked contrast with the decadent, over-elaborate and heavily ornamented temples and other buildings of the north and south. Inspired architects and builders put up with loving hands the Taj Mahal at Agra.

The last of the so-called 'Grand Mughals,' Aurungzeb, tried to put back the clock, and in this attempt stopped it and broke it up. The Mughal rulers were strong so long as they put themselves in line with the genius of the nation and tried to work for a common nationality and a synthesis of the various elements in the country. When Aurungzeb began to oppose this movement and suppress it and to function more as a Moslem than an Indian ruler, the Mughal Empire began to break up. The work of Akbar, and to some extent his successors, was undone and the various forces that had been kept in check by Akbar's policy broke loose and challenged that empire. New movements arose, narrow in outlook but representing a resurgent nationalism, and though they were not strong enough to build permanently, and circumstances were against them, they were capable of destroying the Empire of the Mughals.

The impact of the invaders from the north-west and of Islam on India had been considerable. It had pointed out and shown up the abuses that had crept into Hindu society—the petrifaction of caste, untouchability, exclusiveness carried to fantastic lengths. The idea of the brotherhood of Islam and of the theoretical equality of its adherents made a powerful appeal, especially to those in the Hindu fold who were denied any semblance of equal treatment. From this ideological impact grew up various movements aiming at a religious synthesis. Many conversions also took place but the great majority of these were from the lower castes, especially in Bengal. Some individuals belonging to the higher castes also adopted the new faith, either because of a real change of belief, or, more often, for political and economic reasons. There were obvious advantages in accepting the religion of the ruling power.

In spite of these widespread conversions, Hinduism, in all its varieties, continued as the dominant faith of the land, solid, exclusive, self-sufficient, and sure of itself. The upper castes had

no doubt about their own superiority in the realm of ideas and thought and considered Islam as a rather crude approach to the problems of philosophy and metaphysics. Even the monotheism of Islam they found in their own religion, together with monism which was the basis of much of their philosophy. Each person could take his choice of these or of more popular and simpler forms of worship. He could be a Vaishnavite and believe in a personal God and pour out his faith to him. Or more philosophically inclined, he could wander in the tenuous realms of metaphysics and high philosophy. Though all their social structure was based on the group, in matters of religion they were highly individualistic, not believing in proselytization themselves and caring little if some people were converted to another faith. What was objected to was in interference with their own social structure and ways of living. If another group wanted to function in its own way, it was at liberty to do so. It is worth noting that, as a rule, conversions to Islam were group conversions, so powerful was the influence of the group. Among the upper castes individuals might change their religion, but lower down the scale a particular caste in a locality, or almost an entire village would be converted. Thus their group life as well as their functions continued as before with only minor variations as regards worship, etc. Because of this we find to-day particular occupations and crafts almost entirely monopolized by Moslems. Thus the class of weavers is predominantly, and in large areas wholly Moslem. So also used to be shoe-merchants and butchers. Tailors are almost always Moslems. Various kinds of artisans and craftsmen are Moslems. Owing to the breaking up of the group system, many individuals have taken to other occupations and this has somewhat obliterated the line dividing the various occupational groups. The destruction of crafts and village industries, originally deliberately undertaken under early British rule and later resulting from the development of a new colonial economy, led to vast numbers of these artisans and craftsmen, more especially the weavers, being deprived of their occupations and livelihood. Those who survived this catastrophe drifted to the land and became landless labourers or shared a tiny patch of land with their relations.

Conversions to Islam in those days, whether individual or group, probably aroused no particular opposition, except when force or some kind of compulsion was used. Friends and relatives or neighbours might disapprove, but the Hindu community as such apparently attached little importance to this. In contrast with this indifferent attitude, conversions to-day attract widespread attention and are resented, whether they are to Islam or Christianity. This is largely due to political factors and especially to the introduction of separate religious electorates. Each convert is supposed to be a gain to the communal

group leading ultimately to greater representation and more political power. Attempts are even made to manipulate the census to this end. Apart from political reasons, there has also been a growth in Hinduism of a tendency to proselytize and convert non-Hindus to Hinduism. This is one of the direct effects of Islam on Hinduism, though in practice it brings it into conflict with Islam in India. Orthodox Hindus still do not approve of it.

In Kashmir a long-continued process of conversion to Islam had resulted in 95 per cent of the population becoming Moslems, though they retained many of their old Hindu customs. In the middle nineteenth century the Hindu ruler of the state found that very large numbers of these people were anxious or willing to return *en bloc* to Hinduism. He sent a deputation to the pundits of Benares inquiring if this could be done. The pundits refused to countenance any such change of faith and there the matter ended.

The Moslems who came to India from outside brought no new technique or political and economic structure. In spite of a religious belief in the brotherhood of Islam, they were class bound and feudal in outlook. In technique and in the methods of production and industrial organization, they were inferior to what prevailed then in India. Thus their influence on the economic life of India and the social structure was very little. This life continued as of old and all the people, Hindu or Moslem or others, fitted into it.

The position of women deteriorated. Even the ancient laws had been unfair to them in regard to inheritance and their position in the household—though even so they were fairer than nineteenth-century English law. Those laws of inheritance derived from the Hindu joint family system and sought to protect joint property from transfer to another family. A woman by marriage changed her family. In an economic sense she was looked upon as a dependant of her father or husband or son, but she could and did hold property in her own right. In many ways she was honoured and respected and had a fair measure of freedom, taking part in social and cultural activities. Indian history is full of the names of famous women, including thinkers and philosophers, rulers and warriors. This freedom grew progressively less. Islam had a fairer law of inheritance but this did not affect Hindu women. What did affect many of them to their great disadvantage, as it affected Moslem women to a much greater degree, was the intensification of the custom of seclusion of women. This spread among the upper classes all over the north and in Bengal, but the south and west of India escaped this degrading custom. Even in the north, only the upper classes indulged in it and the masses were happily free from it. Women

now had less chances of education and their activities were largely confined to the household.* Lacking most other ways of distinguishing themselves, living a confined and restricted life, they were told that their supreme virtue lay in chastity and the supreme sin in a loss of it. Such was the man-made doctrine, but man did not apply it to himself. Tulsidas in his deservedly famous poems, the Hindi Ramayana, written during Jehangir's time, painted a picture of woman which is grossly unfair and prejudiced.

Partly because the great majority of Moslems in India were converts from Hinduism, partly because of long contact, Hindus and Moslems in India developed numerous common traits, habits, ways of living and artistic tastes, especially in northern India—in music, painting, architecture, food, clothes, and common traditions. They lived together peacefully as one people, joined each other's festivals and celebrations, spoke the same language, lived in more or less the same way, and faced identical economic problems. The nobility and the landed gentry and their numerous hangers-on took their cue from the court. (These people were not landlords or owners of the land. They did not take rent but were allowed to collect and retain the state revenue for a particular area. These grants were usually for life.) They developed a highly intricate, and sophisticated common culture. They wore the same kind of clothes, ate the same type of food, had common artistic pursuits, military pastimes, hunting, chivalry, and games. Polo was a favourite game and elephant fights were popular.

All this intercourse and common living took place in spite of the caste system which prevented fusion. There were no intermarriages except in rare instances and even then it was not fusion but usually the transfer of a Hindu woman to the Moslem fold. Nor was there inter-dining but this was not so strict. The seclusion of women prevented the development of social life. This applied even more to Moslems *inter se* for *purdah* among them was stricter. Though Hindu and Moslem men met each other frequently, such opportunities were lacking to the women of both groups. These women of the nobility and upper classes were thus far more cut off from each other and developed much more marked separate ideological groups, each largely ignorant of the other.

Among the common people in the villages, and that means the vast majority of the population, life had a much more corporate and joint basis. Within the limited circle of the village there was an intimate relationship between the Hindus and Moslems. Caste did not come in the way and the Hindus looked

'And yet many instances of notable women, scholars as well as rulers, occur even during this period and later. In the eighteenth century Lakshmi Devi wrote a great legal commentary on the Mitakshara, a famous law book of the medieval period.

upon the Moslems as belonging to another caste. Most of the Moslems were converts who were still full of their old traditions. They were well acquainted with the Hindu background, mythology, and epic stories. They did the same kind of work, lived similar lives, wore the same kind of clothes, spoke the same language. They joined each other's festivals, and some semi-religious festivals were common to both. They had common folk-songs. Mostly these people were peasants and artisans and craftsmen.

The third large group, in between the nobility and the peasantry and artisans, was the merchant and trader class. This was predominantly Hindu and though it had no political power, the economic structure was largely under its control. This class had fewer intimate contacts with the Moslems than any other class, above it or below. The Moslems who had come from outside India were feudal in outlook and did not take kindly to trade. The Islamic prohibition against the taking of interest also came in the way of trade. They considered themselves the ruling class, the nobility and functioned as state officials, holders of grants of land or as officers in the army. There were also many scholars attached to the court or in charge of theological and other academies.

During the Mughal period large numbers of Hindus wrote books in Persian which was the official court language. Some of these books have become classics of their kind. At the same time Moslem scholars translated Sanskrit books into Persian and wrote in Hindi. Two of the best-known Hindi poets are Malik Mohammad Jaisi who wrote the 'Padmavat' and Abdul Rahim Khankhana, one of the premier nobles of Akbar's court and son of his guardian. Khankhana was a scholar in Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit, and his Hindi poetry is of a high quality. For sometime he was the commander-in-chief of the imperial army, and yet he has written in praise and admiration of Rana Pratap of Mewar, who was continually fighting Akbar and never submitted to him. Khankhana admires and commends the patriotism and high sense of honour and chivalry of his enemy on the battlefield.

It was this chivalrous and friendly approach on which Akbar based his policy and which many of his counsellors and ministers learned from him. He was particularly attached to the Rajputs, for he admired in them qualities which he himself possessed—reckless courage, a sense of honour and chivalry, and an adherence to the pledged word. He won over the Rajputs, but the Rajputs for all their admirable qualities, represented a medieval type of society which was already becoming out of date as new forces were arising. Akbar was not conscious of these new forces, for he himself was a prisoner of his own social inheritance.

Akbar's success is astonishing, for he created a sense of oneness among the diverse elements of north and central India. There was the barrier of a ruling class, mainly of foreign origin, and there were the barriers of religion and caste, a proselytizing religion opposed to the static but highly resistant system. These barriers did not disappear, but in spite of them that feeling of oneness grew. It was not merely an attachment to his person; it was an attachment to the structure he had built. His son and grandson, Jehangir and Shah Jehan, accepted that structure and functioned within its framework They were men of no outstanding ability, but their reigns were successful because they continued on the lines so firmly laid down by Akbar. The next comer, Aurungzeb, much abler but of a different mould, swerved and left that beaten track, undoing Akbar's work. Yet not entirely, for it is extraordinary how, in spite of him and his feeble and pitiful successors, the feeling of reverence for that structure continued. That feeling was largely confined to the north and centre; it did not extend to the south or west. And it was from western India, therefore, that the challenge to it came.

Aurangzeb puts the Clock Back
Growth of Hindu Nationalism. Shivaji

Shah Jehan was a contemporary of Louis XIV of France, *le Grand Monarque,* and the Thirty Years War was then ravaging central Europe. As Versailles took shape, the Taj Mahal and the Pearl Mosque grew up in Agra, and the Jame Masjid of Delhi and the Diwan-i-Am and the Diwan-i-Khas in the imperial palace. These lovely buildings with a fairy-like beauty represent the height of Mughal splendour. The Delhi court, with its Peacock Throne, was more magnificent and luxurious than Versailles, but, like Versailles, it rested on a poverty-stricken and exploited people. There was a terrible famine in Gujarat and the Dekhan.

Meanwhile the naval power of England was rising and spreading. The only Europeans that Akbar knew were the Portuguese. During his son Jehangir's time the British navy defeated the Portuguese in Indian seas and Sir Thomas Roe, an ambassador of James I of England, presented himself at Jehangir's court in 1615. He succeeded in getting permission to start factories. The Surat factory was started, and Madras was founded in 1639. For over 100 years no one in India attached any importance to the British. The fact that the British now controlled the sea routes and had practically driven away the Portuguese had no significance for the Mughal rulers or their advisers. When the Mughal Empire was visibly weakening during Aurungzeb's reign, the British made an organized attempt to increase their possessions in India by war. This was in 1685. Aurungzeb, weak as he was growing and beset by

enemies, succeeded in defeating the British. Even before this the French had established footholds in India. The overflowing energies of Europe were spreading out in India and the east just when India's political and economic condition was rapidly declining.

In France, Louis XIV was still continuing his long reign, laying the seeds of future revolution. In England, the rising middle classes had cut off the head of their king, Cromwell's brief-lived republic had flourished, Charles II had come and gone, and James II had run away. Parliament, representing to a large extent a new mercantile class, had curbed the king and established its supremacy.

It was during this period that Aurungzeb succeeded to the throne of the Mughals after a civil war, having imprisoned his own father, Shah Jehan. Only an Akbar might have understood the situation and controlled the new forces that were rising. Perhaps even he could have only postponed the dissolution of his empire unless his curiosity and thirst for knowledge led him to understand the significance of the new techniques that were arising, and of the shift in economic conditions that was taking place. Aurungzeb, far from understanding the present, failed even to appreciate the immediate past; he was a throw-back and, for all his ability and earnestness, he tried to undo what his predecessors had done. A bigot and an austere puritan, he was no lover of art or literature. He infuriated the great majority of his subjects by imposing the old hated *jeziya* poll-tax on the Hindus and destroying many of their temples. He offended the proud Rajputs who had been the props and pillars of the Mughal Empire. In the north he roused the Sikhs, who, from being a peaceful sect representing some kind of synthesis of Hindu and Islamic ideas, were converted by repression and persecution into a military brotherhood. Near the west coast of India, he angered the warlil-e Marathas, descendants of the ancient Rashtrakutas, just when a brilliant captain had risen amongst them.

All over the widespread domains of the Mughal Empire there was a ferment and a growth of revivalist sentiment, which was a mixture of religion and nationalism. That nationalism was certainly not of the modern secular type, nor did it, as a rule, embrace the whole of India in its scope. It was coloured by feudalism, by local sentiment and sectarian feeling. The Rajputs, more feudal than the rest, thought of their clan loyalties; the Sikhs, a comparatively small group in the Punjab, were absorbed in their own self-defence and could hardly look beyond the Punjab. Yet the religion itself had a strong national background and all its traditions were connected with India. 'The Indians,' writes Professor Macdonell, 'are the only division of the Indo-European family which has created a great national religion—Brahmanism—and a great world religion—Buddhism; while all the rest far from displaying originality in this sphere have long since adopted a foreign

faith.' That combination of religion and nationalism gained **strength** and cohesiveness from both elements, and yet its ultimate **weakness** and insufficiency were also derived from that mixture. For it could only be an exclusive and partial nationalism, not including the many elements in India that lay outside that religious sphere. Hindu nationalism was a natural growth from the soil of India, but inevitably it comes in the way of the larger nationalism which rises above differences of religion or creed.

It is true that during this period of disruption, when a great empire was breaking up and many adventurers, Indian and foreign, were trying to carve out principalities for themselves, nationalism, in its present sense, was hardly in evidence at all. Each individual adventurer sought to augment his own power; each group fended for itself. Such history as we have only tells us of these adventurers, attaching more importance to them than *to* more significant happenings below the surface of events. Yet there are glimpses to show that it was not all adventurism, though many adventurers held the field. The Marathas, especially, had a wider conception and as they grew in power this conception also grew. Warren Hastings wrote in 1784: 'The Marathas possess, alone of all the people of Hindostan and Deccan, a principle of national attachment, which is strongly impressed on the minds of all individuals of the nation, and would probably unite their chiefs, as in one common cause, if any great danger were to threaten the general state.' Probably this national sentiment of their was largely confined to the Marathi-speaking area. Nevertheless the Marathas were catholic in their political and military system as well as their habits, and there was a certain internal democracy among them. All this gave strength to them. Shivaji, though he fought Aurungzeb, freely employed Moslems.

An equally important factor in the break-up of the Mughal Empire was the cracking up of the economic structure. There were repeated peasant risings, some of them on a big scale. From 1669 onwards the Jat peasantry, not far fram the capital itself, rose again and again against the Delhi Government. Yet another revolt of poor people was that of the Satnamis who were described by a Mughal noble as 'a gang of bloody miserable rebels, goldsmiths, carpenters, sweepers, tanners, and other ignoble beings.' Thus far revolts had been confined to princes and nobles and others of high degree. Quite another class was now experimenting with them.

While the empire was rent by strife and revolt, the new Maratha power was growing and consolidating itself in western India. Shivaji, born in 1627, was the ideal guerilla leader of hardened mountaineers and his cavalry went far and wide, sacking the city of Surat, where the English had their factory, and enforcing the *chowth* tax payment over distant parts of the Mughal dominions.

Shivaji was the symbol of a resurgent Hindu nationalism, drawing inspiration from the old classics, courageous, and possessing high qualities of leadership. He built up the Marathas as a strong unified fighting group, gave them a nationalist background, and made them a formidable power which broke up the Mughal Empire. He died in 1680, but the Maratha power continued to grow till it dominated India.

The Marathas and the British Struggle for Supremacy. Triumph of the British

The 100 years that followed the death of Aurungzeb in 1707 saw a complicated and many-sided struggle for mastery over India. The Mughal Empire rapidly fell to pieces and the imperial viceroys and governors began to function as semi-independent rulers, though so great was the prestige of the descendant of the Mughals in Delhi that a formal allegiance was paid to him even when he was powerless and a prisoner of others. These satrapies had no real power or importance, except in so far as they helped or hindered the main protagonists for power. The Nizam of Hydrabad, by virtue of the strategic position of his state in the south, appeared to have a certain importance in the beginning. But it soon transpired that this importance was entirely fictitious and the state was 'straw-stuffed and held upright' by external forces. It showed a peculiar capacity for duplicity and for profiting by the misfortunes of others while avoiding all risk and dangers. Sir John Shore described it as 'incorrigibly depraved, devoid of energy.. .consequently liable to sink into vassalage.' The Marathas looked upon the Nizam as one of their subordinate chieftains paying tribute to them. An attempt by him to avoid this and to show independence met with swift retribution and the Marathas put to flight his feeble and none-too-brave army. He took refuge under the protecting wings of the growing power of the British East India Company and survived as a state because of this vassalage. Indeed the Hyderabad state enlarged its area considerably, without any remarkable effort on its part, by the British victory over Tipu Sultan of Mysore.

Warren Hastings, writing in 1784, refers to the Nizam of Hyderabad : 'His dominions are of small extent and scanty revenue; his military strength is represented to be most contemptible; nor was he at any period of his life distinguished for personal courage or the spirit of enterprise. On the contrary, it seems to have been his constant and ruling maxim to foment the incentives of war among his neighbours, to profit by their weakness and embarrassments, but to avoid being a party himself in any of their contests, and to submit even to humiliating sacrifices rather than subject himself to the chances of war.'*

*'Quoted in Edward Thompson's 'The Making of the Indian Princes' (1943),p. 1.

The real protagonists for power in India during the **eighteenth** century were four: two of these were Indian and two foreign. The Indians were the Marathas and Haidar Ali and his son Tipu Sultan in the south; the foreigners were the British and the French. Of these, it appeared almost inevitable, during the first half of the century, that the Marathas were destined to establish their supremacy over India as a whole and to be the successors of the Mughal Empire. Their troops appeared at the very gates of Delhi as early as 1737 and there was no power strong enough to oppose them.

Just then (in 1739) a new eruption took place in the north-west and Nadir Shah of Persia swept down to Delhi, killing and plundering, and carrying off enormous treasure including the famous Peacock Throne. It was an easy raid for him for the Delhi rulers were effete and effeminate, wholly unused to warfare, and Nadir Shah did not come into conflict with the Marathas. In a sense, his raid facilitated matters for the Marathas, who in subsequent years spread to the Punjab. Again Maratha supremacy of India was in sight.

Nadir Shah's raid had two consequences. He put an end completely to any pretensions that the Delhi Mughal rulers had to power and dominion; heneceforth they became vague shadows enjoying a ghostl/ sovereignty, puppets in the hands of any one who was strong enough to hold them. To a large extent they had arrived at that stage even before Nadir Shah came; he completed the process. And yet, so strong is the hold of tradition and long-established custom, the British East India Company as well as others, continued to send humble presents to them in token of tribute right up to the eve of Plassey; and even afterwards for a long time the Company considered itself and functioned as the agent of the Delhi emperor, in whose name money was coined till 1835.

The second consequence of Nadir Shah's raid was the separation of Afghanistan from India. Afghanistan, which for long ages past had been part of India, was now cut off and became part of Nadir Shah's dominions. Sometime afterwards a local rebellion resulted in the murder of Nadir Shah by a group of his own officers and Afghanistan became an independent state.

The Marathas had in no way been weakened by Nadir Shah and they continued to spread in the Punjab. But in 1761 they met with a crushing defeat at Panipat from an Afghan invader, Ahmad Shah Durrani, who was ruling Afghanistan then. The flower of the Maratha forces perished in this disaster and, for a while, their dreams of empire faded away. They recovered gradually and the Maratha dominions were divided into a number of independent states joined together in a confederacy under the leadership of the Peshwa at Poona. The chiefs of the bigger

states were Scindhia of Gwalior, Holkar of Indore, and the Gaekwar of Baroda. This confederacy still dominated a vast area in western and central India. But the Panipat defeat of the Marathas by Ahmad Shah had weakened them just when the English Company was emerging as an important territorial power of India.

In Bengal, Clive, by promoting treason and forgery and with very little fighting, had won the battle of Plassey in 1757, a date which is sometimes said to mark the beginning of the British Empire in India. It was an unsavoury beginning and something of that bitter taste has clung to it ever since. Soon the British held the whole of Bengal and Bihar and one of the early consequences of their rule was a terrible famine which ravaged these two provinces in 1770, killing ever a third of the population of this rich, vast, and densely populated area.

In south India, the struggle between the English and the French, a part of the world struggle between the two, ended in the triumph of the English, and the French were almost eliminated from India.

With the elimination of the French power from India, three contestants for supremacy remained—the Maratha confederacy, Haider Ali in the south, and the British. In spite of their victory at Plasssey and their spreading out over Bengal and Bihar, few, if any, people in India then looked upon the British as a dominant power, destined to rule over the whole of India. An observer would still have given the first place to the Marathas who sprawled all over western and central India right up to Delhi and whose courage and fighting qualities were well-known. Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan were formidable adversaries who inflicted a severe defeat on the British and came near to breaking the power of the East India Company. But they were confined to the south and did not directly affect the fortunes of India as a whole. Haider Ali was a remarkable man and one of the notable figures in Indian history. He had some kind of a national ideal and possessed the qualities of a leader with vision. Continually suffering from a painful disease, his self-discipline and capacity for hard work were astonishing. He realized, long before others did so, the importance of sea power and the growing menace of the British based on naval strength. He tried to organize a joint effort to drive them out and, for this purpose, sent envoys to the Marathas, the Nizam, and Shuja-ud-Dowla of Oudh. But nothing came of this. He started building his own navy and, capturing the Maldive Islands, made them his headquarters for shipbuilding and naval activities. He died by the wayside as he was marching with his army. His son Tipu continued to strengthen his navy. Tipu also sent messages to Napoleon and to the Sultan in Constantinople.

In the north a Sikh state under Ranjit Singh was growing up

in the Punjab, to spread later to Kashmir and the North West Frontier Province; but that too was a marginal state not affecting the real struggle for supremacy. This struggle, it became clear as the eighteenth century approached its end, lay between the only two powers that counted—the Marathas and the British. All the other states and principalities were subordinate and subsidiary to these two.

Tipu Sultan of Mysore was finally defeated by the British in 1799, and that left the field clear for the final contest between the Marathas and the British East India Company. Charles Metcalfe, one of the ablest of the British Officials in India, wrote in 1806: 'India contains no more than two great powers, British and Mahratta, and every other state acknowledges the influence of one or the other. Every inch that we recede will be occupied by them.' But there was rivalry amongst the Maratha chieftains, and they fought and were defeated separately by the British. They won some notable victories and especially inflicted a severe defeat on the British near Agra in 1804, but by 1818 the Maratha power was finally crushed and the great chiefs that represented it in central India submitted and accepted the overlordship of the East India Company. The British became then the unchallenged sovereigns of a great part of India, governing the country directly or through puppet and subsidiary princes. The Punjab and some outlying parts were still beyond their control, but the British Empire in India had become an established fact, and subsequent wars with the Sikhs and Gurkhas and in Burma merely rounded it off on the map.

The Backwardness of India and the Superiority of the English in Organization and Technique

Looking back over this period, it almost seems that the British succeeded in dominating India by a succession of fortuitous circumstances and lucky flukes. With remarkably little effort, considering the glittering prize, they won a great empire and enormous wealth, which helped to make them the leading power in the world. It seems easy for a slight turn in events to have taken place which would have dashed their hopes and ended their ambitions. They were defeated on many occasions—by Haider Ali and Tipu, by the Marathas, by the Sikhs, and by the Gurkhas. A little less good fortune and they might have lost their foothold in India, or at the most held on to certain coastal territories only.

And yet a closer scrutiny reveals, in the circumstances then existing, a certain inevitability in what happened. Good fortune there certainly was, but there must be an ability to profit by good fortune. India was then in a fluid and disorganized state, follow-

ing the break-up of the Mughal Empire; for many centuries it had not been so weak and helpless. Organized power having broken down, the field was left open to adventurers and new claimants for dominion. Among these adventurers and claimants, the British, and the British alone at the time, possessed many of the qualities necessary for success. Their major disadvantage was that they were foreigners coming from a far country. Yet that very disadvantage worked in their favour, for no one took them very seriously or considered them as possible contestants for the sovereignty of India. It is extraordinary how this delusion lasted till long after Plassey, and their functioning in formal matters as the agents of the shadow Emperor at Delhi helped to further this false impression. The plunder that they carried away from Bengal and their peculiar methods of trade led to the belief that these foreigners were out for money and treasure and not so much for dominion; that they were a temporary though painful infliction, rather like Timur or Nadir Shah, who came and plundered and went back to his homeland.

The East India Company had originally established itself for trading purposes, and its military establishment was meant to protect this trade. Gradually, and almost unnoticed by others, it had extended the territory under its control, chiefly by taking sides in local disputes, helping one rival against another. The company's troops were better trained and were an asset to any side, and the company extracted heavy payment for the help. So the company's power grew and its military establishment increased. People looked upon these troops as mercenaries to be hired. When it was realized that the British were playing nobody's game but their own, and were out for the political domination of India, they had already established themselves firmly in the country.

Anti-foreign sentiment there undoubtedly was, and this grew in later years; but it was far removed from any general or widespread national feeling. The background was feudal and loyalty went to the local chief. Widespread distress, as in China during the days of the war lords, compelled people to join any military leader who offered regular pay or opportunities of loot. The East India Company's armies largely consisted of Indian sepoys. Only the Marathas had some national sentiment, something much more than loyalty to a leader, behind them, but even this was narrow and limited. They managed to irritate the brave Rajputs by their treatment of them. Instead of gaining them as allies, they had to deal with them as opponents or as grumbling and dissatisfied feudatories. Among the Maratha chiefs themselves there was bitter rivalry, and occasionally civil war, in spite of a vague alliance under the Peshwa's leadership. At critical moments they *failed* to support each other, and were separately defeated.

Yet the Marathas produced a number of very able men, statesmen and warriors, among them being Nana Farnavis, the Peshwa Baji Rao I, Mahadaji Scindhia of Gwalior, and Yaswant Rao Holkar of Indore, as also that remarkable woman, Princess Ahalya Bai of Indore. Their rank and file was good, seldom deserting a post and often facing certain death unmoved; but behind all this courage there was often an adventurism and amateurishness, both in peace and war, which were surprising. Their ignorance of the world was appalling, and even their knowledge of India's geography was strictly limited. What is worse, they did not take the trouble to find out what was happening elsewhere and what their enemies were doing. There could be no far-sighted statesmanship or effective strategy with these limitations. Their speed of movement and mobility often surprised and unnerved the enemy, but essentially war was looked upon as a series of gallant charges and little more. They were ideal guerrilla fighters. Later they reorganized their armies on more orthodox lines, with the result that what they gained in armour they lost in speed and mobility, and they could not adjust themselves easily to these new conditions. They considered themselves clever, and so they were, but it was not difficult to overreach them in peace or war, for their thought was imprisoned in an old and out-of-date framework and could not go beyond it.

The superiority in discipline and technique of foreign-trained armies had, of course, been noticed at an early stage by Indian rulers. They employed French and English officers to train their own armies, and the rivalry between these two helped to build up Indian armies. Haider Ali and Tipu also had some conception of the importance of sea-power, and they tried, unsuccessfully and too late, to build up a fleet in order to challenge the British at sea. The Marathas also made a feeble attempt in this direction. India was then a shipbuilding country, but it was not easy to build up a navy within a short time and in the face of constant opposition. With the elimination of the French many of their officers in the armies of the Indian powers had to go. The foreign officers who remained, chiefly British, often deserted their employers at critical stages, and, on some occasions, betrayed them, surrendering and marching over to their enemies (the British) with their armies and treasure. This reliance on foreign officers not only indicates the backwardness of the army organization of the Indian powers, but was also a constant source of danger owing to their unreliability. The British often had a powerful fifth column both in the administration and in the armies of the Indian rulers.

If the Marathas, with their homogeneity and group patriotism, were backward in civil and military organization, much more so were the other Indian powers. The Rajputs, for all their

courage, functioned in the old feudal way, romantic but thoroughly inefficient, and were rent among themselves by tribal feuds. Many of them, from a sense of feudal loyalty to an overlord, and partly as a consequence of Akbar's policy in the past, sided with the vanishing power of Delhi. But Delhi was too feeble to profit by this, and the Rajputs deteriorated and became the playthings of others, ultimately falling into the orbit of Scindhia, the Maratha. Some of their chiefs tried to play a careful balancing game in order to save themselves. The various Moslem rulers and chiefs in northern and central India were as feudal and backward in their ideas as the Rajput. They made no real difference, except to add to the confusion and the misery of the mass of the people. Some of them acknowledged the suzerainty of the Marathas.

The Gurkhas of Nepal were splendid and disciplined soldiers, the equals, if not the superiors, of any troops that the East India Company could produce. Although completely feudal in organization, their attachment to their homelands was great, and this sentiment made them formidable fighters in its defence. They gave a fright to the British, but made no difference to the issue of the main struggle in India.

The Marathas did not consolidate themselves in the vast areas in northern and central India where they had spread. They came and went, taking no root. Perhaps nobody could take root just then owing to the alternating fortunes of war, and indeed many territories under British control, or acknowledging British suzerainty were in a far worse condition, and the British or their administration had not taken root there.

If the Marathas (and much more so the other Indian powers) were amateurish and adventurist in their methods, the British in India were thoroughly professional. Many of the British leaders were adventurous enough but they' were in no way adventurist in the policy for which they all worked in their separate spheres. 'The East India Company's secretariat,' writes Edward Thompson, 'was served in the courts of native- India by a succession and galaxy of men such as even the British Empire has hardly ever possessed together at any other time.' One of the chief duties of the British residents at these courts was to bribe and corrupt the ministers and other officials. Their spy system was perfect, says a historian. They had complete information of the courts and armies of their adversaries, while those adversaries lived in ignorance of what the British were doing or were going to do. The fifth column of the British functioned continuously and in moments of crisis and in the heat of war there would be defections in their favour which made a great difference. They won most of their batles before the actual fighting took place. That had been so at Plassey and was repeated again and again right up to the Sikh wars. A notable instance of desertion was that of a high officer

in the service of Scindhia of Gwalior, who had secretly *come to* terms with the British and went over to them with his entire army at the moment of battle. He was awarded for this later by being made the ruler of a new Indian state carved out of the territories of Scindhia whom he had betrayed. That state still exists, but the man's name became a byword for treason and treachery, just as Quisling's in recent years.

The British thus represented a higher political and military organization, well knit together and having very able leaders. They were far better informed than their adversaries and they took full advantage of the disunity and rivalries of the Indian powers. Their command of the seas gave them safe bases and opportunities to add to their resources. Even when temporarily defeated, they could recuperate and assume the offensive again. Their possession of Bengal after Plassey gave them enormous wealth and resources to carry on their warfare with the Marathas and others, and each fresh conquest added to these resources. For the Indian powers defeat often meant a disaster which could not be remedied.

This period of war and conquest and plunder converted central India and Rajputana and some parts of the south and west into derelict areas full of violence and unhappiness and misery. Armies marched across them and in their train came highway robbers, and no one cared for the miserable human beings who lived there, except to despoil them of their money and goods. Parts of India became rather like central Europe during the Thirty Years War. Conditions were bad almost everywhere but they were worst of all in the areas under British control or suzerainty: '...nothing could be more fantastic than the picture presented by Madras or by the vassal states of Oudh and Hyderabad, a seething delirium of misery. In comparison, the regions where the Nana (Farnavis, the Maratha statesman) governed were an oasis of gentle security'—so writes Edward Thomspson.

Just prior to this period, large parts of India were singularly free from disorder, in spite of the disruption of the Mughal Empire. In Bengal during the long reign of Allawardi, the semi-independent Mughal Viceroy, peaceful and orderly government prevailed and trade and business flourished, adding to the great wealth of the province. Some little time after Allawardi's death the battle of Plassey (1757) took place and the East India Company constituted themselves the agents of the Delhi Emperor, though in reality they were completely independent and could do what they willed. Then began the pillage of Bengal on behalf of the company and their agents and factors. Some years after Plassey began the reign of Ahalya Bai, of Indore in central India, and it lasted for thiry years (1765-1795). This has become almost legendary as a period during which perfect order and good govern-

ment prevailed and the people prospered. She was **a** very **able** ruler and organizer, highly respected during her lifetime, and considered as a saint by a grateful people after her death. Thus during the very period when Bengal and Bihar, under the new rule of the East India Company, deteriorated and there was organized plunder and political and economic chaos, leading to terrible famines, central India as well as many other parts of the country were in a prosperous condition.

The British had power and wealth but felt no responsibility for good government or any government. The merchants of the East India Company were interested in dividends and treasure and not in the improvement or even protection of those who had come under their sway. In particular, in the vassal states there was a perfect divorce between power and responsibility.

When the British had finished with the Marathas and were secure in their conquests, they turned their minds towards civil government and some kind of order was evolved. In the subsidiary states, however, the change was very slow, for in those so-called protected areas there was a permanent divorce between responsibility and power.

We are often reminded, lest we forget, that the British rescued India from chaos and anarchy. That is true in so far as they established orderly government after this period, which the Marathas have called 'the time of terror.' But that chaos and anarchy were partly at least due to the policy of the East India Company and their representatives in India. It is also conceivable that even without the good offices of the British, so eagerly given, peace and orderly government might have been established in India after the conclusion of the struggle for supremacy. Such developments had been known to have taken place in India, as in other countries, in the course of her 5,000 years of history.

Ranjit Singh and Jai Singh

It seems clear that India became a prey to foreign conquest because of the inadequacy of her own people and because the British represented a higher and advancing social order. The contrast between the leaders on both sides is marked; the Indians, for all their ability, functioned in a narrow, limited sphere of thought and action, unaware of what was happening elsewhere and therefore unable to adapt themselves to changing conditions. Even if the curiosity of individuals was roused they could not break the shell which held them and their people prisoners. The Englishmen, on the other hand, were much more worldly wise, shaken up and forced to think by events in their own country and in France and America. Two great revolutions had taken place. The campaigns of the French revolutionary armies and of Napoleon

had changed the whole science of war. Even the most ignorant Englishman who came to India saw different parts of the world in the course of his journey. In England itself great discoveries were being made, heralding the industrial revolution, though perhaps few ralised their far-reaching significance at the time. But the leaven of change was working powerfully and influencing the people. Behind it all was the expansive energy which sent the British to distant lands.

Those who had recorded the history of India are so full of wars and tumults and the political and military leaders of the day, that they tell us very little of what was happening in the mind of India and how social and economic processes were at work. Only occasional and accidental glimpses emerge from this sordid record. It appears that during this period of terror the people generally were crushed and exhausted, passively submitting to the decrees of a malevolent fate, dazed and devoid of curiosity. There must have been many individuals, however, who were curious and who tried to understand the new forces at play, but they were overwhelmed by the tide of events and could not influence them.

One of the individuals who was full of curiosity was Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a Jat Sikh, who had built up a kingdom in the Punjab, which subsequently spread to Kashmir and the Frontier Province. He had failings and vices; nevertheless he was a remarkable man. The Frenchman, Jacquemont, calls him 'extremely brave' and 'almost the first inquisitive Indian I have seen, but his curiosity makes up for the apathy of the whole nation.' 'His conversation is like a nightmare.'* It must be remembered that Indians as a rule, are a reserved people, and more so the intellectuals amongst them. Very few of these would have cared to associate then with the foreign military leaders and adventurers in India, many of whose actions filled them with horror. So these intellectuals tried to preserve their dignity by keeping as far as possible from the foreign elements and met them only on formal occasions when circumstances compelled them to do so. The Indians whom Englishmen and other foreigners usually met were of the opportunist and servile class that surrounded them or the ministers, frequently corrupt and intriguing, of the Indian courts.

Ranjit Singh was not only intellectually curious and inquisitive, he was remarkably humane at a time when India and the world seethed with callousness and inhumanity. He built up a kingdom and a powerful army and yet he disliked bloodshed. 'Never was so large an empire founded by one man with so little criminality,' says Prinsep. He abolished the death sentence for every crime, however heinous it might be, when in England even petty pilferers had to face death. 'Except in actual warfare,' writes Osborne, who visited him, 'he has never been known

*Qyoted by Edward Thompson in ' The Making of Indian Princes' (1943), p. 158.

to take life, though his own has been attempted more than once, and his reign will be found freer from any striking acts of cruelty and oppression than those of many more civilized monarches.'*

Another but a different type of Indian statesman was Sawai Jai Singh, of Jaipur in Rajputana. He belongs to a somewhat earlier period and he died in 1743. He lived during the period of disruption following Aurungzeb's death. He was clever and opportunist enough to survive the .many shocks and changes that followed each other in quick succession. He acknowledged the suzerainty of the Delhi Emperor. When he found that the advancing Marathas were too strong to be checked, he came to terms with them on behalf of the emperor. But it is not his political or military career that interests me. He was a brave warrior and an accomplished diplomat, but he was something much more than this. He was a mathematician and an astronomer, a scientist and a town-planner, and he was interested in the study of history.

Jai Singh built big observatories at Jaipur, Delhi, Ujjain, Benares, and Mathura. Learning through Portuguese missionaries of the progress of astronomy in Portugal, he sent his own men, with one of the missionaries, to the court of the Portuguese King Emmanuel. Emmanuel sent his envoy, Xavier de Silva, with De la Hire's tables to Jai Singh. On comparing these with his own tables, Jai Singh came to the conclusion that the Portuguese tables were less exact and had several errors. He attributed these to the 'inferior diameters' of the instruments used.

Jai Singh was of course fully acquainted with Indian mathematics; he had studied the old Greek treatises and also knew of recent European developments in mathematics. He had some of the Greek books (Euclid, etc.) as well as European works on plane and spherical trigonometry and the construction and use of logarithms translated into Sanskrit. He also had Arabic books on astronomy translated.

He founded the city of Jaipur. Interested in town planning, he collected the plans of many European cities of the time and then drew up his own plan. Many of these plans of the old European cities of the time are preserved in the Jaipur museum. The city of Jaipur was so well and wisely planned that it is still considered a model of town-planning.

Jai Singh did all this and much more in the course of a comparatively brief life and in the midst of perpetual wars and court intrigues, on which he was himself often involved. Nadir Shah's invasion took place just four years before Jai Singh's death. Jai Singh would have been a remarkable man anywhere and at any time. The fact that he rose and functioned as a scientist in the typically feudal *milieu* of Rajputana and during one of the darkest

* *Quotations taken from Edward Thompson: 'The Making of Indian Princes' (1943), pp. 157, 158.*

periods of Indian history, when disruption and war and tumults filled the scene, is very significant. It shows that the spirit of scientific inquiry was not dead in India and that there was some ferment at work which might have yielded rich results if only an opportunity had been given to it to fructify. Jai Singh was no anachronism or solitary thinker in an unfriendly and uncomprehending environment. He was a product of his age and he collected a number of scientific workers to work with him. Out of these he sent some in the embassy to Portugal, and social custom or taboo did not deter him from doing so. It seems probable that there was plenty of good material for scientific work in the country, both theoretical and technical, if only it was given a chance to function. That opportunity did not come for a long time. Even when the troubles and disorders were over, there was no encouragement of scientific work by those in authority.

The Economic Background of India: the two Englands

What was the economic background of India when all these far-reaching political changes were taking place? V. Anstey has written that right up to the eighteenth century, 'Indian methods of production and of industrial and commerical organization could stand comparison with those in vogue in any other part of the world.' India was a highly developed manufacturing country exporting her manufactured products to Europe and other countries. Her banking system was efficient and well organized throughout the country, and the *hundis* or bills of exchange issued by the great business or financial houses were honoured everywhere in India, as well as in Iran, and Kabul and Herat and Tashkent and other places in central Asia. Merchant capital had emerged and there was an elaborate network of agents, jobbers, brokers, and middlemen. The ship building industry was flourishing and one of the flagships of an English admiral during the Napoleonic wars had been built by an Indian firm in India. India was, in fact, as advanced industrially, commercially, and financially as any country prior to the industrial revolution. No such development could have taken place unless the country had enjoyed long periods of stable and peaceful government and the highways were safe for traffic and trade.

Foreign adventurers originally came to India because of the excellence of her manufacturers which had a big market in Europe. The chief business of the British East India Company in its early days was to trade with Indian goods in Europe, and very profitable trading it was, yielding enormous dividends. So efficient and highly organized were Indian methods of production, and such was the skill of India's artisans and craftsmen, that they could compete successfully even with the higher tech-

niques of production which were being established in England. When the big machine age began in England, Indian goods continued to pour in and had to be stopped by very heavy duties and, in some cases, by outright prohibitions.

Clive described Murshidabad, in Bengal, in 1757, the very year of Plassey, as a city 'as extensive, populous, and rich as the city of London, with the difference that there are individuals in the first possessing infinitely greater property than in the last.' The city of Dacca, in eastern Bengal, was famous for its fine muslins. These two cities, important as they were, were near the periphery of Hindustan. All over the vast land there were greater cities and large numbers of big manufacturing and trading centres, and a very rapid and ingenious system of communicating news and market prices had been evolved. The great business houses often received news, even of the wars that were going on, long before despatches reached the officials of the East India Company. The economy of India had thus advanced to as high a stage as it could reach prior to the industrial revolution. Whether it had the seeds of further progress in it or was too much bound up with the rigid social structure, it is difficult to say. It seems quite possible, however, that under normal conditions it would have undergone that change and begun to adapt itself, in its own way, to the new industrial conditions. And yet, though it was ripe for a change, that change itself required a revolution within its own framework. Perhaps some catalytic agent was necessary to bring about that change. It is clear that however highly organized and developed its pre-industrial economy was, it could not compete for long with the products of industrialized countries. It had to industrialize itself or submit to foreign economic penetration which would have led to political interference. As it happened, foreign political domination came first and this led to a rapid destruction of the economy India had built up, without anything positive or constructive taking its place. The East India Company represented both British political power and British vested interests and economic power. It was supreme and, being a company of merchants, it was intent on making money. Just when it was making money with amazing rapidity and in fantastic quantities, Adam Smith wrote about it in 'The Wealth of Nations' in 1776: 'The government of an exclusive company of marchants is perhaps the worst of all governments for any country whatever.'

Though the Indian merchant and manufacturing classes were rich and spread out all over the country, and even controlled the economic structure, they had no political power. Government was despotic and still largely feudal. In fact, it was probably more feudal than it had been at some previous stages of Indian history. Hence there was no middle class strong enough, or even consciously thinking of seizing power, as in some western countries.

The people generally had grown apathetic and servile. There was thus a gap which had to be filled before any revolutionary change could take place. Perhaps this gap had been produced by the static nature of Indian society which refused to change in a changing world, for every civilization which resists change declines. That society, as constituted, had no more creative part to play. A change was overdue.

The British, at that time, were politically much more advanced. They had had their political revolution and had established the power of Parliament over that of the King. Their middle classes, conscious of their new power, were full of the impulse to expand. That vitality and energy, proof of a growing and progressive society, were indeed very evident in England. They showed themselves in many ways and most of all in the inventions and discoveries which heralded the industrial revolution.

And yet, what was the British ruling class then? Charles and Mary Beard, the eminent American historians, tell us how the success of the American revolution removed suddenly from the royal provinces in America the 'British ruling class—a class accustomed to a barbarous criminal code, a narrow and intolerant university system, a government conceived as a huge aggregation of jobs and privileges, a contempt of men and women who toiled in field and shop, a denial of education to the masses, an established religion forced alike on Dissenters and Catholics, a dominion of squire and parson in counties and villages, callous brutality in army and navy, a scheme of primogeniture buttressing the rule of the landed gentry, a swarm of hungry placemen offering sycophancy to the king in exchange for offices, sinecures, and pensions, and a constitution of church and state so ordered as to fasten upon the masses this immense pile of pride and plunder. From the weight of this mountain the American revolutionists delivered the colonial subjects of the British Crown. Within a decade or two after that emancipation they accomplished reforms in law and policy which required 100 years or more of persistent agitation to effect in the mother country—reforms which gave to the statesmen who led in the agitation their title to immortality in English history'.*

The American Declaration of Independence, that landmark in freedom's history, was signed in 1776, and six years later the colonies separated from England and began their real intellectual, economic, and social revolution. The land system, that had grown up under British inspiration and after the model of England, was completely transformed. Many privileges were abolished and the large estates confiscated and then distributed in small lots. A stirring period of awakening and intellectual and economic activity followed. Free America, rid of feudal relics and foreign control,

*'The Rise of American Civilization' (1928), Volume I, p. 292.

marched ahead with giant strides.

In France, the great revolution smashed the Bastille, symbol of the old order, and swept away the king and feudalism and declared the rights of man to the world.

And in England then? Frightened by these revolutionary changes in America and France, England became even more reactionary, and her fierce and barbarous penal code became even more savage. When George III came to the English throne in 1760 there were about 160 offences for which men, women, and children were put to death. By the time his long reign ended in 1820, nearly a hundred new offences, carrying the death penalty, were added to this terrible list. The ordinary soldier in the British army was treated worse than a beast of the field, with a brutality and inhumanity that horrify. Death sentences were common and commoner still was flogging, inflicted in public, flogging up to several hundred lashes, till death sometimes intervened or the mangled body of the sufferer, just surviving, told the story to his dying day.

In this matter as in many others involving humanity and respect for the individual and the group, India was far more advanced and had a higher civilization. There was more literacy in India then than in England or the rest of Europe, though the education was strictly traditional. Probably there were more civic amenities also. The general condition of the masses in Europe was very backward and deplorable and compared unfavourably with the conditions prevailing in India. But there was this vital difference: new forces and living currents were working invisibly in western Europe, bringing changes in their train; in India, conditions were far more static.

England came to India. When Queen Elizabeth gave a charter to the East India Company in 1600, Shakespeare was alive and writing. In 1611 the Authorized English edition of the Bible was issued; in 1608 Milton was born. There followed Hampden and Cromwell and the political revolution. In 1660 the Royal Society of England, which was to advance the cause of science so much, was organized. A hundred years later, in 1760, the flying shuttle was invented, and there followed in quick succession the spinning jenny, the steam engine, and the power loom.

Which of these two Englands came to India? The England of Shakespeare and Milton, of noble speech and writing and brave deed, of political revolution and the struggle for freedom, of science and technical progress, or the England of the savage penal code and brutal behaviour, of entrenched feudalism and reaction? For there were two Englands, just as in every country there are these two aspects of national character and civilization. 'The discrepancy in England,' write Edward Thompson, 'between the highest and the ordinary levels of our civilization, has always been

immense; I doubt if there is anything like it in any country with which we should wish to be compared and it is a discrepancy **that** lessens so slowly that it often seems hardly to lessen at all.'*

The two Englands live side by side, influencing each other, and cannot be separated; nor could one of them come to India forgetting completely the other. Yet in every major action one plays the leading role, dominating the other, and it was inevitable that the wrong England should play that role in India and should come in contact with and encourage the wrong India in the process.

The independence of the United States of America is more or less contemporaneous with the loss of freedom by India. Surveying the past century and a half, an Indian looks somewhat wistfully and longingly at the vast progress made by the United States during this period, and compares it with what has been done and what has not been done in his own country. It is true no doubt that the Americans have many virtues and we have many failings, that America offered a virgin field and an almost clean slate to write upon while we were cluttered up with ancient memories and traditions. And yet perhaps it is not inconceivable that if Britain had not undertaken this great burden in India and, as she tells us, endeavoured for so long to teach us the difficult art of self-government, of which we had been so ignorant, India might not only have been freer and more prosperous, but also far more advanced in science and art and all that makes life worth living.

•'Making of Indian Princes' (1903), p. 264.